

Matt Brown

Assistant Nature Reserve Warden

As soon as I get to Ammanford I can feel the stress falling from me. This is unusual as with previous jobs in other sectors the apprehension generally tends to build as I get closer. For me, working on the Llwyndewi Nature Reserve, part of the Brecon Carreg estate bordering Brecon and Carmarthenshire has felt more like a privilege than a chore.

The work has been varied although the summer has been spent primarily removing the ever-invasive Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) – a crucial task as the reserve contains the source of the Llwchwr river. With the help of steadfast volunteers and hard-working contractors we've managed to make a real impact. With continued monitoring and management over the coming years it should hopefully spell its demise.



Managing the Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) has also vastly occupied our time. Although this species is native, if left unchecked it can dominate wide swathes of land preventing other grasses and herbaceous plants from flourishing. The bracken control has largely been successful due to some innovative techniques brought on by staff and students at Bridgend College - who have close ties with INCC; being a former student myself. This should hopefully lay the groundwork to invite more grasses, forbs and the like to set seed and restore the acid grassland to its former glory.

One of the long-term projects on the reserve has been the potential reintroduction of the White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) to the Llwchwr. Although by modern records it is undocumented in the area it is believed that the habitat would certainly have been conducive to their survival. Presently, we are at the feasibility stage, and this involves carrying out regular DNA checks on the river to ensure there are no diseases in the water which could prevent their continuation.

On a personal level I have really enjoyed my time at the reserve and working with the INCC team and their associated volunteers. I have learnt a great deal about what it takes to manage a nature reserve and will undoubtedly take this experience with me on the next stage of my journey. My contract for the summer is now over, and I will be attending the University of South Wales to complete my BSc in Natural History in September. I have always enjoyed the diversity of roles within the conservation sector and although I am gearing myself up to pursue a career as a warden / ranger, I would dearly love to continue in academia and get the chance to apply my research in the field. A huge thank you to Rob, Vaughn and Lizzie for the amazing opportunity – I'm looking forward to seeing you down the line in whatever capacity that may hold. Diolch yn fawr.