



Conservation Report

2024 - 2025

MENTER AR GYFER
CADWRAETH NATUR CYMRU



INITIATIVE FOR NATURE
CONSERVATION CYMRU

Conservation Report 2024 / 2025

Reporting Period: April 2024 – March 2025

Dear Supporter

I became a Trustee of INCC in early 2024 and was honoured to become its Chairman in early 2025. I believe that Wales needs an independent nature conservation organisation like INCC, an organisation that can speak out and challenge decision makers to do more for wildlife and the environment. I am proud of the steps taken toward holding Welsh Government and NRW to account during the reporting period, particularly our growing ambition to create a nature conservation investigations unit for Wales. Our new business plan breaks down the five core elements of INCC's work over the coming years and these are, Nature Investigations, Species Recovery, Habitat Restoration, Natur Cymru and supporting Early Career Conservationists. It is great to see so much progress being made already for each of the five elements and I am looking forward to INCC delivering more over the coming months and years. Not accepting government or statutory funding means that our successes have only been made possible by you - our generous supporters, donors and volunteers. Every hour of time you give and every pound you raise contributes towards a Wales with more wildlife in more places.

Thank you.

Daniel Jenkins-Jones
Chair of Trustees

Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru (INCC)

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Who We Are and What We Stand For

INCC's Vision

A Wales with more wildlife in more places, created by a society that intrinsically values the natural world.





INCC's Mission

To be the unconstrained voice that Welsh wildlife needs, speaking out and putting the needs of wildlife first.

Governance

-  **Chairman:** Daniel Jenkins-Jones
-  **Treasurer:** Carys Solman
-  **Secretary:** Lyndsey Maiden
-  **Trustee:** Dr Mike Shewring
-  **Trustee:** Julian Jones
-  **Trustee:** Dr Jim Vafidis
-  **Trustee:** Dr Rob Thomas

Staff



-  **Chief Executive:**
Robert Jones Parry
-  **Natur Cymru Editor**
Dr Lizzie Wilberforce
-  **Species Officer:**
Vaughn Matthews
-  **Conservation Officer:**
Eliza Chapman
-  **Conservation Officer:**
Richard Bluck

-  **Community Wildlife Officer:**
Gráinne Connolly

Position in the Sector


INCC was founded in 2018 in response to the growing need for an independent nature conservation organisation able to speak out and challenge environmental decision makers to do more for wildlife.

Activities

-  Species & habitat conservation
-  Research, surveys & monitoring
-  Habitat restoration & creation
-  Landowner advisory & support
-  Engagement & education
-  Advocacy, litigation & campaigns

Objectives

The objectives of INCC, as outlined in our governing document are:

-  To promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection, and improvement of the natural environment of Wales in such ways as the trustees think fit and including by advocacy, carrying out research and publishing the useful results

thereof, and promoting biodiversity.

- 🌿 To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment of Wales by providing information and through raising awareness.

Business Plan 2025 - 2030

This business plan is the second strategic document for INCC, following on from its first Strategic Plan, which ran from 2019 to 2023.

During its first seven years, INCC has built its staff base to five part-time roles, delivered a number of successful legal challenges in defence of our natural environment, launched its journal of note *Natur Cymru*, and managed several successful significant practical conservation projects including the high-profile reintroduction of Marsh Fritillary butterflies *Euphydryas aurinia* to Llantrisant. It has built its income and cashflow into a resilient model that sustains the projects it is currently running, with *Natur*

Cymru covering its own costs and supporting INCC's wider charitable work.

This business plan covers our priorities for the coming five years. Our conservation priorities will be:

- Delivering and demonstrating best practice land management
- Species recovery
- Developing the reach and impact of *Natur Cymru*
- Developing a Nature Investigations Unit
- Supporting early career conservationists

We also have organisational development priorities which are:

- Increase INCC's donor base and total annual donation value
- Review Board roles, training and succession planning
- Increase INCC's unrestricted reserves
- To grow INCC's public profile

Nature Investigations

Speaking out for wildlife through campaigning and challenging environmental decision makers is at the core of INCC's work.

To ensure that our campaigning has as much impact as possible we work closely with the environmental law firm Leigh Day. Legal challenges are becoming an increasingly necessary tool in the fight for a Wales with more wildlife.

Stop the War on Nature

Over the next three years we want to pioneer a fundamental shift in the nature conservation sector that will see greater emphasis being placed on holding environmental decision makers to account.

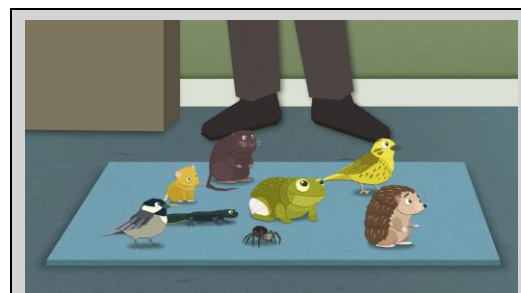
We want to achieve this by exposing and challenging attitudes, inaction, and decision making, where it has the potential to impact wildlife and nature conservation in Wales.

We are currently fundraising to establish a Nature Investigations Unit for Wales. The unit will comprise experienced journalists, campaigners, researchers and

communicators who will help uncover, expose and challenge the issues affecting nature recovery in Wales, along with proposing appropriate solutions.

