

**REPORT OF THE BIODIVERSITY OFFICER**

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**SUBJECT: CONSERVATION REPORT 2022-2023**

1. The attached report set out the outcomes achieved for this National Park through our conservation work during the financial year 2022-2023.
2. The report sets out:
  - The impact of conservation land management activities in 2022-2023.
  - Specific examples of achievements under the 'Conserving the Park' scheme.
  - Progress made on the management of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority owned sites.
  - A report on partnership projects and collaboration.
  - Progress on Authority led projects and programmes.
  - Species monitoring results and interpretation.
3. The report illustrates the substantial amount of work the Authority undertakes across a range of conservation activities. The main contributors internally are the officers in Nature Recovery, including the Warden Teams, as well as the Ranger Service and other volunteer programmes, notably Pathways.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Members are requested to RECEIVE and COMMENT on the Report.**

*(For further information contact Sarah Mellor on extension 4829)*



# Conservation Report 2022 to 2023



**Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority**

**Operational Review Committee**

**6<sup>th</sup> December 2023**



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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 two hundred sites aimed at benefitting priority habitats and species within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. This is achieved through the management of the PCNPA's owned or leased estate and through working in partnership with private landowners with our 'Conserving the Park' scheme.

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 several 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.

1.1.5 A successful award from the Nature Networks 2 fund takes the Stitch in Time Project up to March 2025. The delivery of the Achub Brith y Gors project, funded through Nature Networks 1 and NRW peatland programme projects were also on-going through this period.

1.1.6 Allocations under the Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places Programme for Decarbonisation facilitated the continuation of the Traditional Boundaries and the Greening Agriculture grant schemes which have both served to develop and expand our connections to farming communities within the National Park.

1.1.7 Allocations under the Sustainable Landscape Sustainable Places programme Wild Park/Wild Coast saw the piloting of measures for the development of our new Connecting the Coast pilot land management grant scheme which aims to significantly expand on the approaches established through the Conserving the Park Programme. Towards the end of the period a new Conservation Officer was recruited to lead the delivery of the pilot phase.

	2019/20	2020/2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	Comments
Property owned or leased by PCNPA managed for biodiversity (hectares)	463	463	474.87	477.77	
Land managed for biodiversity in partnership with private landowners (hectares)	1,288	1,356.69	1,483.62	1,544.04	Conservation team have removed sites from list if PCNPA haven't been involved in the last couple of years. However, most of the sites are likely still to be under favourable management.
Access land where PCNPA supports common management partnerships (hectares)	2,750	2,858.20	3,183.25	3,718.59	Two commons had been omitted from previous figures

These figures are net and therefore take account of areas of land both entering and leaving the scheme.

## 1.2 Conserving the Park

1.2.1 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.

<b>New Agreements</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Conservation sites % managed in line with management objectives	100	100	100	100	
# new agreements made through Conserving the Park	3	0	1	5	Budget fully spent
Hectares new agreements cover	21.94	0	2.93	88.62	
# new sites outside management agreements	11	24	49	18	Limited Biodiversity budget and staff time is a constraint on what help we can give. Capital interventions mostly rely on external funding.
New sites outside management agreements (hectares)	67.03	189.79	256.01	44.12	
New pollinator habitat created (hectares)	52.91	189.79	256.01	132.74	



## CASE STUDY –

### Helping declining farmland birds - Newgale

One of the ways we help farmers and landowners is to help them discover what they have on their land – they might have important plants and animals that they are not aware of. An example was the discovery of yellowhammers on a farm above the Brandy Brook valley. This species has suffered huge declines in the county, being restricted now to just a handful of locations.



The owners were taken to see what a nearby farmer is doing for this important farmland bird, and subsequently feeders were installed to help get the birds through the winter, as this seems to be one of the major factors in its decline. The birds were seen using the new feeders within a few weeks.

Another discovery here was the presence of a significant population of Spring squill, which is normally only seen growing on cliffs and coastal slopes, with only a couple of inland locations in the county. The grazing regime has now been amended to allow this early-flowering species to flower and set seed successfully.





## CASE STUDY

### Woodland improvements for butterflies - Cresselly

In a hidden valley near Cresselly, we have worked with the owners over a number of years to make this wildlife-rich site even richer. Our main project this year was some woodland enhancement – cutting a wide ride to bring in more sunlight for woodland butterflies, particularly the silver-washed fritillary (our largest butterfly).

