



15 years of **Gwarchod y Parc** **Conserving the Park** 2003-2018

**A niche scheme promoting traditional
land management in Pembrokeshire**



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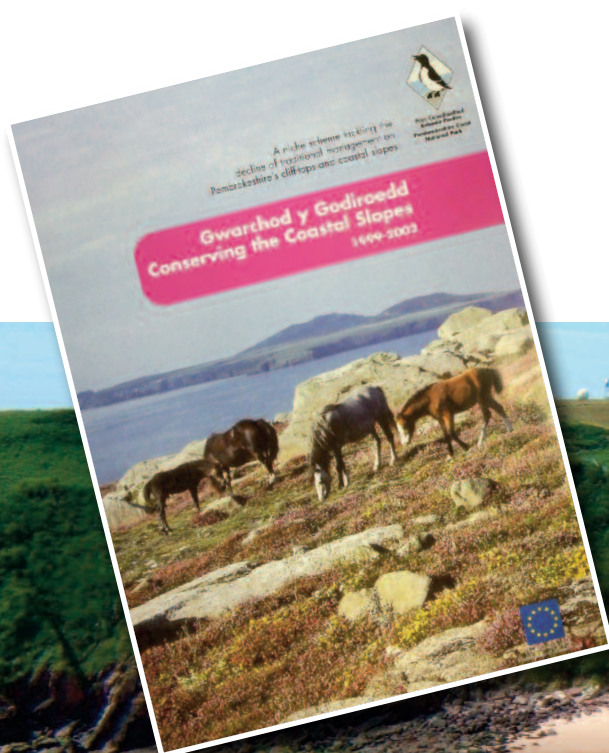
Bumblebee training course for the residents of Brynberian village

Early days

Back in 1999, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority received funding from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund for a three-year project called '*Conserving The Coastal Slopes – Gwarchod Y Godiroedd*'. This was set up to address the decline in traditional farming practices (primarily grazing) along the coast and the resulting decline in its internationally important coastal wildlife. This included coastal heath and flower-rich maritime grassland, together with a host of species which depend on them, the flagship being the rare chough which has Pembrokeshire as one of its strongholds.

The project was well-received and developed as it went along, in order to meet the needs of coastal landowners and wildlife.

This booklet gives technical advice on tackling coastal management problems and is still available from PCNPA



The project today

We found that the lessons we learnt from managing the coast were also applicable to other habitats and other parts of the National Park, so when the original scheme ended in 2002, it was rolled out accordingly – this time as '*Conserving the Park – Gwarchod y Parc*'. Under-grazing is a key problem facing many habitats today; at the other end of the spectrum, there is also a need to restore land which has been intensively managed. The project aims to address both these issues – and everything in between.

The scheme is now core-funded by the National Park Authority, which is recognition of the importance of the scheme in meeting the Authority's primary purpose to conserve and enhance its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

Core funding means that participants don't need to worry about the scheme ending after a few years, unlike many projects these days. This gives landowners confidence to join the scheme, particularly if they are going to significantly change the way they manage their land or make a considerable financial investment.

This booklet has been written to summarise what we have learnt over the last 15 years of running the scheme and to celebrate some of its successes.

Skrinkle Haven



How does the project fit in alongside other schemes?

The project offers assistance to anyone who wishes to maximise the wildlife value of their land. It can help those for whom the national agri-environment scheme is not suitable or for which they are not eligible (we have no minimum holding size, for example). It can also help those who are already in another scheme but need some additional help to deliver it, such as fencing or finding the right grazing animals.

Our work tries to fill a gap; we have always described it as “the scheme that reaches the parts other schemes don’t reach”! It is a niche, local scheme that tries to reinforce and complement, rather than compete with, existing schemes.

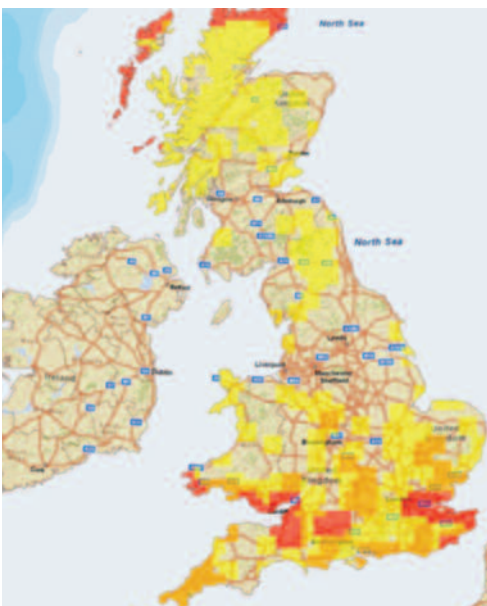
NATIONAL AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES IN PEMBROKESHIRE



Our scheme has picked up landowners who have been in one of the above schemes but not progressed to the next for various reasons. This has meant that we have been able to build on and continue the good work already achieved.

This may be of particular significance at the present time, with the current uncertainty over agri-environment support post-Brexit. Local schemes may have a role to play in helping to bridge the gap before new national support measures are up and running.

As our work has a positive impact on declining pollinators, it supports other organisations and projects which focus on this issue. The map below shows bumblebee hot-spots in the UK which the Bumblebee Conservation Trust has prioritised for action, with the red areas being of highest priority; the Pembrokeshire coast and hinterland falls into this category.



Priority areas for bumblebee conservation action



The map above shows those project sites (marked with green diamonds) which fall within the wildlife corridors or 'B-Lines' mapped by Buglife.

Who are our customers?

As well as continuing our work with all those signed up to the earlier Conserving the Coastal Slopes scheme, we have taken on a steady stream of new participants each year. These range from farmers, smallholders, a wildlife trust, youth hostels, schools, churchyards, community groups and even a ferry company.

Some of these lie within designated areas, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) but most do not, meaning that it is difficult for these landowners to access advice and assistance.