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of our wonderful supporters and grant giving trusts and foundations over the 2024-25 financial year, we are at the stage where we hope to launch the investigations unit later in 2025.

As part of fundraising efforts for the Nature Investigations Unit, INCC teamed up with Cardiff-based animation studio Cloth Cat to produce a hard-hitting animation to demonstrate to the wider public the issues wildlife faces when it comes to government inaction.



Stop the War on Nature animation.
INCC /Cloth Cat.

You can see the full animation at:
<https://bit.ly/StopTheWarOnNature>

No More Wildfires

The spring of 2025 saw another extreme period of wildfires in Wales. The wildfires are now an annual event that causes the loss of habitat and wildlife on a vast scale.



Burnt reptiles found on a heathland after a recent fire. Photo courtesy of Amphibian and Reptile Trust.

This year INCC has raised awareness of the impact of grassland fires on wildlife and has campaigned to get 'controlled burns' better regulated by the Welsh Government. This led to a lot of media coverage over the course of spring 2025, for example:

<https://bit.ly/WildfiresWales>



Water Vole burrow entrance in Greater Tussock Sedge exposed by an out-of-control fire.

Recently, INCC have applied to the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor to review the legislation around issuing controlled burn permits in Wales. We await the response from Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

Impacts of Conifer Regeneration

There are lots of threats facing our native wildlife and habitats in Wales. Most are well known and documented. However, the threat of conifer regeneration on our open grassland, heathland and woodland habitats is less publicised.



Craig y Llyn SSSI, designated for its upland plant and scree communities which are now under threat by invading conifer trees.

Conifer regeneration is the name given to the growth of conifer trees away from their planted forest coupes. Seeds from commercial conifer trees are deposited away from their forest coupes and often find their way to open habitats such as acid grassland, bogs, and heathlands.

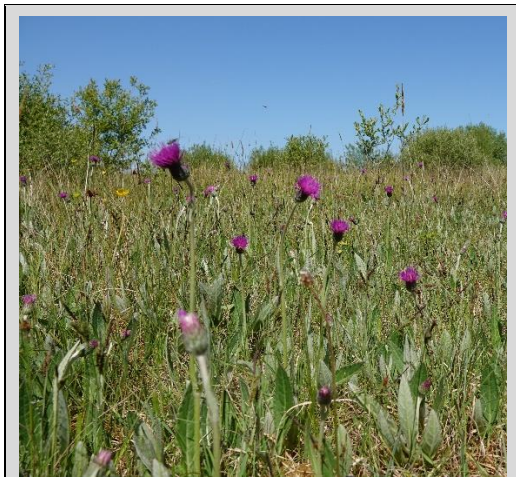
These habitats often lie adjacent to forestry plantations and provide important habitats for a number of species. Once conifer seedlings are allowed to grow, they can quickly outcompete and shade out our native flora, reducing the overall biodiversity value of the area. As these conifer trees are now outside of designated coupes, they are not felled, and are allowed to destroy

open habitats and in time set seed themselves to exacerbate the problem. Over the coming months and years, INCC aims to identify the true extent of the problem of conifer regeneration in Wales so that it can prepare appropriate legal action to deal with the problem.

SSSI Grassland Mismanagement

After a two-year battle, INCC has been able to force Wales' statutory environmental body NRW to use their own legal powers to safeguard one of South Wales' most important grassland habitats. The Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which cannot be named for legal reasons, was once described as one of the most significant wildlife sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It had an amazing array of rare habitats, including marshy grassland, species-rich neutral grassland and wet heath which used to cover 25 hectares of the site. These habitats were home to some of our rarest species, including the beautiful Marsh Fritillary, a butterfly which is endangered in Europe. This

butterfly's population in the area was once thought to be one of the most important remaining in Wales.



Marshy grassland habitat with
Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*

However, since the site was designated as a SSSI some 18 years ago, it has been left unmanaged, resulting in the loss of important grassland habitat, and with it the rare and specialist wildlife that relied upon it. It is believed that the Marsh Fritillary butterfly became extinct at the site around 2014.

In a letter to INCC, dated 25th October 2022, NRW acknowledge that the site in question is not in suitable condition and requires appropriate habitat management works. Furthermore, NRW also

acknowledged that they had yet to enter into a management agreement with the landowner which would have established a regime of suitable habitat management works to be undertaken.

Due to the pressure exerted on NRW by INCC, and our solicitors Leigh Day, formal action has finally been instigated by NRW, using their own statutory powers to restore the species-rich grassland habitat within the site. According to NRW in their letter to INCC (25th October 2022), a key reason for taking action to ensure suitable management was INCC's recent Marsh Fritillary butterfly reintroduction.

"We acknowledge, that given the recent re-introduction of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly at Llantrisant Common SSSI by INCC, the matter of ensuring that there is as much suitable habitat in the wider landscape available for this species is more important than ever"

NRW Spokesperson

Species Recovery

INCC believes that restoring species (and populations of species) to the landscape is an important element of nature conservation action in Wales. Restoring habitats is essential, but if we are to reverse declines in biodiversity, then we believe that more proactive and interventional conservation approaches are now required. Working at the landscape scale has always been an important aspect of how INCC delivers its practical nature conservation activities. We do this by identifying species that can act as flagships for their landscape and provide a means of encouraging local communities to be at the heart of conservation action.

