

REPORT OF CONSERVATION OFFICER

SUBJECT: CONSERVATION REPORT 2019 – 2020

1. The attached report set out the outcomes achieved for this National Park through our conservation work during the financial year 2019-20.
2. The report sets out:
 - Conservation work carried out across the National Park area,
 - The results of monitoring from sites in the active work programme,
 - Specific examples of achievements under the 'Conserving the Park' scheme,
 - Progress made on the management of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority owned sites,
 - *Stitch in Time* progress,
 - Collaboration and joint projects, both terrestrial and marine,
 - Species monitoring results and interpretation,
 - Changes in agricultural support.
3. The report illustrates the substantial amount of work the Authority undertakes across a range of activities. The main contributors internally are the officers in Park Direction, the Warden Teams and the Ranger Service.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members are requested to RECEIVE and COMMENT on the Report.

(For further information contact Mary Chadwick on 01646 624868)

Conservation Report 2019 to 2020



Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

**Operational Review Committee
2020**



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1. Conservation Land Management

1.1 Conservation across the Park

1.1.1 As part of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's (PCNPA) land management programme, conservation work is carried out on over one hundred sites aimed at benefitting priority habitats and species within Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. This is achieved through the management of the PCNPA's owned or leased estate and also through working in partnership with private landowners with our 'Conserving the Park' scheme.

	2018/19	2019/20
Conservation work carried out on land aimed at benefitting priority species (hectares)	4323 (7% of National Park)	4501 (7.3% of National Park)
Property owned or leased by PCNPA managed for biodiversity (hectares)	463	463
Land managed for biodiversity in partnership with private landowners (hectares)	1110	1288
Access land where PCNPA supports common management partnerships (hectares)	2750	2750

1.1.2 In addition, we engage in specific projects, either through direct delivery or as part of a partnership. At any one time we may have a number of live projects aimed at engaging landowners in a particular aspect of land management, for example control of non-native invasive species through the 'Stitch in Time' project.

1.1.3 PCNPA's conservation work covers a diverse range of activities and is normally individually tailored to sites. The practical elements of our conservation work are carried out in partnership with the Warden and Ranger teams, including volunteers.

1.1.4 Typical activities include: -

- Ecological survey and monitoring.
- Vegetation management e.g. burning and cutting.
- Facilitation of conservation grazing.
- Management agreements with landowners.
- Capital projects associated with land management such as fencing, gates and water supply.
- Woodland management.
- Advice on conservation management and grant schemes including agri-environment schemes and burning plans.
- Practical assistance through the Warden and Ranger teams (for example assistance with tasks such as burning, cutting, fencing and scrub management).
- Feedback and on-going discussion with landowners regarding progress and challenges.

1.2 Active Work Programme Monitoring Results

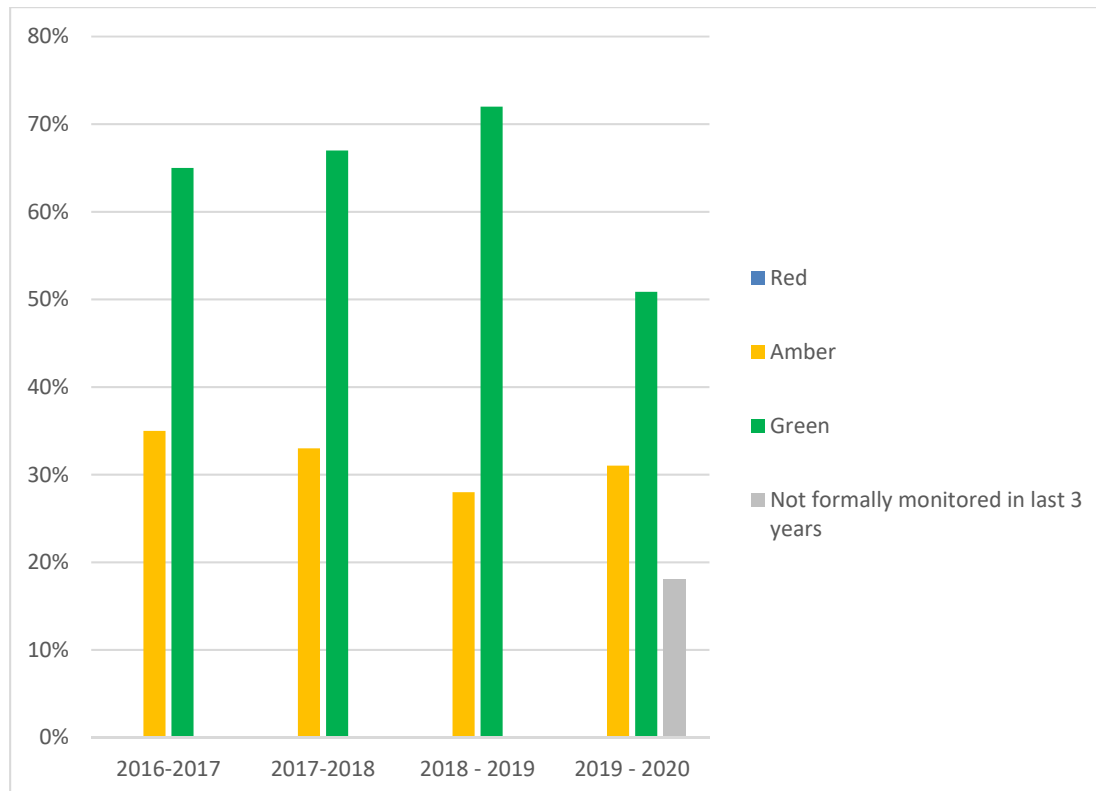
1.2.1 The monitoring scheme covers sites under the Conserving the Park scheme as well as land owned by the Authority.