We have over 100 current active sites, but have assisted around 200 since the scheme began. We have let the scheme grow gradually over the years, so that we can meet demand in terms of staff time and resources available. We have never promoted the scheme heavily for this reason. Landowners have generally come to us via:

- word of mouth, such as recommendation between landowning neighbours
- other Park Authority staff, particularly rangers and wardens, who are out and about working with landowners
- referral from other conservation organisations (eg Natural Resources Wales)
- direct targeting of important areas of land, or land which adjoins existing sites
- local shows and events

The amount of land in the scheme varies from year to year as sites come and go, but it currently lies around 1,200 hectares.

There is no doubt that more funding and staff time would reap huge rewards in terms of the amount of land managed for wildlife. We have found that there is no shortage of customers out there, looking for this kind of help. For many people, there is nowhere else to turn for hands-on assistance with managing their land in this way.

Scheme flyer



We have changed the management on many of our own sites to make them more wildlife-friendly, such as at Carew Castle, Skrinkle Haven, Strumble Head and Freshwater East



Carew Castle

What are our priorities and targets?

A list of priority habitats and species in Pembrokeshire has been drawn up under the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Every site we assist contains at least one, and usually more, of these priority habitats/species.



Lowland heath



Marshy grassland



Coastal slopes



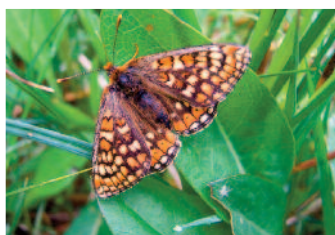
Churchyards



Lowland meadows



Plants such as hairy greenweed, greater butterfly-orchid, pillwort, pale heath violet, slender yellow centaury, three-lobed water crowfoot, Newport centaury and grassland fungi

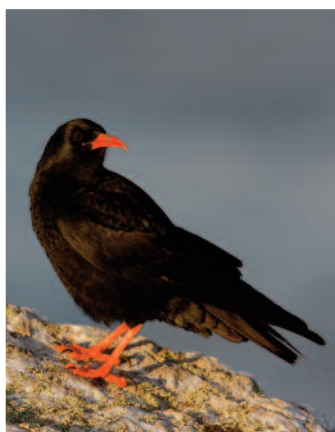


Butterflies: marsh fritillary, brown hairstreak

Pollinators such as bumblebees and hoverflies



Reptiles and amphibians: adder, common lizard, slow-worm, common toad



Birds: chough, skylark, barn owl and scrubland birds such as stonechat

However, the scheme aims to benefit a much wider range of wildlife than this. The scheme is all about putting into place certain processes which are known to create the right conditions for a whole wealth of wildlife, delivered perfectly by traditional farming practices. In the majority of cases, this is a diverse vegetation structure over the site – a mosaic of habitats – which will benefit the greatest number of species, many of which we are not even fully aware of, particularly when it comes to the smaller invertebrates. So, for example, we want to see patches of scrub for birds, areas of short sward for basking reptiles, long vegetation for small mammals and invertebrates, etc. A habitat mosaic such as this also creates plenty of 'edge habitat' ie where one type of habitat grades into another; this is very valuable for wildlife.



A valley in North Pembrokeshire where grazing has produced a perfect patchwork of habitats rich in wildlife

Where are our project sites?

Most of the sites lie within the National Park, but we can also help those which lie outside it if the land contributes to the biodiversity of the Park. Nature doesn't stop at the boundary. It can be more beneficial to assist a site which lies just outside the Park but on a wildlife corridor that extends into it, than a site within the Park but which is surrounded by improved land and not connected ecologically to anywhere else.

We target sites which lie on, or can help create, wildlife corridors. We need to provide a landscape that is better ecologically connected in this way in order to address the widespread decline in our wildlife and to address the problems posed to wildlife by climate change.

How does it work?

We started off with a number of different things we could offer participants, but as our experience of what people needed grew over the years, so too has the range of help available. The scheme is very flexible, so if a need for something new arises, we can build this into the project. The result is a 'tool kit' that aims to tackle all of the obstacles someone might face when trying to manage their land with wildlife in mind.

The Tool kit Approach

Each new site is visited and assessed for current and potential wildlife value. The 'tools' required to maximise its wildlife value are identified and discussed with the landowner. Different sites require different sets of tools – some will need all of them, others only a few. In this way, the help a site receives is tailor-made and site-specific ... and hence much more likely to succeed.

The project operates on the principles of

Simplicity - minimum of paperwork for farmers

Promptness – agreements drawn up rapidly, prompt payments, quick response times to call-outs for assistance

Flexibility – rigid, standardised prescriptions (eg stocking rates) avoided in favour of site-specific proposals that can be adjusted as and when required

Bracken bruising, above Marloes Sands



Tool Kit

Tool	Problem addressed
Advice	<p>There are few places for landowners to turn for free land management advice on undesignated land.</p> <p>Once a project is up and running, advice is always easily available from project staff to keep things on track.</p>
Practical assistance	<p>Some traditional skills have largely died out, such as controlled winter burning of gorse and heather, so this service is offered by National Park staff through the scheme.</p> <p>Where it is difficult to find contractors to do things like bracken rolling or scrub cutting, our staff can carry this out or organise specialist contractors.</p> <p>Some jobs are too small for contractors, such as patching up fences, but our wardens can help.</p>
Access to volunteers	<p>Lack of manpower on farms to tackle large or time-consuming jobs such as hedge-planting and scrub cutting.</p>
Grants	<p>To tackle the expensive job of stock-proofing sites.</p> <p>Available for fencing, gates, water supplies and other required infrastructure.</p>
Management agreements (area payments)	<p>As an incentive and as a way of making a new management regime pay its way.</p>
Sourcing grazing animals	<p>Many holdings do not have suitable stock for conservation grazing.</p>
Special projects	<p>To tackle expensive projects for particular habitats/species, such as pond/scrape creation, barn owl boxes, hedgerow creation/restoration.</p>
Access to experts	<p>Lack of knowledge regarding special plants and animals.</p> <p>We have good links with local wildlife experts who can help locate and identify special species, as well as put them into geographical context and advise on management</p>
Hand-holding	<p>Many landowners appreciate continued staff involvement to assess how things are going, to help tackle problems that crop up and to offer additional help along the way if required.</p>