Flagship species are those species that are in desperate need of intervention, or species that symbolise a particular habitat. This approach has allowed us to work in a variety of habitats for a variety of species, and it also enables us to better communicate complex conservation messages and actions to local communities.

Our Marsh Fritillary population restoration project is perhaps the best example of how we do this.

Marsh Fritillary Population Reinforcement

The Marsh Fritillary has undergone widespread declines across much of its natural range, including the UK. The species is now one of the most threatened butterflies in Europe. Wales remains a relative stronghold for the Marsh Fritillary globally, but even here, population declines and local extinctions continue to occur.



Photo: Vaughn Matthews

Marsh Fritillary basking at Llantrisant Common May 2024.

Our Marsh Fritillary reinforcement project has now been running for four years, having first reared caterpillars in captivity back in 2021.

The project is reinforcing a dwindling and vulnerable population of the butterfly in a

landscape in South Wales, around the towns of Llantrisant and Tonyrefail, bringing them back so that they can repopulate Llantrisant Common and the rest of the landscape.

Caterpillars had once again been collected from the wild in Spring 2024. They were taken to our rearing pens to develop through to adulthood, and the first butterfly was seen in the pens on the 20th of May 2024.

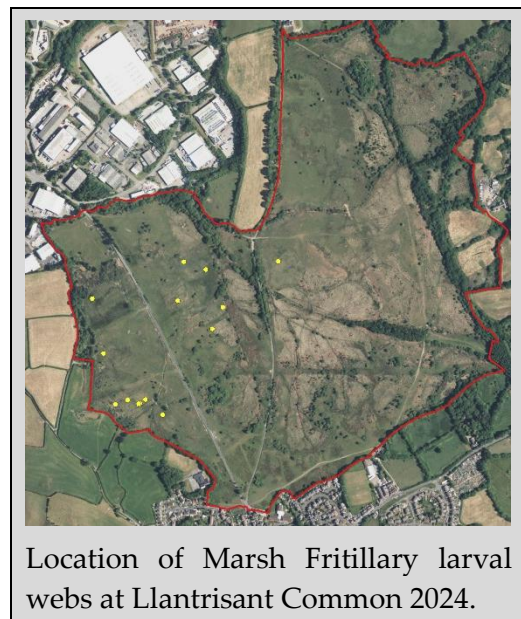


During the late spring and summer of 2024, we continued to monitor the Marsh Fritillaries in the rearing pens and on the Common, where they were again seen flying over much of the site, though poor weather meant that the numbers were lower than in previous years.

There were no further releases onto the Common in 2024 as we wanted to increase the numbers in the rearing pens with another round of breeding in 2025, looking to release larvae in late summer that year.

Breeding Success

Larval web counts were again carried out in August and September to assess the distribution and numbers on the Common. There were fewer webs than in previous years, probably due to poor early summer weather which would likely have hampered the butterfly's breeding success.



The larval webs at the common were distributed quite widely but concentrated in the land to the west, where most of the butterflies had been seen a few months earlier.

The ongoing success of the breeding population of Marsh Fritillary at Llantrisant Common is really positive news, and a testament to all the work and support from volunteers, funders, partners and the local community.

In early 2025 we visited the Common regularly to see how the caterpillars had fared over the winter. The weather had been particularly wet, so we were relieved to see larvae out basking in a few locations across the site.



Marsh Fritillary larvae at Llantrisant Common in February 2025.

Habitat Restoration

In 2024 an extensive habitat management project was undertaken on Llantrisant Common, in order to restore some of the poorer habitat on site. Areas were carefully selected taking into consideration the location of Marsh Fritillary larval webs. The cutting was concentrated on areas of rank Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and some large monoculture patches of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

The cutting was carried out by Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and should allow more suitable and diverse habitat to develop, with flowering plants including Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* (the Marsh Fritillary larval food plant) more likely to flourish. We will be returning to these sites in 2025 to assess how well the vegetation is recovering and to see if Scabious and then Marsh Fritillaries colonise the cut areas.

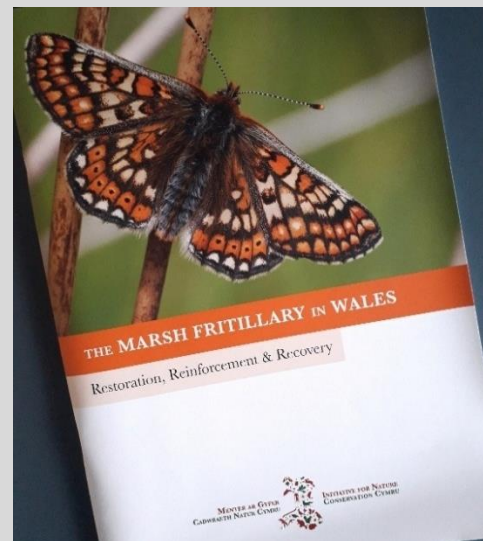


An aerial view of some of the cut areas of the Common, December 2024.

Publication

One of INCC's aims for the Marsh Fritillary project was to produce a publication documenting the project from beginning to end, including Marsh Fritillary ecology, habitat management, and the captive rearing process.

This was published in 2024 with physical copies for sale, as well as digital versions available on INCC's website. The document was designed to allow others to be able to use it to plan their own population reinforcement projects of this kind, by highlighting not only what went well, but also what didn't, so that others could learn from our experiences.



Front cover of INCC's Marsh Fritillary book.

