



# Naturally Connected Project Report

March 2018



## 1. Naturally Connected

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) secured Sustainable Development Fund support to pilot a new engagement initiative aimed at tourism businesses who own land within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (PCNP).

A consultant ecologist visited each business to conduct an ecological survey and provided a report containing advice on wildlife friendly land management practices. Each business also received a bespoke report on the wildlife on their property as well as details information about special places and wildlife experiences in the area local to them. The report was written in such a way that the information was suitable for sharing directly with visitors.

The overall aim of the initiative was to

- Encourage tourism business to adopt land management practices that provide suitable habitats for wildlife
- Help businesses promote local 'wildlife aware' visitor activities and experiences that will bring benefits to both the environment and also the business.

We worked with businesses to identify a small project aimed at enhancing or interpreting biodiversity on their land. These projects were then implemented with a small budget and practical support through the National Park Rangers and the Pathways Project.

Evaluation of the project was carried out through structured interviews with each participating business. The project manager asked a series of questions (see Appendix 1) as a prompt for feedback and discussion about the project.



Waxcap Fungi in grassland at Llwyngwair Manor

## 2. Practical Projects

### **SDF Output**

***7 tourism business owners will have taken part in the project and at least 5 of these will have taken practical action to benefit biodiversity or improve wildlife interpretation on their land and will have a greater awareness of the links between the quality natural environment and land management through personal experience.***

Seven businesses took part in the project. At the request of the SDF panel the approach was tested with a diversity of businesses and as a result the project included visitor attractions and a variety of accommodation providers. The project also ranged from the luxury to the budget end of the market.

Business Name	Location	Description
Llwyngwair Manor Holiday Park	Newport	Large holiday park with extensive grounds alongside the River Nevern. Pub, Holiday Apartments, Owned Static Caravans, Touring Caravans and a small number of camping pitches. <a href="http://www.pembrokeshireholidaypark.co.uk/">http://www.pembrokeshireholidaypark.co.uk/</a>
Bluestone Brewery & Tyriet Farm	Cilgwyn	Visitor Attraction and Brewery based on Tyriet Farm. The brewery is closely linked to the farm. Waste water is filtered through the reedbed before entering the river and cattle are fed waste from the brewing process. The Brewery is an event venue and visitor attraction. The farm is of very high value for nature and is farmed very extensively. <a href="https://www.bluestonebrewing.co.uk/">https://www.bluestonebrewing.co.uk/</a>
May Cottage	Carnhedryn	Self-catering Holiday Cottage let through a local agent - St. Brides Bay Holiday Cottages. <a href="http://www.stbridesbaycottages.com/cottages/st-davids/may-cottage.html">http://www.stbridesbaycottages.com/cottages/st-davids/may-cottage.html</a>
Penrhiw Hotel	St. Davids	Luxury hotel in old vicarage with grounds. Part of the Twr y Felin Hotel Group. <a href="https://www.penrhiwhotel.com/">https://www.penrhiwhotel.com/</a>
Brandy Brook Camping Site	Roch	A small number of owned static caravans and extensive camping pitches. <a href="http://www.brandybrookcampsite.co.uk/index.htm">http://www.brandybrookcampsite.co.uk/index.htm</a>
Picton Castle	Rhos	Visitor Attraction – Castle and Garden. Self-catering holiday accommodation. <a href="https://www.pictoncastle.co.uk/">https://www.pictoncastle.co.uk/</a>
Manorbier Youth Hostel	Skrinkle	Youth Hostel Accommodation adjacent to our land at Skrinkle Haven. <a href="https://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/manorbier">https://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/manorbier</a>



Each business was given a report providing recommendations for enhancement of their land for wildlife (a sample is provided in Appendix 1).

The project then supported six businesses to undertake a range of practical projects to benefit wildlife and improve interpretation.