The work was carried out by the Pathways and Roots to Recovery groups over a number of sessions in winter. The trees were coppiced and will regrow over coming years, adding to the structure and age diversity of this ancient wood.

The wood is criss-crossed with former miner's paths, which have closed over in more recent times. The plan is to recut these in stages to create a network of sunny butterfly paths and glades.



## CASE STUDY –

### **New community wildlife space for St David's**

The owner of the last remaining undeveloped field along the Glasfryn Lane in St David's approached us with a wish to create a space for nature and people. Alongside EcoDewi, the local environmental community group, we have been able to help advise, part-fund and deliver the early stages of his vision.

This year saw the plan starting to take shape with the planting of a new roadside hedge and hundreds of woodland trees and shrubs, in a joint effort between local people and our wardens, rangers and volunteers.

A new pond and small meadow patches will follow.





## 1.3 Management of Common Land

1.3.1 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 and 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.

1.3.2 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. Rank ungrazed grasses and vegetation makes day-to-day management more difficult along with contributing to increasing the fuel load.

1.3.3 PCNPA continues its programme of fire break cutting, working closely with graziers to pinpoint areas of possible ignition. In the year 2022/23 fire breaks were cut on Carningli SSSI an area designated for its flora and fauna that has been extensively burned in the past. Thanks to the ongoing communications the graziers at Carningli conducted a controlled burn assisted by Mid and West Fire Service on the Mountain following a day of cutting out fire breaks. Although not the easiest of terrains the fact that breaks were in place gave a framework they could work towards. Although it may seem insignificant, getting the graziers to disclose the exact areas to be burnt and ensuring prior approval from NRW beforehand has been no mean feat and demonstrates the constructive relationship between we as PCNP and MAWW Fire have forged with the graziers during the last year. They have already expressed their wishes to coordinate with all agencies in the future. This is a positive foundation and one that can be built upon in years to come.



Working in conjunction with a grazier on the Preseli SAC, two areas were targeted and micro breaks cut to aid controlled burning. On the other end of the spectrum a large break was also created utilising the landscape and current breaks. This break of 3.1km splits the area of 6,000 acres in half. With the change in climate we hope to create more breaks like this in the future to limit the damage of possible extensive summer grassfires. In 2023/23 13km of fire breaks were put in place; three quarters of these paths being new ones.

1.3.4 The PCNPA is actively involved in supporting the management of common land on around half the total area of common land resource. PCNPA has obtained funding from Welsh Government to help with boundary fencing, where this will ensure that grazing can be maintained and in some parts reintroduced for the benefit

of wildlife and graziers. In 2022/23 the Commons Resilience Fund facilitated just over 2.8km of fencing on the Preseli, Carningli Commons.

## 1.4 Greening Agriculture

Funding has been secured over the next 2 years from the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places Welsh Government Grant to develop the Greening Agriculture pilot with the aim of further decarbonisation within the agricultural sector both by reducing emissions and sequestration.



In January of 2023 four businesses were granted funding to improve efficiency on their farms and lower Carbon emissions. This included one 50kWh Battery Storage system to complement the current renewable system at Caerfai Farm. The battery system being utilised to power the robotic milking machine, electric farm vehicles and the production and storage of their own cheese. The other projects comprised of efficiency enhancements including heat exchangers, upgraded vacuums and Vacuum on Demnad.

## CASE STUDY – Carningli Dairy

In the heart of Llwyngwair, a family enterprise thrives on 121 hectares, prioritising both agriculture and sustainability. With 150 pedigree Brown Swiss and Holsteins, they've embraced robotic milking and a plough-free approach for eight years. The farm, intricately woven with 24 hectares of woodland, practices a paddock system.

As supplier of the first milk co-operative they are committed to embracing the new First4Milk Pledge which includes agreeing to provide cows with access to pasture for a minimum of 6 hours per day for 120 days during the grazing season; sharing antibiotic use data; enhancing biodiversity and soil health on farm and helping to promote a positive image of dairy. Notably, they monitor their carbon output annually as a part of the Tesco supply chain, embodying a commitment to environmental responsibility.

Venturing beyond traditional farming, they've successfully diversified into bottling their own milk, delivering to doorsteps in Newport and the surrounding areas for over a year. The bottling plant, operational year-round, produces over 2,000 litres per week, fostering a local sustainable ethos deeply rooted in the community.

The Greening Agriculture Project Funded the installation of 22.21kW Solar PV System including a 25.56kWh battery system.