Water Vole Reintroduction River Thaw

In May 2024, INCC (working with local landowners and partner organisations) reintroduced over 100 Water Voles *Arvicola amphibius* to the River Thaw in the Vale of Glamorgan. The release of Water Voles followed several years of planning, habitat restoration, and American Mink *Neovison vison* control by the partnership.

Water Voles were recorded in the Thaw valley until 2004, before they became extinct. A few records were

made after this date, but none could be verified. The river itself would have once been full of Water Voles, from its source near the village of Llansanor to its mouth at Aberthaw in the Bristol Channel.



Water Vole release pens ready to be positioned along the River Thaw in suitable habitat.

Although scrub encroachment and intensive agriculture have taken its toll on the riparian habitat of the River Thaw, it is thought that the main reason for the Water Voles extinction twenty years ago was the presence of American Mink. The project will continue with habitat restoration and Mink control across the Thaw Valley and further reintroductions are planned in the future.



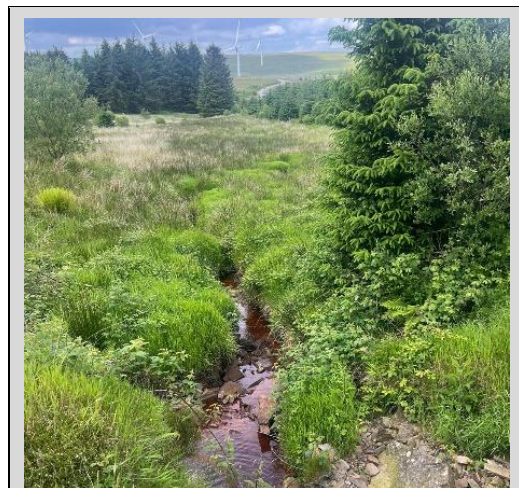
Water Vole leaving its release pen for the first time to venture along the banks of the River Thaw.

Marsh Fritillary Reintroduction in North Pembrokeshire

INCC are working with Dr Beynon's Bug Farm on an ambitious project to reintroduce the Marsh Fritillary butterfly to North Pembrokeshire. The area has many marshy grassland habitats suitable to support the butterfly and it is thought that the species became extinct here around 10 – 15 years ago.

Saving our Upland Water Voles

In 2024, INCC began its ambitious Upland Water Vole Project, thanks to funding from the Pen Y Cymoedd Community Vision Fund. The project is located in the uplands of the Cynon, Rhondda, Neath and Afan valleys, some of the last refuges for this rare and wonderful species in Wales. The landscape is one of the last known locations for extant Water Vole populations in the whole of Glamorgan.



Typical upland Water Vole habitat in the Pen y Cymoedd area.



The core area and suitable habitat for the Marsh Fritillary reintroduction in North Pembrokeshire (J. Hudson).

Since the butterfly's extinction, lots of habitat restoration and creation has taken place, linking up patches of good and suitable marshy grasslands.

INCC has been able to write a license for the project and caterpillar collection from the wild will take place in March 2026. Before then, there is still lots of work to do including the growing of Devil's-bit Scabious and monitoring potential donor sites, which will take place in the summer of 2025.

These upland landscapes are becoming increasingly important if we are to save Water Voles in Wales,

but they also face a huge number of different pressures, from forestry and conifer regeneration, to farming, climate change, renewable energy and American Mink.

In the late spring we were able to employ two Conservation Officers to work on the project, Eliza Chapman and Richard Bluck.



Eliza taking water samples.

The majority of 2024 involved extensive surveys of the project area, looking for Water Vole's distinctive field signs, and beginning to map their distribution across this huge area. We have already discovered over 20 new colonies, with the discovery of American Mink at a couple of sites being the only negative.



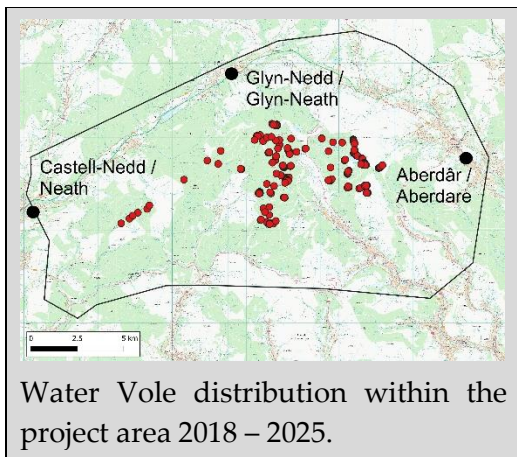
Richard surveying along an upland stream.

Research and Genetics

We will continue monitoring these populations, as well as identifying new ones, throughout 2025. We will also be carrying out genetic work in conjunction with Aberystwyth University to assess how well connected the colonies are, and therefore how vulnerable they are.

We are also working with Cardiff University on other methods of assessing how far individual Water Voles will move across the landscape. One method that is being trialled is using edible glitter in their food. The glitter is harmless to Water

Voles but is visible in their droppings, enabling us to identify individual territories.