1.2.2 Conservation sites in the active work programme are subject to formal audit visits which are written up and recorded on file. During formal visits, sites are assigned a Red, Amber or Green category¹.

	2018/19 Monitoring Period	2019/20 Monitoring Period
% of sites on the conservation work programme receiving a formal monitoring visit and assessment	55%	48%

1.2.3 All other sites are visited informally throughout the year to discuss particular issues with landowners, to assess grazing livestock and their impacts, etc.

1.2.4 The graph below shows the monitoring results for 2019-20. Results from previous years are included for comparative purposes. It should be noted that individual sites are not monitored annually but follow a 3 year rolling programme. Each year of the graph shows the aggregated results over the last 3 years. This is the first year that we have shown the number of sites that have not undergone formal monitoring, but most of these have received brief visits to inform or implement management.



¹ See Appendix 1 for description of monitoring method and explanation of red, amber and green status

1.2.5 Currently all sites are assigned an amber or green category and are in line with their conservation management plan. Amber sites tend to be undergoing restoration management, so they have not yet become as species rich as is their potential.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Conservation Sites - % in line with the Management Plan	100	100	100

1.2.6 This indicates that sites on both PCNPA-owned land and on land managed in partnership with private landowners continue to be managed in line with nature conservation objectives.

1.2.7 As different sites are monitored each year, real long-term trends can only be determined over a period of several years.

1.3 Conserving the Park

1.3.1 Conserving the Park facilitates practical conservation action on privately owned sites across the National Park. It increases the resilience of key habitats and species by safeguarding a network of nature-rich sites. See Appendix 2 for more information.

New Agreements	2018/19	2019/20	Comment
# new agreements made through conserving the Park	2	3	Management agreement budget is now fully allocated
Hectares new agreements cover	6	21.94	
# new sites outside management agreements		11	This is a new indicator to complement data on agreements
Hectares new sites outside management agreements		67.03	This is a new indicator to complement data on agreements
Hectares – New pollinator habitat that has been created	6	52.91	

Case study: Marsh fritillaries around Mynachlogddu

Mynachlogddu is a stronghold for the threatened marsh fritillary butterfly and has a cluster of sites in Conserving the Park. Marsh fritillaries need 50 ha of contiguous, suitable habitat to sustain a 'meta-population' in the long-term. Its local populations fluctuate from year to year due in part to a rare parasitic wasp, but this is not a problem if there is another population close by that can re-colonise the site.

In 2019-20, two new sites joined the scheme, enabling the restoration and management of 30 hectares of connected land: a mosaic of marshy grassland, wet heath and drier, species-rich grassland.



One of the new landowners has a herd of Ruby Red cattle, an ideal breed for marsh fritillary habitat. These cattle will graze all the adjoining sites over the course of a year. The new sites needed boundary fencing before grazing could be reintroduced, so a grant was obtained from the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership to help towards it.

