Nature Networks Fund (round two) decisions, January 2023

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Award decisions for the Nature Networks Fund (round two).

We are distributing the Nature Networks Fund (round two) on behalf of the Welsh Government and in partnership with Natural Resources Wales.

The programme aims to strengthen the resilience of Wales' network of protected land and marine sites, supporting nature's recovery while actively encouraging community engagement. Grants ranging from £87,600 to £249,999 have been awarded to 17 projects.

Wales-wide

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) – Biosecurity for Wales

Award: £249,713

The main focus of the project is to prevent the establishment of non-native mammal predators such as rats. Such predators can prey on ground-nesting seabirds at a wide range of seabird sites along the Welsh coastline.

The project will improve and embed biosecurity practices into the day-to-day management of seabird islands and provide training and support for staff, boat operators, harbour masters and volunteers who are involved in biosecurity surveillance checks. The project will also maintain a national biosecurity database.

North Wales

The Bat Conservation Trust – Gobaith Coetir: Meirionydd Oakwoods and Bat Sites SAC Vale of Ffestiniog

Award: £227,603

With all 15 species of bat found in Wales using woodlands for roosting, foraging and commuting, woodlands are excellent indicators of the health of the bat population.

The grant will fund a survey of SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) woodlands in the Meirionnydd Oakwoods and Bat Sites Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in the Vale of Ffestiniog in Gwynedd. The survey will measure the diversity and levels of bat activity there. The project will also encourage public use of woodlands to bridge the gap between local communities and their woodland heritage.

Wild Ground – Newt Networks

Award: £249,576

This project will be operating in the Johnstown, Buckley, Connah’s Quay and St Asaph areas of north-east Wales. Wild Ground will work with Wrexham County Borough Council, Flintshire County Council and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) to improve the condition of a number of designated sites in Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire, with a focus on pond and wetland habitat and amphibian species.

The project will see ponds being created and restored, scrub clearance and footpaths and wildlife corridors being created across nine sites and a series of community events being held during the summers of 2023 and 2024.

The North Wales Wildlife Trust – Preventing Aliens Taking Hold (PATH): Building resilience within the River Dee SAC

Award: £249,999

This project will cover the River Dee between Bala and Llangollen. By 2025, the project aims to have reduced the number of invasive plants along a 30km stretch of riverbank in this Special Area of Conservation and improve its overall condition. To do this, staff and volunteers from the local community will carry out surveys to get a full understanding of how widespread non-native plants are in the area and increase awareness of the natural heritage of the River Dee SAC.

The North Wales Wildlife Trust – Limestone Grassland Restoration

Award: £249,999

This project aims to restore natural habitats in north Wales and control the spread of cotoneaster plants, which can pose a threat to native vegetation. It covers five protected sites:

- the Great Orme in Llanduno
- Halkyn Common and Holywell grasslands
- the Llandulas Limestone and Gwrych Castle woods
- Moel Hiraddug and Bryn Gop
- Mynydd Marian in Conwy

There will be guided audio walks and signs about the work so that the local communities can engage with and learn about their natural heritage.

The North Wales Wildlife Trust – Living With Beavers in the Dyfi Catchment: Ensuring Positive Coexistence

Award: £249,545

There are already a small number of beavers living wild in the area, but this project intends to re-establish a beaver population as a welcome and valued addition to the Dyfi catchment. The aim is that the beavers' ecosystem engineering skills are able to restore, enhance and maintain the heritage of the area.

It will work to ensure the benefits of beavers are enjoyed and encouraged whilst negative impacts are avoided or minimised through monitoring and beaver impact management. The release of beavers is subject to receipt of a licence from Natural Resources Wales.

The Marine Conservation Society – Hiraeth yn y Môr (HYYM): Advancing Ocean Literacy in North East Wales through marine citizenship

Award: £244,000

This project will connect people to our oceans through community engagement and protected site management. It will inspire local communities to care about the oceans and empower them to act to protect it. Activities like beach cleans and litter surveys will contribute to the sustainable management of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA and the wider marine environment and provide evidence to inform practical conservation action and drive legislative change for marine environments in Wales.

The Zoological Society of London and Bangor University – Restoring Wild Oysters to Conwy Bay

Award: £249,919

The two year project will introduce European native oyster at the Liverpool Bay SPA & Menai Strait and Conwy Bay SAC protected sites. By doing so it aims to restore European native oyster habitat and the biodiverse community of associated organisms and local cultural heritage and contribute to ocean recovery. Re-creating this lost habitat will provide opportunities for local communities – schools, universities and residents, to connect with their coastal heritage through education and citizen science.

Coetir Anian – Nature Connections in the Llyfnant, Melindwr and Einion catchments

Award: £249,995

Based in Glaspwll outside Machynlleth, the nature restoration project aims to restore habitats and improve connectivity between four sites in the upper catchments of the Llyfnant, Melindwr and Einion tributaries of the Dyfi.