**CARNINGLI  
DAIRY**



## 1.5 Traditional Boundaries Scheme

Traditional Boundaries	2019/20	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Length of Traditional Boundary Restored under Traditional Boundaries Grant Scheme (metres)	NA	970	2708	2,086

The successful pilot scheme ended in 2021/22 but funding has been successfully obtained to expand the work through the SLSP project with a focus on Decarbonisation.



In 2022/23 over 11,000 hedging plants were planted including 527m of new hedge created to link existing habitat. Pictures below show (from left to right) 180m of new Hedgerow planted yn Penrallt y Gardde, Glanrhyd; 100m of Double Hedgerow planted in Rhosmaen, Crosswell; Creation of a new hedge bank and 147m planted in Boulston, Uzmaston.



## 1.6 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Owned Sites

Location	Example activities/impact
Carew Castle SN 045 038	Building on the work to establish new specimen trees around the site, further work has been undertaken by the warden which draws in support from adjacent farmers. As part of this phase of the project a new hedgerow has been established along the edge of the carpark to the south of the millpond which will provide habitat connectivity for bats as well as enhancing the landscape and visitor welcome. To the north of the millpond a number of new hedgerow trees were planted into notches within existing hedgerows to help replace trees lost to ash dieback.
Grapley End Fields SM 835 327	Following the project to restore infrastructure to the site the grazing licence was let to a local grazier who will now manage the site with a low intensity mixed regime including cattle, sheep and hay cutting.
Pentre Ifan Wood SN091378	After a number of years hiatus over Covid we now have two new licensed monitors who are keen to refresh and re start the monitoring transect at Pentre Ifan. North volunteers made a number of new boxes to replace those that are now mostly rotted away.

## 1.7 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Led Projects

### 1.7.1 A Stitch in Time

The phase of the Welsh Government's Local Places for Nature programme Stitch in Time concluded in 2023 (see below).

Across the two years the project worked in a number of focal catchments to manage, monitor and maintain 32.05ha of area infested with Himalayan Balsam. The focal areas included the Nevern headwaters, Moylegrove, Castlemartin Corse/Pembroke river and Fishguard. As ever the project drew in a huge amount of support from local communities with 29 landowners engaged in the project and 461 volunteer hours donated by various groups both old and new. Our local contractor base continued to support volunteer effort at sites with six local contractors regularly carrying out work for the project.



In response to a community request we also funded the survey of the Afon Alun catchment in St. Davids. A balsam infestation was confirmed in this catchment and despite extensive survey no sign could yet be found of the infestation in the headwaters which include SAC wetland habitats which raises hope that timely action can be taken to tackle the infestation.

#### **CASE STUDY – Afon Brynberian volunteer led approach**

It's always great to have groups which are keen to get involved and have the ability to commit to pushing the work forward across the season. Here the Stitch in Time Project Officer led the first work party on a tributary of the Afon Brynberian with Brynberian Environment group and Ramblers Cymru officer to share best practice learnt as part of the Stitch in Time Project.



The on-going commitment of the volunteers meant very little input was needed from the PCNPA project officer. Group work parties finished at the end of July with individuals spending their own time to keep the momentum of control on these sites as well as moving further downstream with agreed access through their own initiative.



Support will continue to be provided to increase access for next season. Japanese knotweed records have also been provided from the group.

Zoe from Ramblers Cymru (pictured above) is leading a project in the same catchment improving neglected or abandoned Public Rights of Way. Ramblers Cymru provided funds to purchase Brynberian environment group tools as well as attend and on one occasion lead balsam bashes on the sites.

### 1.7.2 Local Places for Nature

The Local Places for Nature programme is a Welsh Government programme aimed at enhancing nature on the doorstep and increasing access to nature for local communities. This is provided as a programme facilitated by the Pembrokeshire Local Nature Partnership by a dedicated officer employed by Pembrokeshire County Council.

As part of the programme the Authority delivered a variety of works across the National Park including:

Project	Description
Stitch in Time Project	See above
Force for Nature Grants	The Pembrokeshire Coast Trust funded 8 local projects including 5 community groups and 3 schools. Projects included tree planting, wildflower meadow creation and the creation of a forest garden and a well-being garden.
Castell Henllys Pond and boardwalk	Creation of a new pond and boardwalk on a piece of wetland by the river.