### Summary of outputs

- 1 Otter Holt installed
- 42 animal boxes (bird, bat and dormouse) installed
- 7 Specimen trees planted and protected.
- 75m of hedgerow laid
- 2ha of Meadow enhanced.
- 0.04ha of invasive species controlled.
- 1 Interpretation Board
- 1 Training course provided
- 30 Children attended pond dipping events
- 233 Volunteer hours contributed.
- 1 Trail Camera placed, footage collected and shared with visitors.

Further details of the projects carried out with each business are described below.

## 2.1 Picton Castle

Sixteen years ago the gardeners at Picton Castle converted part of the Castle lawns from a closely mown amenity grassland into a wildflower-rich meadow through implementing traditional haymeadow management. They were rewarded with the appearance of their first Southern marsh orchid last year.

The ecological survey highlighted the importance of this meadow as a rare and declining habitat in Pembrokeshire. The challenge for Picton was to integrate this meadow into the visitor experience of the castle and gardens. In particular to to draw attention to the meadow and also to help explain to people why the grass is left long. Naturally Connected helped fund the design and purchase of an interpretation board to draw the attention of visitors to this very special and rare habitat.



Picton Castle meadow Interpretation Board

## 2.2 Bluestone Brewery & Tyriet Farm

Although Otters have made a very good comeback to our rivers they need dense vegetation and log piles alongside to use as resting up and breeding areas. These kinds of places can still be quite hard to find in the farmed landscape, therefore we took the opportunity to install a new otter holt alongside the River Clydach, a tributary of the Nevern. North volunteer wardens helped to install a recycled plastic prefabricated holt and carried out some hazel coppicing disguise the holt. We are just waiting for some tenants now.



Installing an Otter Holt at Tyriet



Putting up Dormouse boxes at Tyriet Farm

Because Tyriet is located in the North Pembrokeshire dormouse hotspot it was a good opportunity to install 30 new Dormouse boxes sampling the woodland and hedgerows around the farm. North volunteer wardens spent half a day making the boxes and then half a day installing them on the farm. Volunteers will be checking these twice a year for signs of dormice and if successful can be added to National Dormouse Monitoring Network Programme (NDMP).

## 2.3 Brandy Brook Camping Site

One of the key natural features of Brandy Brook campsite is the abundance of mature and veteran trees. All of these trees are of a similar age and the campsite owner was keen to look towards planting trees that would shade the next generation of campers. In-field trees are not as common as they used to be as they are less compatible with modern intensive agriculture; newly planted in-field trees are very scarce indeed so this was a wonderful opportunity. The project funded 7 standard trees (2-3 years old) along with tree guards to provide sheep protection when fields are grazed in winter. The trees were planted by West Ranger Ian



Tree planting with Portfield School



Meopham and volunteers from Portfield School.

Some of the hedges on the campsite were planted around 10-15 years ago meaning they were ideal for laying. Laying is a traditional form of hedgerow management which aims to make hedges thick at the bottom to ensure they are stock proof – which incidentally also makes them better for wildlife. We chose a hedge along a public footpath which runs through the campsite for Tom Iggleden and his Pathways Volunteer Group to tackle. The group were grateful to local expert hedgelayer Gareth Evans who gave his time to show a new style of hedgelaying to add to their repertoire. There are several more hedges in need of management at the campsite which we hope to tackle in the future.



Hedgelaying at Brandy Brook

## 2.4 Llwyngwair Manor

The campsite manager received training in running river and pond dipping sessions to enable her to share the wetland habitats at the campsite with her visitors. The project helped with purchasing the necessary equipment to allow her to run three sessions through the summer which were popular with visitors and locals alike. Sessions were advertised on Facebook and filled up almost immediately.

On the opposite side of the river the campsite has a meadow which is used for informal recreation by campers. This area has huge potential for development for both wildlife and recreation as well as extending the environmental education to grassland habitats. One of the major issues on this meadow is the presence of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Himalayan Balsam and



Pond dipping at Llwyngwair

Japanese knotweed. The campsite have been controlling the Himalayan Balsam on the site by regular mowing of the meadow however it still lingered in hard to reach places in the woodland and along the river banks.