Increased tree cover at Bwlch Corog and the neighbouring Pemprys will improve habitat connectivity between Cwm Einion woodland SAC and Cwm Llyfnant woodland SSSI. Restoration of degraded peatland will also restore upland heathland and blanket bog to link two SSSIs designated for these habitats: Pencreigiau'r Llan and Pen Carreg Gopa a Moel Hyrddod.

Mid-Wales

Aberaeron Conservation Ltd – Wild Service Trees in Wales

Award: £87,600

A project to protect, enhance and enable the expansion of the Coed Allt Craig Arth woodland SSSI near Aberaeron. Running for two years, the project’s overall aim is to make the woodland more resilient to climate change and improve its Favourable Conservation Status so that it is thriving and continues to thrive into the future. Once completed, the project will have created a unique space for people and wildlife and biodiversity enhancement that will conserve and restore habitats and species unique to Ceredigion.

West Wales

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust – Connecting the Carmarthenshire Coast

Award: £222,272

Carmarthenshire is a priority landscape for rare bumblebees and this project has been developed to help invertebrate species to travel between the Carmarthenshire coast's precious network of protected sites. The work will involve carrying out comprehensive surveys to provide an accurate picture of populations and habitat for target bumblebee species.

To maximise the project's impact for nature, it will also work with other organisations to survey threatened insect species, like solitary bees, butterflies and beetles. A project officer will be employed to carry out bumblebee surveys on priority sites.

Dr Beynon's Bug Farm – Connected Commons & The Centre for Nature Recovery

Award: £211,624

This project is aiming to plug the gaps in the fragmented habitat corridor across the St Davids Peninsula to strengthen the resilience of its network of protected land. Connecting habitats such as roosting and nesting sites will help species such as the rare greater horseshoe bat and aid nature's recovery and the project will work with Pembrokeshire County Council to trial the use of amphibian ladders in road gulley drains. The development of The Bug Farm Nature Recovery Centre will actively encourage community engagement with the project.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority – Pwyth mewn pryd/Stitch in time: Non-native, invasive species

Award: £170,193

This project aims to remove and control the spread of non-native invasive species. It will target the Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed in rivers in the national park. Six areas will be targeted:

- Castlemartin Corse SSSI
- the Milford Haven Waterway SSSI
- the Aberarth Carreg Wylan SSSI
- the Preseli SAC and Cleddau Rivers SAC
- the Preseli SAC and North Pembrokeshire Woodlands SAC
- the North West Pembrokeshire Commons SAC and St. Davids SAC

A project coordinator will be employed to lead and coordinate volunteers, community groups, contractors, staff and landowners.

South Wales

Gwent Wildlife Trust Ltd – Connecting Nature, Connecting Communities

Award: £248,834

This project will focus on 11 nature reserves which support habitats including ancient woodland, traditional hay meadows and other species. The area includes nine SSSIs, one SAC, one Special Protection Area (SPA) and two Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) that cover over 400 hectares.

The project will enhance the ecological condition of the protected sites network across Gwent. These sites are all vital to ensure that species thrive and to support an ecologically resilient landscape. The project will also enable more communities to discover and support the nature on their doorstep.

Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales Limited – Healthy, Resilient Grasslands

Award: £249,565

Semi-natural grasslands are a threatened habitat mostly found within the farmed countryside and are usually grazed by livestock and associated with very low usage of man-made fertilisers. This project is seeking to reverse the loss of these habitats through better management and awareness of their importance. It will work across 11 protected sites so that grazing can be introduced. The project will create a better network of high-quality grasslands and support a range of species that live in grasslands.

The Trustees of Merthyr Mawr Estate – Merthyr Mawr Dunes: Reconnecting Nature

Award: £120,731

Near Bridgend, the dunes are a National Nature Reserve and home to some of Wales' rarest plants and bird species. This project will link the whole estate to the nature reserve and remove non-native species to encourage bare sand habitats that are crucial to the survival of plants including petalwort which is important features of the SAC. It will also protect the presence of birds such as the curlew sandpiper, the avocet and purple sandpiper.

The South East Wales Rivers Trust – Restoration, Protection and Enhancement of the Ely Valley SSSI (RePrEEV)

Award: £248,314

Based in the Ely Valley, the project will conserve the stretch of river between St Fagans and Miskin, which is an SSSI and called 'the best station in Wales for Aconitum anglicum (Monkshood)'. The site is also a vital corridor for other protected species including the European otter, the water vole, the river lamprey, sea lamprey and Atlantic salmon. However, the existence of the species and resilience of the site are threatened by issues such as over-grazing by cattle, loss of tree-cover and shading and the impacts of invasive species.