Drier parts of these sites are cut for hay to feed the cattle through the winter, which maintains their rich diversity of plants and benefits pollinators and other wildlife.

1.4 Management of Common Land

1.4.1 Common land covers an area of 5,310ha. Commons are a significant resource for nature conservation with 72% designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, with 61% also being designated as Special Areas for Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive. They are the largest areas of both dry and wet heath in the County as well as providing the largest deposits of carbon in the form of peat in Pembrokeshire.

1.4.2 There has been a gradual decline in the number of heavier grazing animals (cattle and ponies) grazing the commons, leading to changes in vegetation and posing a threat to certain rare species of plants and invertebrates. There is also an increased 'fuel load' on many commons, putting them at greater risk of accidental fires.

1.4.3 The National Park Authority is actively involved in supporting the management of common land on around half the total area of common land resource. In addition to work cutting fire-breaks, PCNPA has obtained funding from WG to help with boundary fencing, where this will ensure that grazing can be reintroduced for the benefit of wildlife and graziers.

1.5 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Owned Sites

Location	Example activities/impact
Llanion Meadow demonstration site SM 971 041	We hosted a visit from 4 members of Neyland Town Council. The town council is looking to implement new mowing regimes to benefit biodiversity on land in Neyland. The meadow provides the opportunity to study the results of 3 different mowing regimes.
Freshwater East SN 019 979	The Brown Hairstreak butterfly was recorded here for the first time. (see case study).
Porthgain Meadow SM 815 323	Following some issues with past over grazing a new relationship has been established with a grazier that lives in the village as a result of a contact made by one of the warden team. The proximity is ideal as the field is very small and requires only very short periods of grazing. Following a short spring graze the meadow was able to flower throughout the summer.
Carew Castle SN 045 038	We also have a new grazier at Carew Castle through contacts made by the warden. A small flock of Hebridean sheep grazed the meadows in the latter part of the winter. Hebrideans are both grazers and browsers and don't shy away from tackling rougher vegetation as more modern sheep breeds do.
Nab Head SM 791 110	<p>It is always nice to get some positive feedback on our management regimes, especially when it comes from our BSBI County Recorder for plants!</p> <p>"It was most impressive to see the impact of your winter pony grazing at the Nab Head and Tower Point. Some superb short grazed lawns, wet areas and lots of upstanding tussocks and open heathland patches. A palmate newt was in one of the stock watering ponds. It was too early to record most plants so I will return later when more are showing and will let you have the findings. Well done to all involved."</p>

Case Study: Brown Hairstreak Butterflies at Freshwater East

Barely a year goes by when we don't report the finding of a new scarce species at Freshwater East, but this year was quite a surprise. A visiting butterfly recorder George Tordoff reported finding a Brown Hairstreak egg on Blackthorn on land opposite the Longhouse.

Three days of egg surveys led by David Redhead the County Recorder for Butterflies in Pembrokeshire found a total of 75 eggs spread across the reserve, putting Freshwater East in the top 10 sites in Pembrokeshire for this species.

This is far from typical habitat for the Brown Hairstreak which has its Welsh stronghold in Carmarthenshire, with scattered populations in Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire. The nearest



known site is around 8km away at West Williamston, although there are records from the 1970's about 2km west at Oriulton.

The species lays its eggs on Blackthorn and is severely affected by annual hedge trimming. At Freshwater East we have a wonderful opportunity to manage our Blackthorn scrub to benefit this butterfly over the long term.

1.6. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Project: Stitch in Time

1.6.1 Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) are a key driver of biodiversity loss globally and locally. The Stitch in Time project pilots top-down catchment control of three target INNS, Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan balsam and *Rhododendron ponticum*. Welsh Government grants (Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing; and Environmental Growth Fund) and a Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership grant have allowed the project to expand from the Cwm Gwaun catchment and Afon Clydach (a sub catchment of the Nevern) to the Ceibwr Bay area (Moylegrove) and Castlemartin Corse.

1.6.2 Best practice control is coordinated on the ground using volunteers, contractors and staff time for strategic use of resources in line with the catchment rationale of top down progression. Community involvement, partnership working, landowner engagement and awareness raising amongst key stake holders are core aspects of the project.

1.6.3 Invasives in the Porthgain, Llanrhian and Cwm Gwaun catchments are now considered to be almost eradicated, and are now monitored regularly to ensure this status is maintained.