The project we funded the treatment of Japanese Knotweed and North Ranger Carol and her group of Army prep volunteers lent some people power to help them in their task of managing the balsam.

## 2.5 Manorbier Youth Hostel

We supported Manorbier Youth Hostel to install 20 bird boxes in the shelterbelt around their site. The shelterbelt was planted about 20 years ago with assistance from National Park volunteers. The trees have done quite well considering the exposed location but they are still very young and lacking in features such as rot holes for nesting birds.

## 2.6 Penrhiw Hotel

At Penrhiw Hotel near St. Davids we provided funding to purchase locally sourced Yellow Rattle seeds to help improve the hay meadow they manage adjacent to the hotel. Although the meadow has been doing very well and is already home to variety of plant species it has a high cover of grasses compared to flowers. Yellow rattle is parasitic on grass and will help to reduce their vigour and improve the cover of wildflowers in the meadow.

The meadow will be open to the public as the part of the St Davids Peninsula Pollinator Trail.

Penrhiw has an ancient badger sett, first recorded in the 1700's. Encouraging access to view badgers brings with it the risk of disturbance so we funded a trail camera to enable the grounds staff to try capturing footage of the badgers which could be shared with guests and on their Facebook Page.



Sowing the rattle seed



Foxes and Badgers on the Penrhiw Wildlife Cam

The camera has been successful in capturing footage of badgers, foxes and foraging birds.

## **2.7 Conclusions**

This part of the project was very successful. Businesses were easily recruited to take part. The project also generated interest from businesses at the Pembrokeshire Tourism Summit including one agent which had a number of properties in Pembrokeshire in their portfolio, suggesting that this is likely to be indicative of wider interest within the community for this type of project.

Businesses were enthusiastic about implementing projects on their land to benefit wildlife and an interesting range of projects were identified and completed. Overall the diversity of opportunities identified demonstrates excellent opportunities for delivering conservation gains particularly in areas such as grassland management and hedgerow management.

Although not a specified output of the project, this in turn generated interesting and rewarding opportunities for volunteers including Ranger groups, Volunteer Wardens and the Pathways Volunteer Group who made a significant contribution to the implementation of the project. The ability to feed through 'ready to go' projects with landowners agreement in place is in strong support of PCNPA's new volunteering policy and associated initiatives.

All businesses identified wildlife as important, citing the interests of their visitors in activities such as watching wildlife, walking and fishing. One business noted that wildlife across the whole of Pembrokeshire was relevant, not just wildlife around their business or local area. Two businesses particularly stressed wildlife as being an essential part of their business; with one manager identifying the desire to develop their business as a 'wildlife retreat' and another saying it was an important part of their business ethos.

Six businesses said they were keen to continue to improve their land for wildlife. One business was limited by the control of their land which was mostly rented out.

When businesses were asked whether they would be happy to make a financial contribution to the wildlife reports, 5 businesses indicated they would prefer to make a contribution to the projects.



### 3. Wildlife Reports

#### **SDF Outputs**

***2) Through the provision of information packs, 7 tourism business owners will have been assisted to develop a very basic 'wildlife tourism' offer to their visitors.***

***3) Through the provision of information packs, visitors to participating businesses will have a greater awareness of the special natural qualities of the National Park and an enhanced understanding of the links between land management and wildlife.***