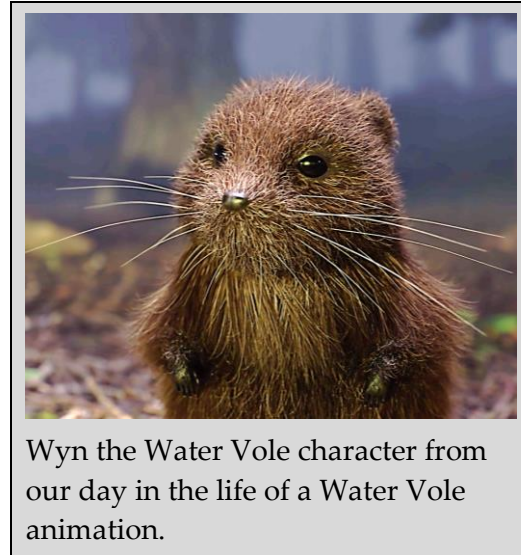


Community Engagement

Community engagement is an important part of the project and outside of the breeding season efforts focused on public events and training of volunteers.

The habitat and landscape are inhospitable, making it difficult to directly show local people their amazing landscape and the wildlife it supports. To overcome this, we have teamed up with the animation studio Cloth Cat Animation to create a new a new animation to highlight Water Voles and their plight.

<https://bit.ly/INCCWaterVole>



Cefn Garthenor Species Survey

Since early 2021, INCC has been working closely with a Ceredigion landowner to help transform an 88 hectare sheep farm into a haven for wildlife. A baseline habitat survey of Cefn Garthenor was initially undertaken to help inform future habitat creation and restoration plans.

Following on from the habitat mapping, a series of ecological surveys are ongoing at Cefn Garthenor. These surveys will continue to help target restoration goals as well as help establish a long-

term vision for the site, and how that vision can be achieved.



Green Tiger Beetle *Cicindela campestris*
new to Cefn Garthenor 25/05/24

In the period April 2024 to March 2025 surveys have been carried out for Marsh Fritillary, birds, amphibians, reptiles and moths, with cameras also put out across the site to look for nocturnal species.

As of spring 2025, 62 species of birds have been recorded at Cefn Garthenor. The different habitats and outbuildings on the site support a variety of species such as Pied Flycatchers *Ficedula hypoleuca*, Barn Owls *Tyto alba*, Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata* and Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*. The avian highlight of

the last year was the discovery of a pair of Willow Tits *Poecile montanus* in one of the willow carr areas. This is one of Wales's rarest breeding birds and we will be looking for signs of nesting in 2025 and 2026.



Spotted Flycatcher outside nest site
May 2024

One of the significant species on site is Marsh Fritillary with surveys confirming their continued presence and breeding success.



Marsh Fritillary caterpillars recently emerged from hibernation March 2025

One of the main developments at Cefn Garthenor has been the creation of an extensive enclosure in preparation for the arrival of a pair of Beavers *Castor fiber*. The licencing process for this has been long but the Beavers are now in their new home and already getting to work by creating dams and ditches.



Inside the Beaver enclosure.

Working on such an ambitious conservation project gives INCC the opportunity to develop our understanding of landscape scale

habitat restoration as well as help us better inform similar projects in future.

Amman Valley Species Recovery

INCC has been working closely with landowners and communities in the Amman Valley, Carmarthenshire since 2018. Our focus has been on restoring species and habitats in the landscape, but importantly, also ensuring that local communities are at the heart of making it happen.

Over recent years INCC has been able to undertake a number of conservation initiatives, ranging from ecological monitoring to habitat creation and restoration. We are now working with numerous landowners in the valley as well as local residents, communities, and businesses.

Key to much many of our species restoration activities in the Amman Valley is our wildlife garden and polytunnel. As well as supporting meadow, scrub and pond habitats the wildlife garden and polytunnel

play a crucial role in other areas of INCC's work. Many of the Devil's-bit Scabious plants needed for rearing Marsh Fritillaries and habitat restoration projects are grown in the polytunnel. A variety of other native species are also being grown, many of these will go to improve the biodiversity value of local sites.



Wildlife garden and polytunnel, April 2024, with volunteers plug planting meadow species.

One special plant that we have been growing in 2024 is Small-flowered Catchfly *Silene gallica*. This is a very rare plant, normally found in species-rich plant communities in the margins of arable fields sown with spring crops. These plants, and their seeds, are destined for the farmland habitat restoration projects in Pembrokeshire and the Vale of Glamorgan.



Small-flowered Catchfly showing the sticky hairs that give it its name.

The wildlife garden is managed with support of local volunteers who help with running events and habitat creation projects, and ensure essential activities such as watering, sowing, potting and planting are all undertaken when they are needed. INCC would not be able to provide this community resource if it wasn't for the dedication and enthusiasm of our volunteers.



Jan (left) showing local residents around the polytunnel and some of the species we are growing.

Community Conservation

As well as running volunteer work parties, wildlife surveys and guided walks, our community engagement work also includes monthly wildlife newsletters. The newsletters are a way of informing people of the wildlife to look out for in the valley, as well as tips and advice on encouraging more wildlife to the garden. In the summer of 2024, we were also fortunate to have Gráinne, our Community Wildlife Officer, working at the wildlife garden and with the wider community. Gráinne and volunteers have planted more native wildflowers in the garden, meaning the meadow areas are looking fantastic.