Stitch in Time Volunteer Days

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
# Stitch in Time -Volunteer Days	109.89	123	440

Stitch in Time Community Group Contributions

Group	Activities carried out in 2019/20
Friends of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park	54 volunteer hours contributed towards eradicating invasives on Castlemartin and Clydach catchments. Additional volunteer time given to monitoring and maintenance in Cwm Gwaun, looking for any balsam that reappears and removing it before seeds are produced.
Newport Paths Group	93 volunteer hours contributed on Clydach without any need for PCNPA supervision.
PCNPA Pathways Project	66.5 volunteer hours contributed on Clydach and Castlemartin catchments.
PCNPA South Ranger Volunteers	10 volunteer hours contributed on Castlemartin catchment.
Llais Llanychaer	This is a key group monitoring and maintaining the Cwm Gwaun catchment. A majority of members are landowners.
Landowner engagement	85 landowners engaged in total across the catchments.

Invasive Species removed at source

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Hectares – Invasive Species removed at source/ injected	43.95	49.35	12

2. Collaboration and Joint Projects

2.1 Terrestrial Partnerships

Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership	<p>Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership administered a small grant pot totalling £19,641.20, which drew in partner contributions of £36,547 and benefitted 9 groups or organisations spread over 18 projects. This included PCNPA-led projects at Trefach, Penrallt and the Slash Pond.</p> <p>The Sea Trust and CLA Cymru became formal members.</p> <p>The Partnership Officer continued to input to strategic groups such as the WG run Nature Recovery Action Plan Refresh Group, Ecosystem Resilience Working Group and Place Based Approaches Group.</p> <p>The programme of landowner engagement visits and community engagement events continued with talks to Community Councils, Local Community Action Groups in St David's and Newport and a series of site visits. This activity was curtailed in Q4 by the Covid19 Lockdown.</p> <p>The Partnership Officer worked with PCC, PCNPA, Hywel Dda Health Board, Tir Coed and Pembrokeshire Lamb to plant 1200 trees on PCC owned land (a number equivalent to the number of babies born in the county each year) to create a woodland by the people of Pembrokeshire, for the people of Pembrokeshire. Similar planting is planned each year to create new woodland in perpetuity with public access.</p>
Magnificent Meadows Project	<p>This Wales-wide project led by Plantlife aims to restore over 500ha of wildflower meadow habitat across Wales. As well as engaging people in the plight of meadows and equipping them to take action to reverse the decline.</p> <p>The South Wales project officer conducted a workshop with key authority staff to explore opportunities in Pembrokeshire. The project will link to both our Conserving the Park Scheme and the 'Make More Meadows' campaign by the Pembrokeshire Coast Charitable Trust.</p>
Bat Conservation Trust	<p>Continuation of the Deall Ecosystemau citizen science</p>

	project (see case study)
Pembrokeshire Grazing Network	Currently active on 48 sites encompassing 349 ha, matching demand for conservation grazing with the appropriate animals.
Pembrokeshire Wildfire Group	Successful presence at Pembs County Show on the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service stand promoting the triple benefits (agriculture, biodiversity and wildfire reduction) of using heathland cuttings as livestock bedding. Continued successful implementation of firebreak cutting to aid the future controlled burning programmes.
Natural Resources Wales	A Vital Nature grant was given to PCNPA for work to safeguard and enhance habitats for the rare Southern Damselfly (see Case Study).

Case study: Saving the Southern Damselfly

PCNPA received funding from Natural Resources Wales over the winter for work to conserve the rare Southern Damselfly, found only in the New Forest and the foothills of Mynydd Preseli.

We commissioned a management plan for the species that gives detailed, site by site guidance on habitat management and monitoring for decades to come. We funded some boundary fencing around the Preseli commons, enabling grazing animals to maintain the open conditions needed by the damselfly.

We also undertook some mechanical excavation of new and existing ditches and streams to create habitat where it has been lost over the years. Finishing the work in between a very wet winter and the start of the nesting season was a challenge, though!



Photo: Brian Southern

Case Study: Deall Ecosytemau Project

In 2018 and 2019 PCNPA took part in a pilot project led by the Bat Conservation Trust encouraging people to help survey bats across Pembrokeshire.

Anyone could book and borrow a bat detector pack from Castell Henllys and Llanion HQ and monitor their chosen location for a few nights. The detector automatically records the echolocation calls of bats which were sent to the Bat Conservation Trust for analysis. Each participant received a report back identifying what bats were recorded, and an indication of the level of activity.