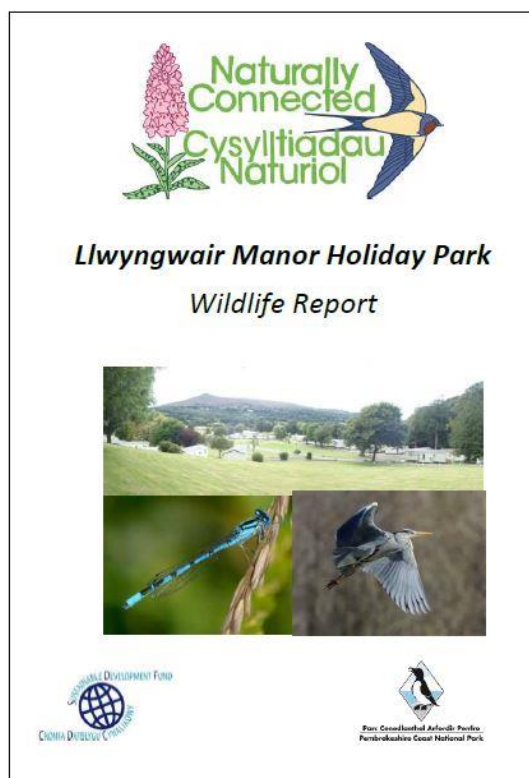
Each participating business received an ecological survey of their land along with an ecological report and recommendations for enhancement of their land and buildings for wildlife. The final report also included information on wildlife sites and experiences within the immediate locality of the business. We encouraged businesses to share these reports directly with their visitors. A sample of each type of report is provided in Appendix 2. Reports for all businesses are available to view on the PCNPA website.

Five businesses felt the Wildlife Report was successful in increasing their awareness of wildlife. Two businesses felt they are already had good knowledge of wildlife so the report had not expanded their personal knowledge, however both noted the value of the having the information collated into one place.

Three of the businesses also highlighted the value of the report in increasing staff knowledge of wildlife enabling staff to interact with visitors more confidently.

***"I had no idea about the importance of the habitats surrounding the hostel. The report helped us realise we have some interesting stuff right on our doorstep which we can promote alongside big ticket items such as the islands and boat trips". –Manorbier YHA.***

Six businesses felt the level of detail in the report was just right and agreed the report was quite complete albeit with a few suggestions for improvements e.g. greater emphasis on marine biology and providing the circular walks information in the Appendix instead of separately.



**Llwngwair Manor Wildlife Report**

Overall businesses felt that the report was quite complete with a few minor suggestions for additions such as a greater focus on marine ecology. A suggestion was made that circular walks could have been included in the appendix instead of provided separately.

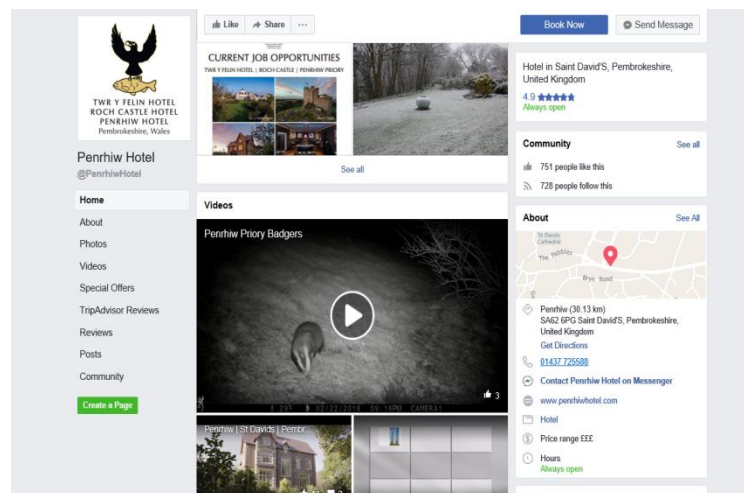
One respondent felt it was a bit too basic and would have liked more ecological information. They felt the balance between information on wildlife on the property and the 'further afield' section which provides information on surrounding sites of interest should have been more in favour of information about the property. They commented that the further afield part of the report felt a bit generic. The respondent did qualify this by saying they still felt the report was a great asset to their business.