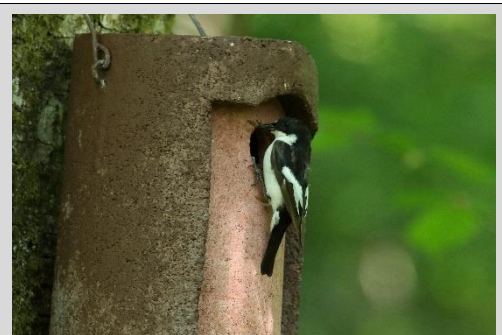


Grainne (left) with volunteers after a hard day's work down at the wildlife garden.

The garden is also used as a base for running events and activities for wildlife and the local community, including a well-attended spring walk in 2024.

Pied Flycatcher Nest Box Monitoring Scheme

One of INCC's flagship species for the Amman Valley is the Pied Flycatcher.



Male Pied Flycatcher on a nest box in the Amman Valley.

Work began to help the species in 2019 when volunteers helped make and install 140 nest boxes. A further 500 boxes were installed in 2021 and 2022. Prior to INCC's involvement in the Amman Valley, no records of Pied Flycatcher had been made, and their distribution therefore was unknown. In 2024 at least 25 nest boxes were used by Pied Flycatchers,

with another five almost certainly occupied by the species.

There is still suitable woodland habitat for Pied Flycatcher in the Amman Valley. Efforts will continue to work with woodland owners to assess habitat suitability and where appropriate install more nest boxes.

The Pied Flycatcher population across the UK has been declining for many years. Providing suitable and safe nest sites in the valley for when they return home from Africa to breed is just one small but important conservation measure that we can do to help.

In 2025 we are planning on working with local bird ringing groups to come and ring newly hatched chicks. Subsequent monitoring will then allow us to identify if the same individuals are returning to the valley each year. In 2024 we sadly found a dead Pied Flycatcher in one of the boxes, a ring on its leg showed that it had been hatched at Cwm Clydach near Swansea, two years earlier.

House Martin Nest Cup Scheme

House Martins *Delichon urbicum* were once common in the Amman Valley, as they were across much of Wales. However, evidence shows that their population has declined dramatically in recent years. There are many factors causing the decline but one of the major causes is the lack of available nest sites due to the changes in the methods and materials used in building construction.



House Martins gathering mud to make their nests.

In 2024, funding from the Mynydd y Betws Community Fund, along with funds from the Carmarthenshire Nature Partnership, have enabled INCC to install over 200 artificial nest cups across various properties in the valley, as well as raise

awareness of the bird and its conservation status through the local communities.



New House Martin nest cups installed at Ammanford Police Station in 2024.

Thanks to the people who have kindly allowed the installation of these on their buildings, in particular the rugby club in Garnant, and the Police Station in Ammanford. We'll be keeping an eye on these in the next few years to see how many House Martins take up residence.

Barn Owl Monitoring

With its marshy grassland, heathland and meadows, the Amman Valley is ideal habitat for predatory bird species such as Barn Owl.

Over the past three years we have been monitoring twelve Barn Owl nest boxes in the valley with the help

and support of several landowners and volunteers Cedwyn and Dafydd.



Dafydd and Cedwyn are crucial to the Barn Owl monitoring in the Amman Valley and elsewhere in South Wales.

In 2024, we had three occupied nests and a total of seven chicks ringed. In addition, we had several boxes that had been inspected by Barn Owls over the previous winter.

With the support of people like Cedwyn and Dafydd we can monitor the Amman Valley Barn Owl population and better direct future conservation action.

Land Management & Habitat Restoration

INCC believes that land management and habitat restoration are key to reversing the decline in biodiversity that Wales has witnessed over the past few decades.

Additionally, managing land increases INCC's knowledge and understanding of the issues at the heart of nature recovery in Wales, and lends more authority to our voice when advocating for wider land use change. As well as managing our Llwyndewi Farm Nature Reserve (more details later in this report), we are actively involved in advising three large landowners in Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Old Wallace Farm

Old Wallace Farm is a mixed farm in the Vale of Glamorgan. Since 2023 INCC has worked with the owner and tenant farmer to improve the site for wildlife, whilst ensuring that the farm remains financially viable. Actions since our involvement have included selective planting of native trees, and the establishment of 6m wide arable margins, full of

wildflowers. These provide food for seed-eating birds such as Yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella* and cover for Brown Hares *Lepus europaeus* and nesting Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* which all occur here.



Arable margins at the farm.

There is more work scheduled at the farm and we are looking forward to working with the tenant farmer to create meadows, scrapes and ponds and other habitats over the next few years.

Llwyngoras

INCC has been working closely with a landowner in Pembrokeshire to help them increase the biodiversity value of their farm. Set within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Llwyngoras covers approximately 39.2 hectares and was, until relatively recently, a mixed pasture

and arable farm comprising agriculturally improved pasture and silage/haylage fields, bordered by dense hedgerows and wooded valleys.



Hereford cattle at Llwyngoras in 2024.

INCC carried out an initial habitat assessment in the summer of 2024, subsequently producing a report including suggestions of ways to enhance its ecological value.

In 2024, INCC staff, along with students from Bridgend College, sowed locally sourced, native wildflower seeds in two of the more species-poor meadows to establish more wildflowers.



Students spreading locally sourced wildflower seeds.

Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* boxes have also been placed throughout the woodland, and breeding Dormouse was confirmed in the autumn of 2024. Future plans for the farm involve the creation and enhancement of Dormouse habitat to better link the hedgerow and woodland habitat.



Dormouse found at Llwyngoras in nest box, October 2024. The dormice are handled by a licensed volunteer.