CLEAN project water sampling	We supported a programme of summer sampling in 2022 carried out by Cwm Arian and members of the local community.
Carew pollinator garden	Enhancements to Carew walled garden with the purchase of plants, planters and sculptures.
St. Davids swift project	See below

### CASE STUDY – Saving Swifts in St. Davids

After receiving a call from a concerned resident regarding a re-roofing job which involved 4 swift nest sites were able to work with the roofers and the home-owners to ensure that the nest sites could be preserved for the future by ensuring continued access through the newly added modern materials. Breathable roofing membranes mean the traditional wall top gap is no longer required for ventilation so roofs are often sealed to prevent wildlife entering which seals up the traditional swift nest sites.



Thanks to the work swifts were able to access the nest sites the following spring.



Local resident Dan Wright teamed up with Ecodewi to launch a project to encourage local residents and businesses to make provision for swifts by erecting nest boxes. The Authority held two talks at which residents were able to sign up to having a box on their property which was then funded by the Local Places for Nature Scheme.

### 1.7.3 Mewn Dau Gae - Achub Brith y Gors

2022 to 2023 was the only full year of this Welsh Government funded, National Heritage Lottery Fund project. The aim of the project was to restore and connect sites with marshy grassland and wet heath habitat that have either supported, or have the potential to support, marsh fritillary butterflies. The species requires a network of adjacent sites with an abundance of its food plant, Devil's-bit scabious. A population needs up to 104ha of suitable habitat in a landscape for long-term viability. During this year, 8 sites were fenced (a total of 4,231m) so that pony or

cattle grazing can restore and maintain the habitat. Cattle crossing points were put in, a cattle handling area built and a movable solar pump was bought so that grazing could be introduced to new sites.

Vegetation cutting was done at 20 different sites (by volunteers and contractors) to facilitate grazing and restore habitats. Devil's-bit scabious seeds were collected and grown into plugs, which were planted out by volunteers at 10 sites where the population needed boosting after historic sheep grazing. Japanese knotweed was treated at 6 sites and Himalayan balsam was cut across more than 20ha of land, mostly comprised of ditches, hedges and waterways.

126 volunteer hours were spent surveying for marsh fritillaries, which were found at 11 out of 16 sites. One of these was a new location for the species, and many of the other sites were rediscoveries after a period of absence.

### 1.7.4 National Peatland Programme

We received just over £20,000 of funding for a second year for peatland restoration works. At Rhos Hescwm common, a series of firebreaks were cut to protect the peatland from accidental fires at this popular site on the edge of Dinas. Volunteers cleared young saplings that were drying out the peat. The area of peatland was found to be much larger than originally thought. Invasive Rhododendron was treated at Trerhos Common. Peatland plants have returned to Rhos Hescwm following the cutting work.



In addition, 4 sites were fenced so that grazing could be introduced – ponies at 3 of the sites and goats at the other. A total length of 1,616m was done through a combination of new fencing or extending the life of existing fences with new posts. This grazing will help to restore 26.86ha peatland and then maintain it in a favourable condition.