### 3.1 Sharing the information with visitors

All business bar one were able to easily share the pack with their visitors. The method of sharing the information pack varied from business to business. It was easiest for accommodation providers who simply placed copies of the wildlife report in the room/cottage information packs and in communal areas such as the lounge or reception area. Penrhiw in particular fully integrated the Wildlife Report and their participation in the Naturally Connected Project into their offer.

**“We placed copies in bedrooms and lounge areas and drew visitors attention to the report as part of the check-in procedure. We also encouraged staff to share the information during conversations with guests and used the Naturally Connected Project as a USP. In the future we will include this as part of the staff induction process”**

**Paula Ellis, Twr y Felin Group.**



Penrhiw Hotel sharing footage from the Wildlife Camera on their Facebook Page.



Llwyngwair shared the Wildlife Report on their website

For campsites it was possible to share at points such as the reception/check-in or shop, although the numbers of guests per season makes it difficult to provide everyone with a copy. Brandy Brook Camping site had a please “return it when you have finished with it” policy which worked satisfactorily for them. Llwyngwair made the report available on the website offering

guests the opportunity to print their own copy before arriving.

3 businesses provided web access to the report which was slightly disappointing but highlights the fact that some businesses do not have easy access to updating or adding material to their websites or are subject to corporate restrictions.

For a visitor attraction such as Picton Castle the task was much more challenging as there was no straightforward way to share the information with visitors due to the high throughput. They chose to share the pack with all their staff and volunteers to equip them with the knowledge to share information with visitors. Providing on-site interpretation of wildlife features was a more efficient way to share information in the visitor pack via alternative means, which is why the Meadow Interpretation board was funded by the Naturally Connected project. Llywngwair Manor also chose to share information in the wildlife pack through education activities – mainly pond and river dipping.

Overall businesses shared the packs well, however it is possible that additional guidance could have been provided by the project. It is also clear that working with visitor attractions requires a more bespoke approach than working with accommodation providers. Where businesses are regionally or centrally managed such as the youth hostels thought may need to be given about the point of engagement.

### **3.2 Feedback**

From the outset and on further discussion with businesses it was accepted that getting feedback directly from visitors was going to be difficult. A note was placed in the front of each pack asking for feedback but no feedback was received via this method.

On discussion with businesses some anecdotal feedback was received. One business noted that some guests requested the report on arrival and one guest actually cited the Naturally Connected project as a reason for choosing to stay. They also noted that guests were more regularly seen exploring the meadow area when previously few had made it past the formal garden. They noted that the wildlife report had given them the confidence to improve access to the grounds and sell it as part of their visitor experience.

**“The information packs are a huge hit, Thankyou!” Alys Daye -Brandy Brook Camping Site.**

The two businesses that didn't report any direct feedback both reported that the copies of the report were 'well-thumbed and dog-eared' proving at least that they were an interesting enough prospect for guests to pick up and read!

We could use businesses perception of the value of the report to their clients as another measure. The reports took up to two days of a professional ecologists time so would cost in the region of £400-£600. We asked businesses if they would be prepared to pay for the report or make a contribution.

One business said they would be happy to split the cost of the reports 50:50. One business recognised the value of the pack and agreed in principle to a contribution but felt they might struggle to fund it in reality. One business commented that whilst they could see a value in the



report it was difficult to gauge its value in terms of return on investment. Two businesses felt they would be unable to make a contribution.

One business felt that with their existing knowledge and research they could have produced similar information and on that basis they would not offer a contribution.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

The Wildlife reports were well received and all businesses could see a value in them for their businesses and visitors. Although as one business noted it was difficult to gauge 'return on investment' and it is probably for this reason that businesses were unconvinced about making a financial contribution to this aspect of the project.

All businesses shared the report with their visitors. What was immediately clear is that this was easy for accommodation providers, a little less easy for campsites and required more thought for visitor attractions. For visitor attractions it was clear that more creativity is needed in sharing the report with visitors.

The sharing aspect could be improved by collating the different ways businesses shared the report and using that to provide advice and ideas.

The project was weak at getting feedback directly from visitors who read the report.