Llwyndewi Nature Reserve

Protecting and managing land for nature is essential if we are to reverse the decline in biodiversity.

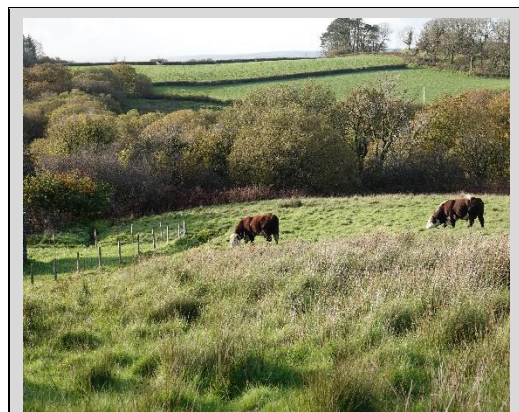
Following two years of collaborating with the Welsh mineral water company, Brecon Carreg, in 2024 INCC signed a long-term lease granting us management of around 65 hectares of their land. The company wanted to use their land to deliver more for biodiversity and the reserve, known as Llwyndewi after the farm that used to manage this land, is now officially INCC's first nature reserve!

The land is a wonderful mosaic of different upland habitats, from marshy grasslands and meadows to Oak woodland and dense Bracken.



Upland landscape at Llwyndewi.

Previous surveys had given us an idea of some of the species and habitats present and our priorities for management. One of the most important, and neglected, habitats on the reserve is a large area of marshy grassland. The floral diversity was relatively low however, so we have installed a new fence around the area that has allowed us to bring in some native breed cattle. These cows are well-suited to these harsh conditions, and their grazing will hopefully start to rapidly improve the sward.



Native Herefordshire Cattle grazing the pastures at Llwyndewi.

We have already found some fantastic wildlife on the reserve including Pied Flycatchers in nest boxes we put up in 2023, Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Glow Worms *Lampyris noctiluca*, String-of-Sausage

Lichen *Usnea articulata* and Lunar Hornet Moths *Sesia bembeciformis* to name a few. However, the highlight so far has been finding nesting Willow Tits. As a result, with help from students from Bridgend College, we have carried out some habitat management for them: creating wet pools and deadwood, as well as installing specialist nestboxes.

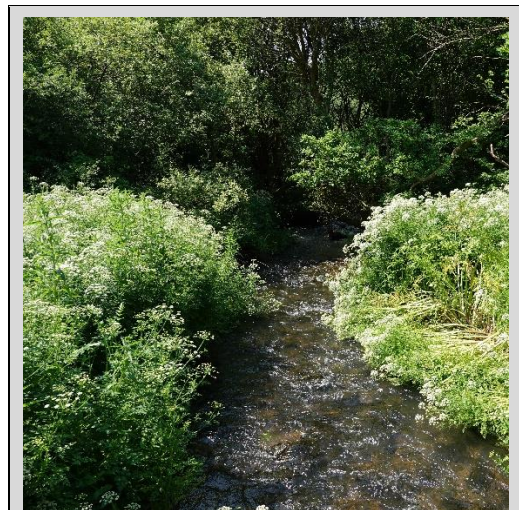


Willow Tit. Now incredibly rare in Wales and the most threatened resident bird species. Photo: Jeff Slocombe.

The site is already host to a wonderful array of habitats and species, but it also has a huge amount of potential to be even better.

White-clawed Crayfish

Ever since we first saw Llwyndewi Nature Reserve we have thought that it would make a great location for an ark site for White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*. An ark site is a location (pond, lakes or river) that is free of Crayfish Plague *Aphanomyces astaci* and is defendable from future arrival of the infection (a water mould).



Afon Llwchwr through Llwyndewi Nature Reserve.

Before a reintroduction can be undertaken several assessments need to be undertaken.

We intend to carry out this work throughout 2025 to hopefully start

the process of introducing our native crayfish to this save haven.



Juvenile White-clawed Crayfish.

Conservation Contracts

INCC is fortunate to have a small team of staff who have a variety of skills and experience in all aspects of nature conservation. These skills are used to deliver conservation contracts that range from ecological surveys and monitoring to habitat assessments and management plans. The conservation contracts are an important way for INCC to generate income as well as help partner

organisations deliver on their objectives.

RSPB Hedgerow Survey

In early 2024 INCC were commissioned to undertake surveys of the hedgerows on the Royal Society for the Protection of Bird's (RSPB) land in the Gwenffrwd and Dinas areas of Carmarthenshire, including land subject to agricultural tenancies.

Hedgerow condition was assessed using the method from the People's Trust for Endangered Species' Great British Hedgerow Survey. In addition, opportunities for management interventions were identified, from more sympathetic management of existing hedgerows to the creation of new hedges or tree planting.



Dense hedgerow on tenanted RSPB land.

In addition, old tithe maps of the area were also consulted in order to identify changes over time and to identify opportunities for the creation of new hedgerows.

RSPB Habitat Survey

INCC were also contracted by RSPB in 2024 to undertake a Phase I survey of their Cwm Clydach reserve, primarily a woodland nature reserve, situated approximately 19km northeast of Swansea, in a steep-sided valley that has had a long history of mining and coal extraction. It is known for its Pied Flycatchers and other summer migrant bird interest.