38 different kilometre squares were surveyed, with 76 volunteer hours, and 347 records were sent to the West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre. Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, noctule, Myotis spp, brown long-eared, lesser horseshoe, greater horseshoe and barbastelle bats were recorded. The latter three are particularly rare across Britain and Europe. Amazingly, 4% of the bats recorded in Pembrokeshire were greater horseshoes, demonstrating the significance of the county for one of the UK's rarest bats.



Photo: Greater horseshoe bat

2.2 Marine Partnerships

Welsh Government	The Authority continues to represent Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia National Parks on the Welsh Government Marine Protected Area Management Steering Group.
Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Steering Group	The group launched its new website which aims to provide accessible information on the work of the group https://www.mhwesg.org.uk/
Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Cardigan Bay SAC and Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites Relevant Authorities Groups	<p>The Authority continues to contribute to Relevant Authority Groups for Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation, Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation and Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites.</p> <p>All the European Marine Sites officers input to national work streams of relevance such as advising the Wales MPA MSG, contributing to NRW's condition improvement project (e.g. the unlicensable activities project), and share information and experience on a UK level with other marine protected area practitioners. A selection of highlights is given below.</p>
SWEPT	The SWEPT (Surveying the Waterway Environment for Pollution Threats) project's data was analysed and written up. Field data from 100+ volunteers generated 2105 photos and 881 nitrate and phosphate test results, infilling that already gathered by NRW in order to help NRW to prioritise land conservation actions and lead to environmental improvements. SWEPT proved to be so successful that it won a national award - The Park Protector Award, run by Campaign for National Parks.
Seagrass Ocean Rescue	<p>The Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer, with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, assisted Seagrass Ocean Rescue (a joint venture between Sky Ocean Rescue, WWF and Swansea University), with stakeholder planning and engagement for their pioneering seagrass regeneration project. Following some intensive local community liaison and licensing, the project successfully planted 750,000 seeds in an agreed area in Dale Bay in late February/early March 2020.</p> <p>The SAC Officer also input to a work package on visitor moorings for the area. Stakeholder liaison continues with the creation of the Dale Seagrass Stakeholder Group to discuss future management and monitoring.</p>
Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales	Provision of guidance and awareness raising (funded by PCNPA) to reduce the impacts of light pollution on Manx shearwaters, liaising with the Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales and industry. This contributes to wider discussions on the benefits of the Dark Skies initiative.

Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum	Contributing to marine and coastal recreation management including inputting to the Wales Activity Mapping project led by Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum mapping risks to marine conservation features from recreational activities, and delivering rocky shore training to outdoor providers as well as sitting on the recreation plan group.
Natural Resources Wales	Assisting NRW with their bait digging management review of The Gann (still underway). Feeding into native oyster regeneration planning within the Milford Haven waterway with NRW.
Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation	New interpretation panels and leaflets have been produced with funding provided by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. The new interpretation material is to help water users recognise the signs of disturbance in marine mammals and sea birds.

3. Species Monitoring

3.1 Chough Monitoring

3.1.1 The annual Chough monitoring programme is carried out by experienced ornithologists on a voluntary basis with assistance from PCNPA and Natural Resources Wales staff. Such a comprehensive annual monitoring programme would not be possible without their contribution, in particular Jane Hodges and Bob Haycock for their generous contributions towards both fieldwork and report writing. The costs of volunteer expenses are met jointly by PCNPA and Natural Resources Wales.

3.1.2 A total of 78 occupied territories were recorded in 2019, and 60 pairs fledged 157 young. With productivity at approx. 2.6 young per pair this was a fairly average breeding year for the National Park population. Non breeding birds were estimated to be somewhere between 46-78 birds, between 29-34% of the total population of choughs in the National Park.

3.2 Chough Data Analysis Project

3.2.1 This year saw a contract completed to collate and analyse the datasets from 1992 to present day and to analyse trends across the last 25 years of the chough monitoring programme.

3.2.2 The overall conclusions from the data analysis are that, following a decline in the 1990s, the breeding population in the National Park gradually increased until

2016, since when it appears to have plateaued. The non-breeding population has shown a similar trend in the National Park as a whole during the same period.