## 2. Collaboration and Joint Projects

### 2.1 Terrestrial Partnerships

<b>Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership</b>	<p>PCNPA made a cash contribution of £7,488.62 and PCC made a contribution of £10,000 to the core running costs of the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership in the 2022/23 financial year. The Partnership administered a small grant fund to a value of £12,953.35 which supported 8 projects, drawing in partner contributions of £22,232.80.</p> <p>Funds were secured under the Welsh Government Local Places for Nature scheme via a combination of allocated and competitive funds to a value of £836,800.00. These included £62,400.00 in revenue and 245,000.00 in capital to PCNPA. Projects under this and other schemes were delivered largely by the Partnership Project Implementation Officer.</p> <p>Funding was also secured under the Nature Networks fund (£173,335.00 capital for habitat creation in St David's); the Coastal Capacity Building Fund (£151,602.00 in revenue to support several coastal partners); and a revenue fund from Welsh Government specifically to support Nature Partnerships announced by the Minister for Climate Change following the Biodiversity Deep Dive (£72,000). The total funding secured by the Partnership for the 2022/23 financial year was therefore £1,251,225.</p> <p>Membership increased to 23 organisational members signed up to the Terms of Reference, with the addition of the RSPB and Folly Farm. The number of subscribers across all mailing lists increased from 893 to 915 in the reporting period (although there is some duplication where people subscribe to multiple lists). Followers on Facebook increased from 822 to 993.</p> <p>362 enquiries were received and responded to. 27 public facing events and activities were run, such as landowner engagement visits and evening talks, including tree planting days with PCNPA Rangers and volunteers.</p> <p>The Partnership's Biodiversity Implementation Officer continued to input to strategic groups such as: NT Southwood Community Sounding Board PCC Green Infrastructure Plan PCC Urban Tree Strategy</p>
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	<p>PCC Cabinet Briefing  PCNPA Recreation Plan Working Group  PSB Wellbeing Objectives  PSB Response to Nature Emergency  PSB Climate Change Risk Assessment Group  WG Ministerial Deep Dive in Biodiversity  WG NRAP Implementation Group  WG Sustainable Funding Models Workshop  WG Bee Champion Group  WG Marine &amp; Fisheries Evidence Workshop  WG Rural Communities Workshops  National Biodiversity Conference Facilitation  Sustainable Farming Scheme Consultation Response</p>
<b>Dawnsio a'r y Dibyn</b>	<p>The Dawnsio a'r y Dibyn project was launched. The project is a collaboration of partners including PCNPA, Ceredigion Council, Gwynedd Council, RSPB and the National Trust. Led by Gwynedd Council and funded by WG's SMS scheme the project will deliver a range of projects including coastal land management, payments for outcomes trials, heritage management as well as a series of best practice exchange visits. Items to be delivered include the People, Paths and Pollinators project, LiDAR surveys, a programme of practical works and guidance for managing coastal adder populations.</p>
<b>Life Quake</b>	<p>Funded by EU LIFE and supported by Welsh Government, LIFEquake is a five-year project which aims to restore peatland, quaking bogs and their wider supporting wetland landscapes to favourable conservation status. Quaking bogs' – so called because when conditions are right the ground 'quakes' underfoot. Delivered in partnership by NRW, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Snowdonia National Park and the National Trust the programme includes work on two SACs within the National Park, Gweunydd Blaencleddau and North West Pembrokeshire Commons SAC.</p>

## CASE STUDY – Dawnsio a'r Dibyn

### Coastal Land Managers Best practice event

A group of 18 land managers from across Wales visited Pembrokeshire Coast National Park to find out more about our Coastal Conservation work.

The day included officers from NRW, RPSB, National Trust and Local Authority staff.

PCNPA presented a range of coastal projects including the Conserving the Park Project, the Pembrokeshire Grazing Animals Scheme and the People, Paths and Pollinators Project.



## 2.2 Marine Partnerships

<p><b>Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Cardigan Bay SAC and Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites Relevant Authorities Groups</b></p>	<p>The Authority continues to be represented on and contribute to funding Relevant Authority Groups for Pembrokeshire Marine SAC, Cardigan Bay SAC and Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites.</p> <p>The Pembrokeshire Marine website is live at <a href="https://www.pembrokeshiremarinesac.org.uk/">https://www.pembrokeshiremarinesac.org.uk/</a>. The work was commissioned and delivered by the SAC Officer and funded by PCNPA. More information can be found on the website projects page, which features <i>Natur am Byth!</i>, marine code work, seagrass restoration, water quality, native oyster regeneration and sustainable shellfish work.</p>
<p><b>Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership</b></p>	<p>The Authority is represented on the Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership (previously the Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group) was formally launched by the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James, in October 2022.</p>
<p><b>Marine Protected Area Management Steering Group</b></p>	<p>The Authority represents Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and Eryri on the Welsh Government Marine Protected Area (MPA) Management Steering Group. A key role of the group is to administer funding in line with the current Marine Protected Area Network Management Action Plan for Wales.</p>
<p><b>Natural Resources Wales</b></p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales is taking forward a number of projects over the next three years that will benefits the European Marine Sites relevant to the National Park. Project themes include invasive species, bait collection management and derelict vessels.</p>
<p><b>Cleddau Nutrient Management Board</b></p>	<p>The inaugural meeting of the Cleddau Nutrient Management Board meeting was held in March 2022 (Pembrokeshire County Council lead). The Board's role is to identify and deliver a Nutrient Management Plan, which will assign actions to Board members so as to achieve NRW conservation targets. The Board will be supported by input from a technical group and a stakeholder group to help inform their decisions.</p>



### **3. Monitoring and Research**

#### **3.1 Small Pearl and Brown Hairstreak Studies**

The National Park Authority secured funding from the Nature Partnership to carry out a review into the conservation status of two threatened butterflies in the National Park; the small pearl bordered fritillary and brown hairstreak. Both studies revealed concerning declines and helped to point remaining sites of conservation concern as well as sites from which they have been recently lost. This will help to focus conservation and restoration efforts for these species using an evidence based approach.