One of the most important tools in the toolkit is Sourcing grazing animals

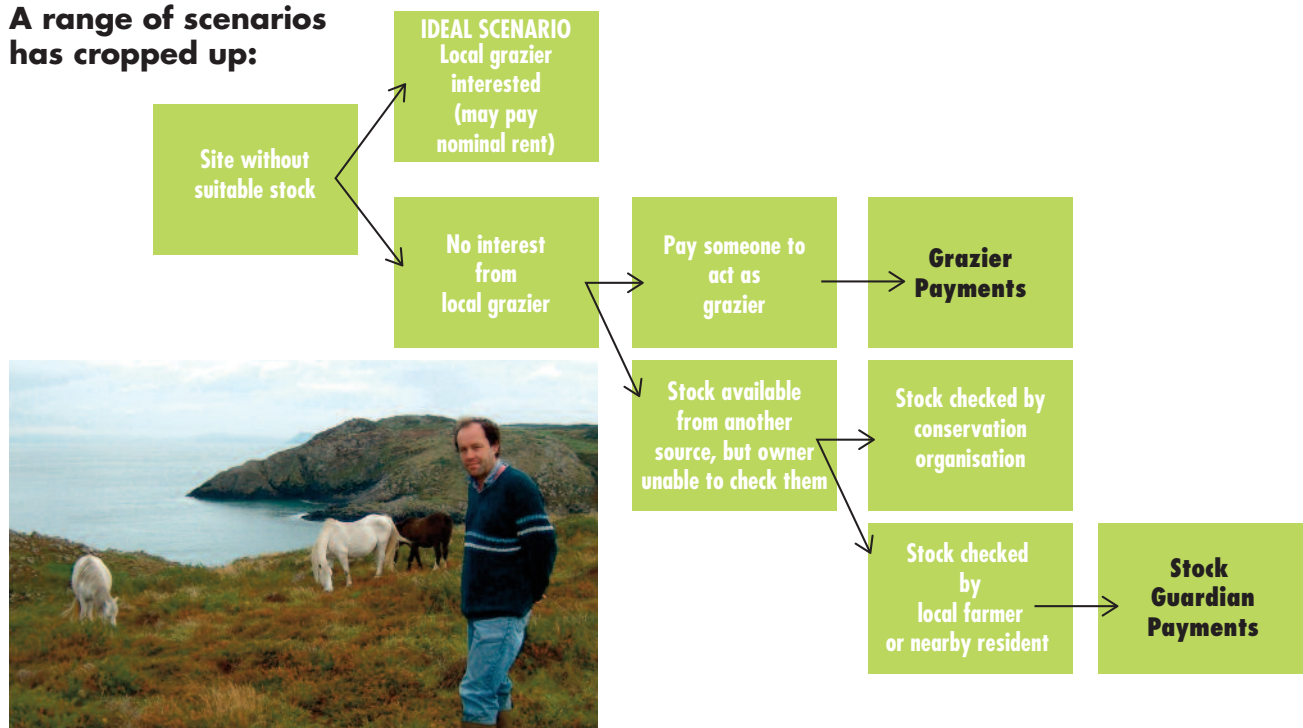
Ideally, conservation grazing schemes should be linked to productive agriculture wherever possible, but this is not always achievable - eg modern dairy and continental beef cattle are not suited to rough grazing, whilst sheep alone will not always deliver conservation objectives. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the management of semi-natural habitats to rely on standard agricultural practices.

Around half of our sites lacked suitable grazing animals to begin with. The Pembrokeshire Grazing Network was set up to address this need – it is a

system for matching up sites/stock required and sites/stock available wherever possible.

Participants of the scheme can enjoy the benefits of having grazing animals on their land without having to own them. Furthermore, many sites are too small to support stock all year round. We aim to deliver the right number of animals for the required length of time, after which they are moved on to other sites. In this way, groups of animals keep circulating around the Park, serving sites that need this service.

A range of scenarios has cropped up:



Farmer Richard Lewis who uses Welsh mountain ponies from the Grazing Network to graze his coastal land, which is under a Glastir agreement. Richard also acts as a stock checker on adjacent National Park land, for which he receives a small monthly payment.



National Park wardens help to round up and move grazing animals between sites.

Most of the time the scheme deals with Welsh mountain ponies. Although cattle are generally the ideal grazing animal, there are strict restrictions on their movement in Pembrokeshire, which limits and often rules out their use for conservation grazing.

Each landowner who joins the network is given a 'grazing pack' which sets out responsibility arrangements for the stock and their welfare /checking regimes.

Today, the Pembrokeshire Grazing Network is now the longest established local grazing scheme in Wales and sits under the Wales-wide umbrella of PONT (Pori, Nature a Threftadaeth – Grazing, Nature and Heritage).

A vibrant field of yellow buttercup flowers in the foreground, with a white house and rolling green hills in the background.

Case Studies

Ysgol Hill, Rosebush

In 2007, the new owners wanted to manage their land for wildlife but were unsure how to go about it; a traditional hay meadow regime was implemented, supported by a management agreement and grant-aid for fencing and field gates. Free practical assistance with bracken bruising along the field margins was also provided. After a couple of years there was great excitement when a beautiful greater butterfly orchid appeared in one of the fields.

Monitoring visits led to further wildlife discoveries here. A colony of the chimney sweeper moth (one of only a dozen colonies in the county) was found in a field containing abundant pignut, with which it is associated. In a different field, an unusual variety of bitter vetch was found.

One of the interesting features of this holding, and others like it which have seen little agricultural improvement over the years, is that every field is different. They vary so much in colour and composition – in summer, one is white with pignut, another yellow with hay rattle – which partly reflects the fact that the natural diversity of soils is still intact.

It is believed that hay meadows such as these have disappeared by at least 98% across the UK since the 1930s, so it is vital to conserve the precious few that remain. These meadows perhaps represent the most vulnerable habitat in the county; if not protected by designation (and most of them aren't) then they can be lost virtually overnight by a change in management such as ploughing, reseeding or spraying.