3.2.3 However, the data also suggest that productivity within the three chough SPAs has declined proportionate to that for the whole of the National Park. The reasons for this are unclear but there has been an increase in the number of nest sites found in other sections of the National Park (outside SPA), especially during the last decade. (Haycock, B. & Hodges, J. 2019. Choughs in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park – Data Analysis.)

3.2.4 The National Park Authority has applied for funding to subject observed trends to rigorous statistical analysis as well to explore further potential for analysis of the data, for example a closer look at performance in the SPA's as well as looking at trends in response to land use change or coastal geology and geomorphology.

3.3 Carew Castle Bat Monitoring

Surveillance visits indicate the numbers and patterns of roost attendance were consistent with previous years and the castle continues to fulfil its role as an intermediate roost for the horseshoe bats. The September count recorded 22 Greater Horseshoe Bats, the highest autumn count since the surveillance programme began over 20 years ago.

3.4 St. David's Airfield Skylark Monitoring

Between 25 - 27 territories were recorded this year despite the surveyor reporting ideal grassland conditions for the birds. This is most likely due to the loss of adult birds or poor productivity of nests.

Availability of invertebrate food and lack of reliable winter food sources are major problems not just for skylarks but for a whole range of birds reliant on the mixed farming which is rare and continues to decline in Pembrokeshire.

4. Conservation Policy and the Future for Agriculture

4.1 In 2016, a representative range of habitats and species in Pembrokeshire was assessed for condition and likely trend. Those assessed as in good condition and / or with improving trend had all been the subject of sustained conservation effort. The majority of habitats and species assessed were in poor or moderate condition and the overall trend is one of decline.

4.2 Most conservation effort is scalable, but resources are needed to influence the management of more agriculturally-productive farmland. Agricultural support schemes need to reward the production of public goods and widen participation in

ecological restoration across Wales.

Welsh Government's proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme will be critical to this, and would potentially contribute to impacts specified in this Management Plan as well as providing a potential new income stream to land managers if Britain exits from the European Union.

4.3 During an update to the Senedd on 9th July 2020, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, set out the next stages in the development of future support, including:

- undertaking a range of economic analysis to understand the impact of moving from an entitlement based income support scheme to a voluntary scheme which rewards the production of outcomes. This will be published next summer and no decision on a future scheme will be made without consideration of this analysis;
- a transition period to enable farmers to adjust their existing business model to accommodate any changes required by the proposed scheme; and
- publishing a White Paper which would pave the way for the introduction of an Agriculture (Wales) Bill during the sixth Senedd term.

Appendix 1 - Conservation Land Management Sites – Monitoring Methodology

Method

A formal assessment considers the species and habitats for which the site is being managed. Monitoring is different for each site depending on what we are trying to achieve through management. The timing of formal visits may be varied from year to year to assess a site with multiple features of interest.

Monitoring considers two things:

- i) The quality of the habitat which is discerned through the presence and abundance of typical positive indicator species (e.g. typical haymeadow flowers) and negative indicator species (e.g. nettles, docks) as recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. We may also consider vegetation structure in terms of sward heights or the balance of scrub to grassland where these are critical to individual species. We carry out some selected specialist species monitoring for example skylark and marsh fritillary where appropriate.
- ii) Compliance with an on-going suitability of the management regime. This will include information on the appropriate timing of management interventions, the success of individual interventions for example bracken control, and physical audit of capital items.

Relying entirely on (i) above to provide a monitoring result is fraught with difficulty. Species can often 'hang on' in habitats of declining quality and natural population fluctuations driven by the weather, or other factors outside of our control can confound the interpretation of these results.

Therefore we combine the information provided by both (i) and (ii) with the professional judgement of experienced staff to assign the site to one of three categories (Red, Amber and Green). Adding a qualitative professional judgement element has been used very successfully in nature conservation scheme monitoring and this was used by the Countryside Council for Wales' (Natural Resources Wales legacy body) rapid review of SSSIs in 2006.