## **4. Additional Comments**

### **4.1 Continued relationship**

Six of the businesses indicated they valued the relationship with the Authority and were keen to continue that relationship to work on conservation land management.

**"I would like us to keep in touch. I really enjoy sharing my site with local people and local groups and the National Park can help with that" Alys Daye, Brandy Brook Camping Site.**

One business indicated they would be interested in developing a more strategic relationship with the Authority particularly on things like grant bids for Apprenticeship schemes.

One business indicated their willingness to offer their hotel as a venue for hosting networking, discussion groups or training events.

### **4.2 Training and events**

Businesses indicated an interest in training workshops for example on habitat management and training on running wildlife/educational events e.g. bat walks and meadow walks. This could work really well, using existing businesses as focal points to share their learning with other businesses.

One great suggestion was offering free places on selected guided walks given by the Authority as an easy way to offer training to tourism businesses on the features of interest in their locality..

## **5. Delivery of the Corporate Plan**

Overall the project was judged a success by all businesses who would all recommend taking in part in the project to other businesses.

The outcomes of the project have a good fit with delivering the following Well-being Objectives as a part of the PCNPA Corporate Plan.

### **1. Support and encourage the development of sustainable and employment and businesses**

- Deliver training to tourism providers to enable them to become advocates for the Park.
- Promote the special qualities of the Park as a tourist destination, working with partners to improve and support the local tourism offer
- Promote sustainable recreation through the Naturally Connected Project.

### **2. Improve the health of National Park Ecosystems**

- Continue effective land management practices through working with farmers and landowners.
- Work with volunteers on conservation work with a focus on acknowledging, retaining , developing and maximising the contribution of voluntary wardens and skilled volunteers.

### **3. Enable and encourage people to people to improve their well being.**

### **5. Work alongside communities to make the most of the National Park.**

- The project can generate enjoyable, satisfying and meaningful volunteer job and opportunities for Volunteer Wardens and Pathways Project Volunteers.

## **6. Next steps**

### **6.1 Delivery within existing resources**

#### **Park-wise**

On discussions with the Park-wise Officer there is scope for linking up on delivering additional messages and possibly training on wildlife engagement and conservation management through upcoming training events. There is no capacity within current Park-wise project to deliver the kind of in-depth engagement such as was provided by the wildlife reports.

#### **Conserving the Park**

The practical biodiversity projects element fits well with the objectives of the current Conserving the Park Scheme. Staff time and budget are the main limitation but this could provide a 'slow and steady' approach to assisting tourism providers with implementing wildlife projects on their land.

There is no capacity to deliver the kind of in-depth engagement such as was provided by the ecological reports and engagement would probably be limited to a verbal assessment of potential projects and assistance with implementation. Total number of businesses engaged would be quite modest.

### **6.2 Project model**

The Naturally Connected Project would lend itself well to a project mode of delivery. A Project Officer could be employed to engage businesses, carry out ecological surveys, develop projects and offer grants for practical conservation and engagement projects. The project could also link up with the existing Parkwise Project to support additional, more in depth wildlife engagement and conservation management focussed training opportunities. The project would also feed volunteering opportunities to the PCNPA Volunteer Wardens and Pathways Projects rather than attempting to engage its own volunteer force.

A 3 year project might cost in the region of around 150k and could be expected to engage circa 60 businesses, deliver 100 small practical conservation projects and 10 training events. It might also be expected to provide around 1500 hours of volunteering opportunities.

### **6.3 Funding**

The project pilot highlights the opportunity for drawing at least a proportion of match funding from participating businesses for biodiversity projects. The easiest way to do this would be by setting an intervention rate on the grant offered for projects or a flat rate fee for participation.

#### **Appendix 1 – Questionnaire**

#### **Appendix 2 – Brandy Brook Wildlife Enhancement Report**

#### **Appendix 3 – Manorbier Youth Hostel Wildlife Report**