Tools needed	
Advice	✓
Management agreement	✓
Practical assistance	✓
Fencing grant	✓
Access to experts	✓
Hand-holding	✓

Priority habitats and species	
Lowland meadow	✓
Greater butterfly orchid	✓



Greater butterfly orchid



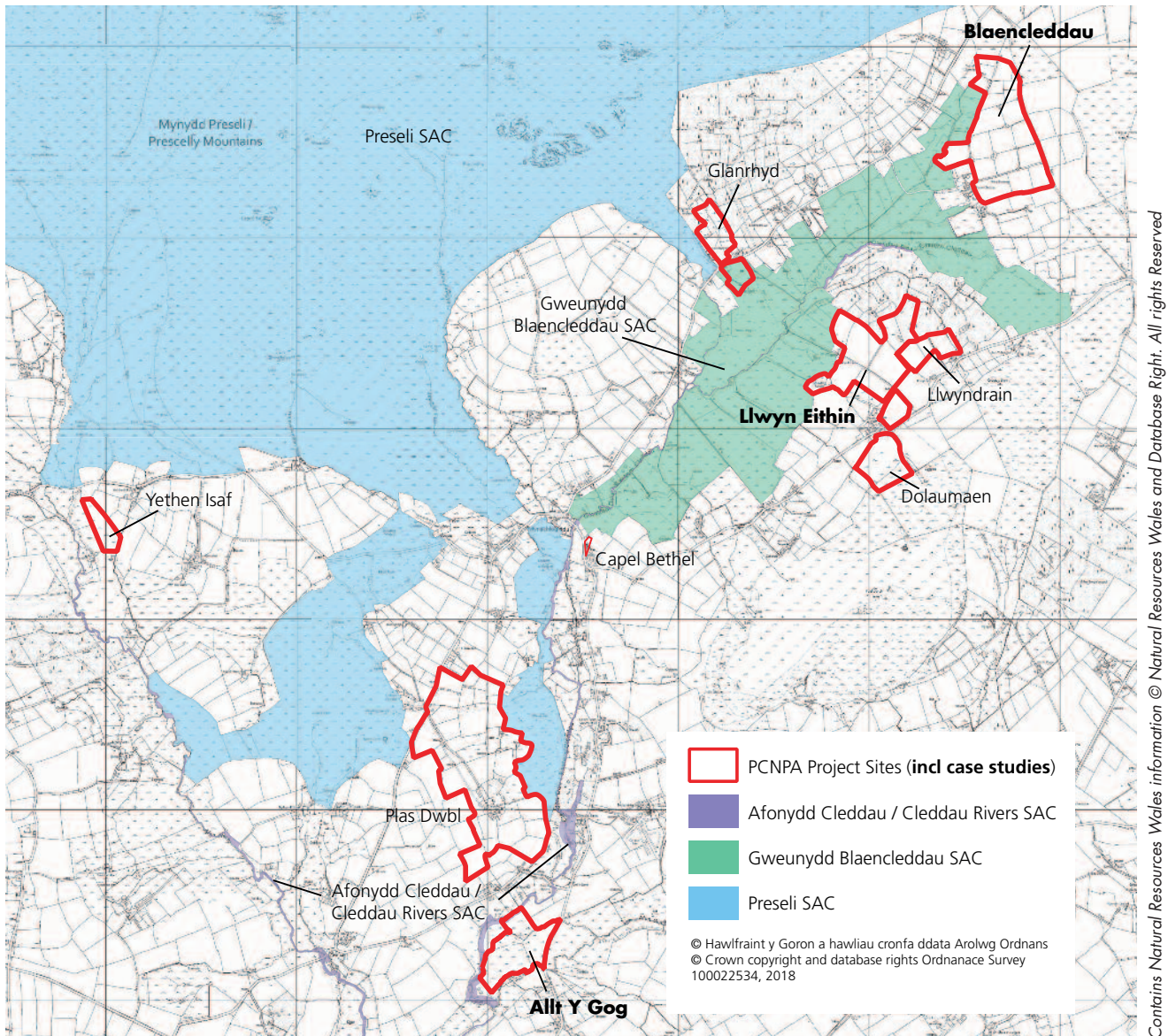
Meadow covered in pignut in May

Chimney sweeper moth

Sites in and around Mynachlogddu

The village of Mynachlogddu sits in a wide river valley and its rich biodiversity is reflected in the fact that it has no fewer than three Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) nearby. We have a handful of sites here which lie adjacent to and buffer these internationally important areas.

It is a hotspot for the rare marsh fritillary, one of Europe's fastest declining butterflies. It depends on having a number of suitable breeding sites within an area in order to maintain a healthy population. A number of our sites contribute to this species' survival here.



Llwyn Eithin Farm, Mynachlogddu

The Probert family are justly proud of the rich array of wildlife that can be found on their small family-run beef farm. They joined the scheme in 2012, receiving a management agreement for half of their land, which comprises of some of the most beautiful hay meadows in the area. Mr Probert says that the annual payments have made all the difference; he can now afford to farm in a way which is right for him and right for wildlife. By mid-July the fields are a dazzling sight and alive with the sounds of bees and other insects - sights and sounds which have largely disappeared from the British countryside. Park Authority staff have also helped the family discover more gems on their land; the marsh fritillary has been found breeding and feeding on their marshy fields, whilst a clump of smooth lady's-mantle was found growing along the farm lane (this plant is known at only two other locations in the county).