In addition to the Phase 1 survey, the aim was to gather additional information to support future management decision making. This might include the presence of invasive non-native species (INNS), past management activity, and speaking to the reserve's long-standing volunteers about site management.



Open Oak woodland habitat within Cwm Clydach nature reserve.

Surveys were carried out by INCC staff throughout the summer of 2024, which enabled us to produce a Phase I habitat map with key features of note, species lists, and management advice where appropriate. Comparisons with earlier surveys, including old aerial photographs, allowed us to assess how the site has changed, demonstrating how woodland canopy cover has increased over recent decades.

Supporting Early Career Conservationists

A priority for INCC, ever since we established in 2018, has been supporting early career nature conservationists. We have done this through providing various internships, volunteering positions, and training, as well as offering employment to early career conservationists when we can.

To this aim, in 2025 we intend to employ four Bridgend College students for a period of four months (during the summer term). The purpose of these posts is to increase their chances of employment in the sector through direct experience, increased skills, contacts, and training. It is planned that two students will be working at our Llwyndewi Nature Reserve and two students on our Upland Water Vole Project.

Llwyngoras Wood Pasture Creation

In November 2024, INCC and the landowners of Llwyngoras hosted a residential weekend with staff and students from Bridgend College Conservation Volunteers (BCCV).

Despite challenging weather conditions, a huge amount was achieved. The purpose of the weekend was to plant native trees and create individual tree guards in a pasture to start the process of creating a wood pasture.

Wood pasture is now a rare habitat in Wales and the planted trees and guards will allow cattle to graze the pasture whilst enabling the trees to grow unhindered. Once the trees reach a suitable size the guards can be removed.



Bridgend College Conservation Volunteers creating tree guards for the woodland pasture habitat.

The residential weekend at Llwyngoras was the third such event organised by INCC, and it is hoped

that many more can be run in collaboration with BCCV in future.



Left: Eliza (INCC staff and former student at Bridgend College) working alongside Freya (Bridgend College student and recently employed as INCC staff on the upland Water Vole project).

Cefn Garthenor Residential

One of the highlights at Cefn

Natur Cymru

farm, where students and volunteers from BCCV spent time learning about the site as well as carrying out practical habitat management such

as fencing and fence removal alongside species surveys and monitoring.



Invertebrate sampling from the new scrapes at Cefn Garthenor.

These surveys included the continuation of the botanical surveys established in 2023 as well as freshwater invertebrate surveys of the new scrapes.

As well as gaining experience in essential nature conservation skills, the residential field trips are an excellent way for early career conservationists to come together and form lasting bonds and learn other life skills and bush crafts.

Our journal of note *Natur Cymru* has now completed four years of

publication, with edition 71 in winter 2024-25 being our ninth.

Edition 71 was mailed to a total of 653 addresses. The subscription database continues to show slow net growth, and we are incredibly grateful to all our supporters who subscribe and donate, especially against the ongoing backdrop of challenging national finances and the cost of living squeeze.



Cover artwork from editions 70 (summer 2024, artist Dr Rob Thomas) and 71 (winter 24-25, artist Geoff Powell).

We continue to work hard to maintain balance in our content – in terms of habitats, species, and geography with content coming in from many different organisations and individuals in different parts of Wales. We also continue to offer both of our two large features in both languages, with translations

available on our website for both the Welsh language feature (available to subscribers in English on the website) and INCC's leader/feature article (available in Welsh on the website).



This English language post on X about subscribing to Natur Cymru received over 7000 impressions. All scheduled posts are bilingual, or posted in both languages individually (where a character limit applies).

Social media profiles that are specific to *Natur Cymru* (but dual branded to INCC) continue to be an important part of our outreach. During 2024-25 we made two changes to our platform use: we joined Bluesky [@naturcymru.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/naturcymru.bsky.social) and LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a natural fit for Natur Cymru since the material we publish is read by and useful for

professionals in the conservation field, and so the platform is a natural place to promote our content. We will review the success of these various platforms in the coming year before deciding the most effective places and messages for our work in the longer term.

Our thanks to our designer Louise Waring of AC9 Design, and our translator Haf Roberts.

Thank You

To achieve what we do for wildlife and nature conservation in Wales we rely on the kind and generous backing of donors, subscribers, supporters and volunteers. We are very grateful for all those individuals, organisations and foundations that support our work. Thank you.

We would like to especially thank The Waterloo Foundation for their ongoing support of the charity and our work.

Thanks also to the Garfield Weston Foundation, Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund, Oakdale Trust, Pobl Trust, Welsh Ornithological Society and the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) for their generous contributions toward our various species and habitat conservation projects.

INCC would like to especially thank all the volunteers who have helped the charity to deliver nature conservation. We would like to particularly thank:

Jan Slade along with Cwmaman Town Council for all their help and support with our conservation work in the Amman Valley.

Carys Romney, Paul Denning and Ben Williams for their time, enthusiasm and dedication toward the Marsh Fritillary project.

A special thank you to Lyn Evans, Alex Godfrey and students at Bridgend College for their help and support with so many of our projects across Wales.

Mike Alexander and the many anonymous staff at NRW for

speaking out and helping INCC challenge their decision making for wildlife.

All of the contributors to Natur Cymru, many of whom entirely volunteer their time and expertise.

Special thank you also to: Iolo Williams, Gareth Griffith, Andy Davies, Alison Wheeler, Geoff Powell, Louise Waring, and Haf Roberts.

Thank You