Explanation of Monitoring Categories

RED	AMBER	GREEN
<p>A site is judged to be Red if:</p> <p>A serious or repeated breach of management plan has taken place.</p> <p>Damaging activities have taken place or features of interest destroyed/partially destroyed.</p>	<p>A site is judged to be Amber if:</p> <p>Management is considered compliant and effective but the conservation value of the site will take time to improve.</p> <p>There is a positive direction of travel in terms of quality improvement but with minor deviations from the management plan which may slow recovery or improvement of conservation value.</p> <p>Management is compliant but our recommended management is not producing the expected results.</p>	<p>A site is judged to be Green when the management regime is compliant, the management is effective and the site is of high quality and with high ecological integrity.</p> <p>In the green category we are often 'running to stand still' as maintenance of good condition requires continued management.</p> <p>Such sites may slip back to Amber if the land changes hands or the owners' circumstances change.</p>

Our response:	Our response:	Our response:
<p>The Authority will make a judgement on whether to continue involvement with the site.</p>	<p>In the first case, the positive feedback is provided to the landowner.</p> <p>In the second case we communicate with the landowner regarding ideal management practice and reasons for deviation, perhaps looking for alternatives.</p> <p>In the third case we would work with the landowner to experiment with management. This is standard practice in nature conservation management and is referred to as 'adaptive' management.</p>	<p>Green sites may stay with the scheme requiring smaller amounts of intervention. For example a site which had capital expenditure such as gates and scrub control may now only need a small amount of on-going assistance with grazing animals.</p> <p>For some sites continued support may be the only option for retaining the conservation interest of the site.</p>

Some of the detail of these responses are only relevant to the Conserving the Park scheme, but the broad principles apply across all the Authority's conservation portfolio.

Appendix 2 ‘Conserving the Park’ Scheme

Background

‘Conserving the Park’ is Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority’s flagship scheme for working with private landowners within the National Park. It has proved a powerful tool in delivering practical land management for key habitats and species and is our key vehicle for delivering first purpose conservation objectives in the National Park Management Plan, the Authority’s Corporate and Resources Plan and the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership’s Local Biodiversity Action Plan / Nature Recovery Action Plan.

Conserving the Park evolved from the highly successful ‘Conserving the Coastal Slopes’ project, which was the practical answer to the Authority’s Chough Conservation Strategy. Further background on this project can be obtained from the excellent project report, which neatly outlines the challenges for conservation management of semi-natural habitats within the National Park and which is as relevant today as it was in 2002.

Why is it needed?

Habitats such as flower-rich grasslands, marshy grasslands and woodlands and coastal slopes all contribute to the rich diversity of wildlife in the National Park. These semi-natural habitats suffer from a range of issues such as land abandonment, inappropriate stock, lack of grazing and lack of traditional vegetation management.

Outside of designated areas there are gaps in the support available to landowners who aspire to manage their land for the benefit of wildlife. The Conserving the Park scheme aims to fill these gaps, and also to facilitate access to other sources of support and to add value where possible. It is important to note that the scheme is not intended to compete with, or replace, existing schemes.

The scheme supports community spaces such as churchyards, which often hold remnants of ancient flower-rich grassland. Volunteers help out with the annual cut and rake which produces an abundance of spring and summer flowers and excellent pollinator habitat at Stackpole Churchyard.

How does the scheme work?

Landowners enter the scheme by two main avenues. They may see the scheme information on our flyers or on our website and contact us directly, or as is often the case they are referred to us by one of our partners, for example NRW.

Sites are visited and assessed for current conservation value and condition and their potential to deliver conservation outcomes for priority habitats and species.

The list of priority habitats and species has been taken from the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Pembrokeshire which provides action plans for European Annex 1 habitats and Annex 2 species and UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species in Pembrokeshire, as well as those of local concern.

The Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership consists of a wide range of statutory and non-governmental organisations and voluntary organisations. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan is regularly updated and reviewed by a core steering group of key partners including NRW, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Pembrokeshire County Council and the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales - ensuring information is relevant and up to date. A list of priority habitats and species can be found in Appendix 1 of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Please click:

<https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/biodiversity/pembrokeshire-nature-partnership-plans-and-guidance>

Process

Check the site is eligible by deciding whether it supports/is capable of supporting priority habitats and species.



Identify the ideal management regime.



Discuss management with the owner and identify barriers to management (such as lack of stock, inability to carry out work, lack of site infrastructure) and sources of alternative funding such as agri-environment schemes.



Barriers to management removed by selecting items from the toolkit (below).



Management and toolkit support agreed with the owner and site enters the scheme. Annual monitoring provides owners with ongoing support and progress updates on their management.

The Toolkit approach

The Toolkit approach was developed during the Conserving the Coastal Slopes Programme. It is highly effective as it can tailor solutions to site management issues and therefore offer highly targeted support.