Tools needed

Management agreement



Advice from plant and butterfly specialists



Priority habitats and species

Lowland meadow



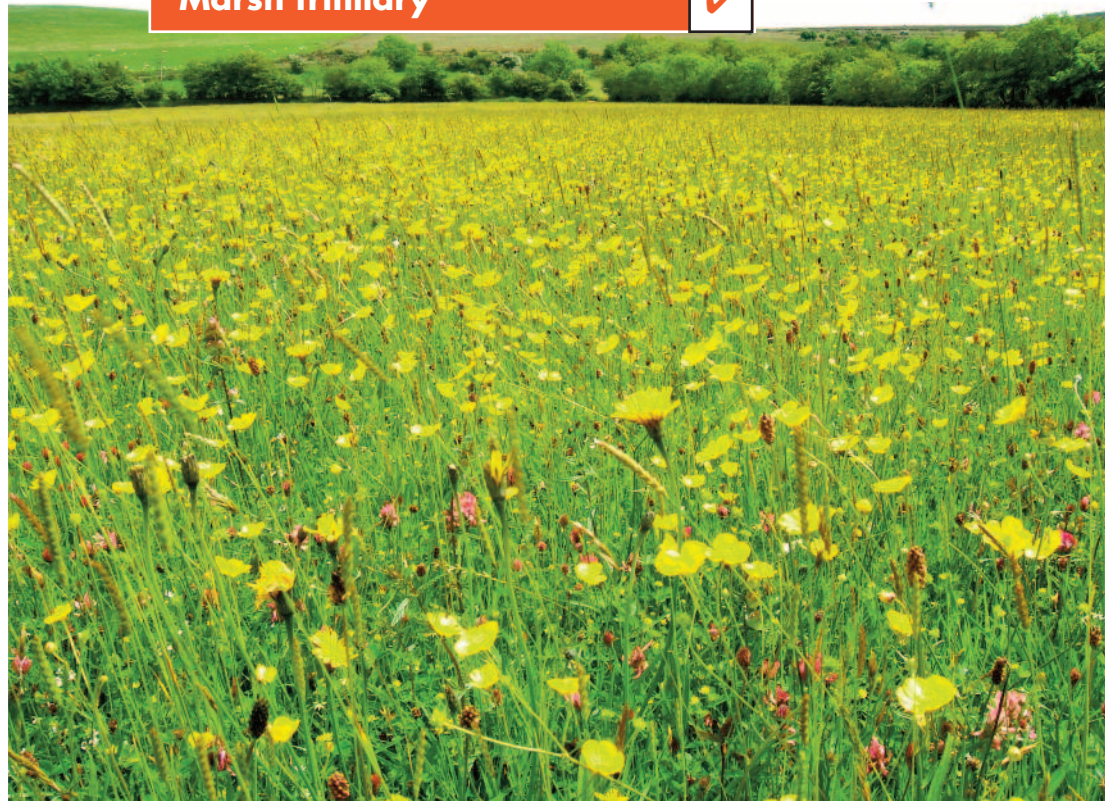
Marshy grassland



Marsh fritillary



Marsh fritillary



Martin Probert



Blaencleddau Farm, Mynachlogddu

Mr & Mrs Kirby joined the scheme in 2014. Half of their farm sits within a SSSI and receives assistance from Natural Resources Wales. The other half entered a management agreement with the National Park Authority, so now the whole farm is farmed in a way that enhances its wildlife value. The agreement focuses mainly on hay meadow management and restoration; some fields which were previously sheep-grazed all year round are now grazed only in autumn and winter, then allowed to grow for hay the rest of the year. This switch in management has allowed a wonderful array of plants to appear, which increases in variety and abundance with each year that passes. The owners have been particularly delighted to see the appearance of lots of orchids and large patches of white whorled caraway flowers, a plant which has seen a dramatic decline elsewhere across the UK due to land drainage.

Tools needed

Management agreement



Priority habitats and species

Hay meadow



Barn owl



Heath spotted-orchid



5-spot burnett moth

Allt Y Gog Farm, Mynachlogddu

Small traditional beef herds are in decline across the county and the UK generally. It was great to be able to support this one, which offered a rich mix of wetland, boulder-strewn dry grassland and scrub habitats, together with a river running through it all.

The land looked like it could be suitable for a range of interesting species. Once the management agreement was up and running, monitoring visits revealed the presence of an important new breeding site for marsh fritillary. Small pearl-bordered fritillaries were also found feeding on the wetland plants and adders breeding in the longer vegetation. A new colony of the chimney sweeper moth was also recorded. In 2018, the site was found to be one of only a few for the rare wood bitter-vetch.

Tools needed

Management agreement



Advice from plant and butterfly specialists



Priority habitats and species

Marshy grassland



Lowland dry acid grassland



Wood bitter-vetch



Marsh fritillary



Adder



Otter



Butterfly expert Steve Coker helping to map marsh fritillary webs in autumn, which gives the best indicator of the health of the butterfly population. The purple flowers are devil's-bit scabious, on which it lays its eggs and where the larval webs are found



Treathro Farm, near Strumble Head

Out on the coast near Strumble Head is found the only location in Pembrokeshire for the beautiful spiked speedwell. This plant needs open conditions in which to grow and spread. The reintroduction of grazing has encouraged this special plant to thrive and expand. The scheme supplies ponies at the right time of year and supplemented this with fencing improvements and the services of a stock checker to keep an eye on the ponies’ health and welfare. The site sits within a SSSI.

Tools needed	
Stock sourcing	✓
Practical assistance	✓
Advice from plant specialist	✓

Priority habitats and species	
Coastal heath	✓
Maritime grassland	✓
Chough	✓
Stonechat	✓
Spiked speedwell	✓
Hairy greenweed	✓

This management regime also benefits other notable species such as the low-growing hairy greenweed and fritillary butterflies (dark green and small pearl-bordered) whose larvae need violets growing in the dappled shade of sparse bracken.

Ponies graze the cliffs in autumn and help to maintain open grassland and heathland, ideal feeding grounds for chough which nest nearby



The combination of pony grazing, rabbits and thin soils has contributed to the success of the Spiked Speedwell.



Monitoring of rare plants by the county’s plant recorder Stephen Evans



Fferm Tresinwen, near Strumble Head

*‘The pale heath violet *Viola lactea* is classed as endangered in England and vulnerable in the UK. Pembrokeshire is one of its most important UK strongholds, where its survival has been greatly assisted by active grazing and burning of heathlands. The decline of such practices along with heathland reclamation explains why it is now endangered in England. If Pembrokeshire and other Welsh heathlands were left unmanaged, it would not be long before it became endangered here too.’*

**Stephen Evans, Pembrokeshire Plant Recorder,
Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI)**

We have therefore been very pleased to see pale heath violet appear on some of our managed coastal sites, where it has never been recorded before. It seems to pop up about two years after burning. New locations for this unusual plant include Tresinwen Farm near Strumble Head.

Tools needed	
Practical assistance	✓
Stock sourcing	✓
Advice from plant specialist	✓

Priority habitats and species	
Coastal slopes	✓
Chough	✓
Adder	✓
Pale heath violet	✓

Rangers and wardens carry out controlled winter burning of dense gorse on behalf of landowners, in accordance with the Heather & Grass Burning Regulations. This includes all preparatory work such as cutting firebreaks and liaison with local reptile experts. This farm has a known adder hibernation site which needs to be avoided during management works. Burn patches are also kept small to create the right ratio of scrub cover to open grassland for adders to safely feed/bask etc. Even though adders are now protected by law, their numbers are falling across the UK, and have already become extinct in some English counties.

Burning vegetation is a traditional practice which makes it easier for grazing animals to access more palatable vegetation and crucially controls the build-up of combustible vegetation, ie small controlled winter burns help prevent large uncontrolled summer fires. There are also numerous benefits for wildlife as burning creates diversity in both the structure and variety of the vegetation.



Chough



Pale dog-violet



Gorse control



Adder



The churchyard in spring

Stackpole Cheriton Churchyard

If managed sensitively, churchyards can harbour many species of plants and animals. Species-rich grassland has largely disappeared from the British countryside so churchyards can act as an important refuge for this now rare habitat.

The church wardens have taken the approach of making the graveyard a wildlife-friendly place and we are delighted to support them. The grassland is cut by our wardens in late summer, then raked off by volunteers a week or so later, once the seeds have had a chance to dry out and fall to the ground.

This small site supports more than 160 species of plants. These include a wonderful display of early spring flowers such as primroses, snowdrops and celandines. A little later, bluebells, cow parsley and pignut appear. By summer, the churchyard is colourful with knapweed, red campion, sorrel and yarrow. All these species in turn attract a wide range of insect life, including butterflies, bumblebees and other important pollinators.

Tools needed	
Practical assistance	✓
Access to volunteers	✓

Priority habitats and species	
Lowland meadow	✓



The annual rake-off in August, with church wardens, Park staff and volunteers



Common carder bee

Castell y Garn, Newport

Tools needed	
Management agreement	✓
Stock sourcing	✓
Fencing grant	✓
Practical assistance	✓
Advice from plant specialists	✓



Priority habitats and species	
Coastal slopes	✓
Chough	✓
Newport centuary	✓

West Wales is dairy country; the mild, damp climate provides ideal grass-growing conditions. Gerwyn and June Davies run a successful dairy business near Newport, with land running down to the sea. The fields are intensively farmed but the coastal slopes had not been part of the working farm for decades, being unsuitable for modern dairy breeds. In 2001, the Park Authority approached the Davies' and subsequently set up an agreement for the slopes to be grazed by ponies, backed up with some bracken control. It has taken a number of years, but the area now has a good ratio of open grassland to bracken, suitable feeding habitat for chough.

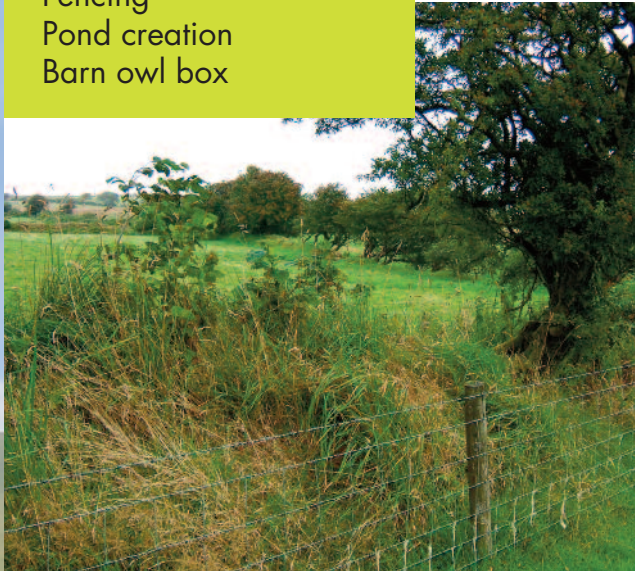
The land joins up two SSSIs. One of these supports the rare Newport/Perennial centaury, which is found here at its only UK location. After several years of grazing on the headland which supports its very northernmost population, the centaury's habitat has been much improved and the plant is now flourishing here.

Project sites in and around Brynberian village



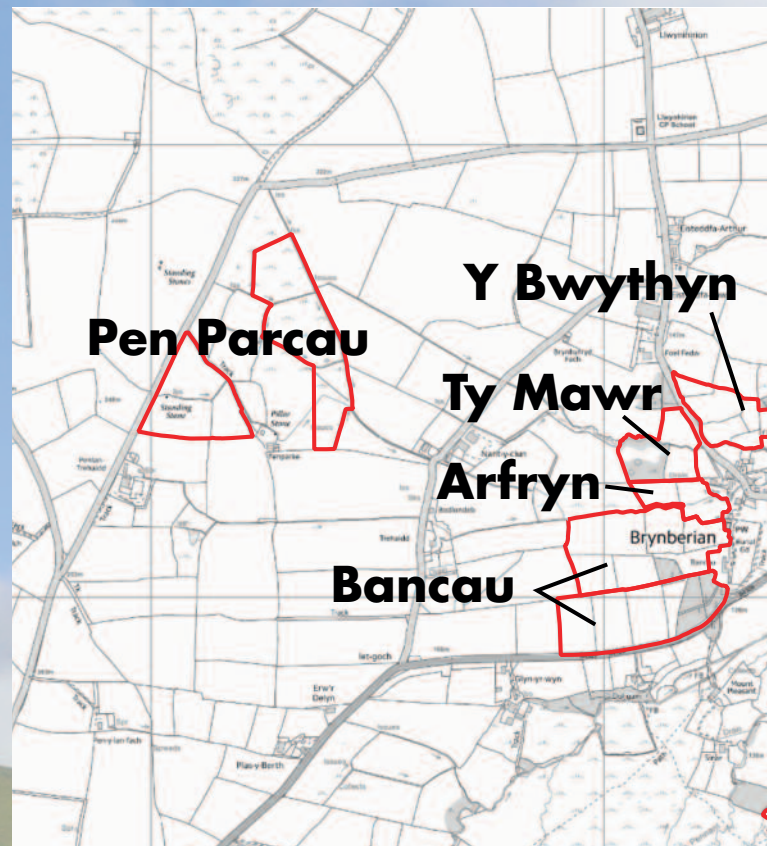
Pen Parcau

Management agreement
Hedgerow restoration
Fencing
Pond creation
Barn owl box



Y Bwythyn

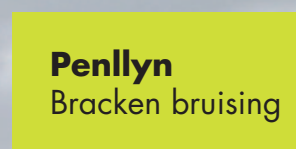
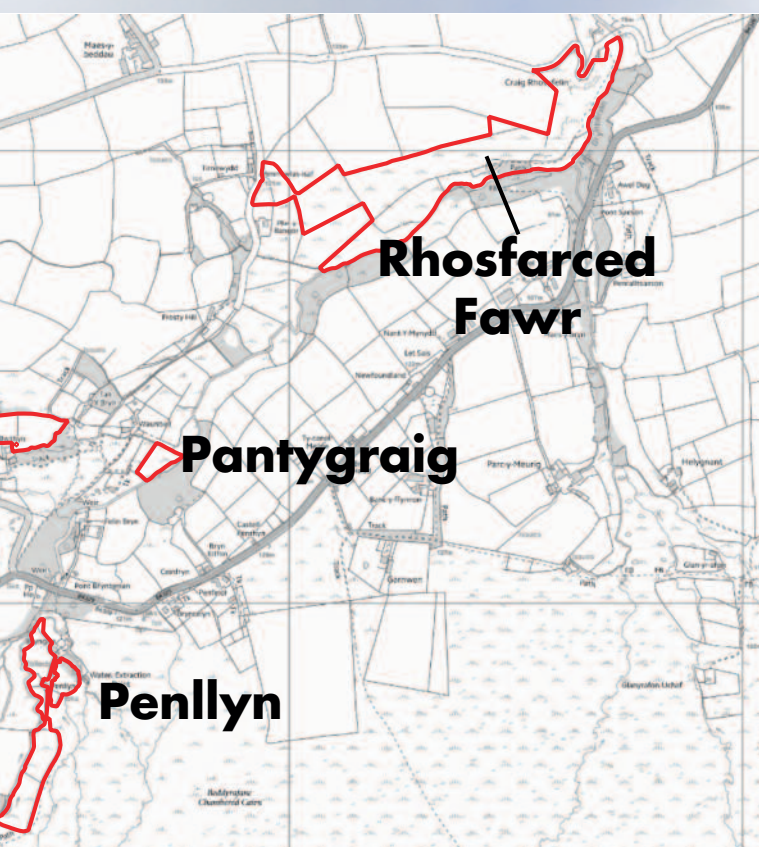
Electric fencing for pony grazing
Barn owl box



Bancau

Bracken bruising
Pond creation







Barn Owl Boxes

Barn owl numbers are thought to have declined significantly during the last half of the last century and it is thought that the lack of suitable nest sites is one of the reasons for this. We therefore decided to offer nest boxes to holdings which had suitable feeding habitat nearby, especially if barn owls were known to be in the area or had been sighted in recent years.

Around 50 boxes have been installed over the years, both indoor (barns, out-buildings) and outdoor (trees). As checking boxes during breeding time requires a license, we work with a local ornithologist

each June to monitor how they're doing.

Outdoor boxes have had little success, although they have been more popular with tawny owls and even stock doves. Indoor boxes are preferred by barn owls; where they have been occupied we have decided to install them in pairs to make conditions even more favourable.

Barn owls seem to have good and bad years, generally reflecting weather conditions; cold, wet or snowy conditions make hunting difficult and this effects survival and breeding rates.



Local ornithologist Paddy Jenks



Installing an owl box

Problems along the way

The hay cut

Finding someone to cut a small hay meadow in summer can be tricky. When a suitable weather window occurs, contractors will often be busy with the larger, more productive sites. Furthermore, today's machinery is also often too large for smaller fields, where access can be difficult. There is a shortage of people with traditional small-scale equipment able to carry out this work; there is a definite niche here that needs to be filled.

The cut material may not be of good enough quality to use as hay, which leads to the problem of its disposal. It may have to be dumped on site, which is far from ideal.

When a cut is not possible, a site may need to be grazed off instead. This may lead to subtle changes in the flora, but is considered acceptable as a short-term measure and is indeed of much benefit to invertebrates.



Traditional small-scale hay-making equipment, an unusual sight these days

Changing weather patterns

Since the scheme began, we have noticed changes in our weather patterns which are making hay meadow management more difficult. In the years running up to 2018, we no longer seemed to get dry spells that were long enough to complete the work. Wet summers mean that hay cutting is often impossible until quite late in the year. The bales are sometimes not properly dried out and are of no use/value and have to be dumped, which is a problem in itself. They are usually left on the margins of the site to rot, which can cause local enrichment.

We have also found that controlled winter burns are becoming increasingly difficult to carry out as the required weather conditions occur only infrequently these days. Over the last few years, ideal conditions have not arrived until mid-late March, which is too late due to the bird-nesting season, which in itself seems to be starting earlier than previously.

Ragwort

The creation of short grassland through grazing can sometimes encourage an increase in ragwort.

Ragwort is an important species for wildlife with over 30 invertebrates using ragwort as a food plant, the most noticeable of which is the Cinnabar moth, which can often be seen in large numbers. Ragwort is a natural element of the grassland flora.

However ragwort is also poisonous to livestock, both fresh when animals are grazing and also when dried in hay. If the abundance of ragwort at a site is considered too high, then our current strategy is to chemically treat it in the spring, which allows us to plan ahead and prevent the problem before it occurs, rather than last-minute scrambles to sort the problem afterwards, usually by the difficult method of hand-pulling, a soul-destroying task for staff and volunteers.



Land changing hands

We have witnessed the loss of a couple of sites during the lifespan of the scheme, such as through development and road improvements. Also, when land changes hands, there is no guarantee that it will continue to be managed sympathetically if it is not designated. However, we have also seen how some owners have made a deliberate choice as to whom they sell to, so that their good work is continued.

Wider benefits of the scheme

As well as benefits for wildlife, the introduction of traditional land management can:

Return previously neglected or abandoned land to part of the working farm once again The land can also bring in financial benefits through management grants or be an extra attraction that farms with a holiday business (B&B, holiday cottages) can offer guests. For instance, some farm accommodations which have been provided with a list of plants and animals say that these are often of interest to visitors.

Improve opportunities for access and recreation

For example, the management of cliffs and coastal slopes helps produce the wildflower spectacle that so many locals and visitors come to enjoy in spring and summer. Instead of walking through a monotonous sea of bracken and bramble, the walking experience is improved by a patchwork of habitats and a range of wildlife to watch. Some iconic species like cough attract visitors in their own right. On land above Goodwick Harbour, for instance, walkers can now wander across the attractive coastal slopes instead of being confined to the Coast Path by thick undergrowth.

Archaeology Overgrown features of archaeological interest that are hard to find/see can often be revealed through careful grazing and vegetation control.

Health and well-being The beauty, peace and wildlife of traditional landscapes is known to play a significant role in reducing stress and promoting a sense of well-being. Indeed, one landowner has commented that creating and subsequently enjoying his hay meadows has helped to significantly reduce his medication for high blood pressure and diabetes.

Rights of way management Sites which contain rights of way benefit from light grazing by reducing the need for mechanical cutting. This also reduces our costs and carbon footprint.

The future

Our experience shows that there is a definite need for a part-farm, locally-tailored scheme to support traditional land management in Pembrokeshire. Without it, it would be very difficult for many landowners to access the advice and assistance they need to make the most of the wildlife they have on their land. With a flexible, supportive, can-do approach, there is no shortage of landowners wishing to receive this kind of help. With the right resources, the scheme will be able to grow even further and become a major mechanism for delivering nature conservation in Pembrokeshire. Furthermore, we have hopefully developed a model which will be useful in other parts of Wales and the UK.



Quotes from partners and participants

"We have been in the management scheme for quite a few years now. Our hay fields are cut in July, and over the years have begun to produce an increasing variety of wild flowers, whilst our wetland is grazed in summer by ponies and has great bio-diversity both on the land and in the new 'scrapes' (shallow pools). We have also benefitted from some hedgerow restoration. All in all it's been a great success for us and there is also the bonus of two owl boxes - one in our barn and one in a big tree- which have lively tenants."

Pat Caplan, Brynberian

"I wanted advice on restoring hedgerows, improving biodiversity, increasing birdlife and wildflowers. Staff from the National Park have been like having a friendly encyclopaedia on hand for all of those moments when I needed advice. The Park Authority has been a friendly resource in the background - never intrusive - but always ready to come and advise. Together we have restored hedgerows, planted trees, wildflowers and watched the natural world return. The Park has some of Pembrokeshire's leading experts in many fields - my advice would be to use their kindness".

J Owen, Castlebythe

"It seems that where PCNPA has been able to maintain a long term management regime of grazing, cutting and the odd patch burn, it is paying dividends. There is an increasing diversity of habitat niches and the habitats look in good shape. The sites look to have a good range of flowering plants with some areas quite remarkable for their stands of bluebells and orchids. Some coastal sites now have extensive areas of very suitable chough feeding habitat. Rare plants are expanding in places where they were lingering on the edge of extinction a few years ago. It would be great to see this management spread further across the National Park into other areas where long term grazing is practical."

Jon Hudson, Natural Resources Wales

"We just wanted to say how much we appreciate all the work you have been doing over the past few years. Where in the past brambles and blackthorn had taken over most of the area east of the lake and the field adjoining it, the display of plants and flowers nowadays is a delight all year round. The biodiversity has improved so much and I don't think we could have managed it without your valued input and assistance. I know from the many wildlife enthusiasts that have stayed at Rosemoor that they agree. They often comment on, and regularly provide us with lists of, the plants, bats, birds, invertebrates, moths and butterflies they have spotted, finding it a true wildlife haven and a perfect antidote to the built-up areas where many of them come from. These things do not get said often enough, but today we thought: high time to say thank you!"

John Meulendijk & Jacqui Janssen, Rosemoor Nature Reserve, Walwyns Castle

"When visitors to Pembrokeshire seek my advice on where to see butterflies, my reply always starts with a walk or two along the coast. There is no doubt in my mind that the variety and especially the numbers of butterflies to be found on Pembrokeshire's coast owes a lot to the existence of the National Park and the sympathetic conservation management and work overseen by its staff. A stand-out day was seeing 76 dark green fritillaries in 4 miles of coast walking near Strumble Head!"

David Redhead, Butterfly Recorder for Pembrokeshire

"There is no doubt that some of our SSSIs would be in unfavourable condition if it were not for the Conserving the Park Scheme. NRW's budget for management agreements has been cut significantly, and we have no capacity to help with practical arrangements such as sourcing, moving and checking on livestock, and helping with difficult fencing work on the coast."

Mary Chadwick, Natural Resources Wales

"I was so pleased to hear about the National Park's grazing scheme. My fields had been neglected for too long, and in less than a year the diversity has started to increase thanks to grazing by Welsh Mountain Ponies, who are a delight in themselves."

Cynthia Boissevain, St Dogmaels

"For a decade or so, the National Park has helped Stena Line Ports Ltd manage our coastal land above the Port at Fishguard. This has included pony grazing, controlling bracken, fencing, firebreak cutting and rhododendron eradication – all of which have opened up the site to wildlife and walkers. It has also reduced the fuel load of the land and prevented the extensive summer fires which used to happen in the past. We are grateful to the team for all their help."

Carl Milne, Port Service Manager

"For the past 3 years we have watched our land blossom because of the help we have received from the National Park Authority. We knew that we had something wonderful here which should be conserved and not just for us. The land had not been cultivated in living memory. However we could not afford to do what was needed. I researched and wrote letters to all sorts of people asking for help/advice. By this time the land had become very overgrown. Then the National Park came along. Hooray! I have kept a photographic record month by month showing how the land has progressed since 2015. The local conservation society has been here recording plants and insect life ... indeed we welcome anyone with an interest in wildlife to visit. We are also grateful for the National Park's ongoing help and advice to keep things on track."

Jean Thomas, Llandeloy

Thanks

Thanks go out to all of the scheme's partners and participants over the years, especially our wonderful landowners, without whom many of these wildlife sites would simply not exist. Sympathetic owners are the only reason some of these wildlife-rich places are still here, so they must be cherished and supported as much as we possibly can.



For more information contact:

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