

# West Glamorgan's Wild Woodlands Report 2015 - 2018



## Introduction

This report covers the work delivered by the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Conservation Team of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) during the period September 2015 - August 2018. It covers the full breadth of work undertaken by the team for this fixed-term WREN grant funded project. The Wild Woodlands Project was funded by WREN's FCC Biodiversity Action Fund, which rejuvenated management to some reserves that through lack of time needed attention to improve their condition, increase biodiversity and eradicate invasive non-native species (INNS). The report aims to capture and celebrate the achievements accomplished during the three years of this project.



All project aims have on the whole been successfully completed. Habitat management work that was laid out in the plan has been successfully carried out over the past three years, including thinning, coppicing, ride management, path clearance, mowing/scything meadows, INNS control and site infrastructure maintenance.



This report is written by Tara Daniels, Project Officer, and edited by Lizzie Wilberforce, Conservation manager.

*Tara Daniels, West Glamorgan's Wild Woodlands Project Officer 2015-2018.*

## Habitat management.

These woodlands are BAP priority habitats and some sites also contain a mosaic of other BAP habitats including neutral grasslands. We sought to restore these woodlands and grasslands and maintain the high quality mixture of priority habitats. The restoration work also set out to support a number of BAP priority species (e.g. Dormice, bats, Pied Flycatchers, Adders). Thus the project contributed to the achievement of both local and national BAP species and habitat targets.



Most native woodland types are included as one of the habitats within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) with the aim to retain extent and achieve recovering or favourable condition.

Our reserves include 29ha of land where a 'Maintain condition' status is sought,

which contributes 0.02% to the overall 123,321 ha stated within the UK plan. A total of 86.3 ha of nature reserve has gone into the 'Achieve condition' category which counts for 0.24% of the overall 35,530 ha of native woodland in the UKBAP. *Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Upland Mixed Ash Woodland, Upland Oak Woodland and Wet Woodland* all feature in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). This habitat is present at Dranges, Coed Barcud, Peel Wood, Prior's Wood and Gelli Hir. *Upland Mixed Ash*

*Woodland* occurs at Llanrhidian Hill, E&R Harding, and Kilvrough Manor Woods. *Upland Oak Woodland* occurs at Craig Cilhendre and Coed Gawdir, and *Wet Woodlands* at Killay Marsh. These contribute 68.9 ha, 9.7% of 710 ha of the 'Achieve condition' target within Swansea, and 17.4ha, 1.6 % of the Neath Port Talbot targets, also 29 ha, 1.3% of the 'Maintain' target in Swansea, with no reserves applicable in Neath Port Talbot county.

Under the UK Broad Habitat *Neutral Grasslands* category, Swansea's LBAP lists Lowland Meadows as a target priority habitat, of which we have 18.1 ha within our sites in the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Counties, covered by the WGWW project, counting for 1.3% contribution toward the target. The reserves contributing to these targets include Dranges, E&R Harding, Llanrhidian Hill, Killay Marsh and Prior's Wood & Meadow. These meadows have mostly been slowly restored over the three years of the project, each year pushing the condition in a more favourable direction toward favourable status. This has been achieved by mowing and raking, ensuring grazing and tackling encroachment and invasive species.

All our targets for ha of habitat work outlined above have been met. In a few cases a little extra work has been identified. Our research and surveys using in house knowledge and species surveying, has highlighted the need for a more in depth thorough analysis of the indicator species the Wildlife Trust need to monitor long term at Prior's Meadow to ensure its full restoration and continued maintenance. This analysis will be carried out by an expert external specialist. Accompanied by new mapping software we have acquired to accurately record and work to reduce encroachment of the meadow boundary. Extra plans are in the pipework to improve access to the meadow and wood for management and extraction purposes. We will also be adding a pond which would aid the welfare of conservation grazing stock, increase local biodiversity and offer additional breeding opportunities for the Great Crested Newt population newly found on site. The West Glamorgan's Wild Woodlands Project has provided the research and foundations of work to base a new project on achieving the above mentioned further goals.



We carried out 13 days of coppicing at Gelli Hir, 16 at Prior's Wood and 35 at Dranges. We also delivered 27 days of thinning at Prior's and 31 at Gelli Hir, with 132 cubic metres of tree wood felled. Thirty metres of hedge has been laid at Prior's and Killay Marsh. All of this action serves to maintain and enhance the condition of the woodland habitats by increasing the levels of light reaching the woodland floor, and increasing the structural and age diversity of the woodland.

### **Managing Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS).**

During the three years, 12 tonnes of Himalayan Balsam have been pulled and composted at Gelli Hir. A third of an acre of 12" Rhododendron has been cut and cleared from the woodland at Coed Gawdir. Glyphosate has been successfully used in the extensive treatment of Japanese Knotweed across Llanrhidian Hill, E&R Harding, Kilvrough, Gelli Hir, Killay Marsh, Craig Cilhendre, Baglan Badger Sett and Melin Cwrt reserves, mitigating a major and long term threat to the habitats at these sites. Over 12 rolls of sheet plastic have been spread over Crassula (an aquatic INNS), preventing photosynthesis and reducing its dominance of the ponds it was recorded in. Additional efforts include the clearance of Cherry Laurel, Cotoneaster, Bamboo, Three-cornered Leek and other invasives. This represents a huge step forward in INNS control and the long term benefits of this investment cannot be over-stated.



Non-native species have been actively controlled on minimum of 85.5 ha.

- Baglan Badger Sett treated 3 years for Japanese Knotweed and cleared and stump treated for Cherry Laurel.
- Craig Cilhendre – Rhododendron cleared and treated wherever it was found across site with regrowth treated; Japanese Knotweed sprayed and then injected 3 years in a row to help protect adjacent Broad-Leaved Helleborine.
- Coed Gawdir – 10ft high Thododendron cleared from 3<sup>rd</sup> of an acre and re-growth sprayed.
- Dranges has been managed for Crassula in two of the three existing ponds for 3 years of the project, with almost complete success in eradication.

- Elizabeth and Rowe Harding – Japanese Knotweed sprayed for 3 years; Cotoneaster cleared on scree slope of spoil heap.
- Gelli Hir – Himalayan Balsam - 12 tonnes pulled over 3 years; Cherry Laurel, Rhododendron, Japanese Knotweed – spot treated as found.
- Killay Marsh – Japanese Knotweed treated 3 years running (twice in the last year to make more manageable).
- Kilvrough has received continued treatment, including both spraying and stem injection, for the remaining Japanese Knotweed along the roadside throughout the 3 years.
- Llanrhidian Hill – Japanese Knotweed treated for 3 years running; Cotoneaster cleared and treated from a section of cliff, and Pheasant Berry as well from the meadow in 2018.
- Peel Wood cleared and treated for Cherry Laurel; treated for Japanese Knotweed and an invasive non-native Honeysuckle.
- Prior's Wood has been mostly cleared of patch and spot treated individual plants of Rhododendron and the Bamboo clump treated.
- 129.4ha of land included in project with 11/12 (missing off Coed Barcud, the only site without INNS) of the project sites treated for non-native species.

### Volunteers

A total of 270 volunteer work parties have taken place, totalling 780.5 volunteer days from September 2015 to August 2018. This is an increase on previous years, and we have learned through WGWW project how to give even more volunteers more rewarding and valuable experiences. We achieved an approximate average of 18% student engagement.



### Management plans and surveys

Project targets included the creation of a number of new management plans, to use existing information and new survey data produced by the project, to inform better long-term management of the sites. The project officer co-ordinated survey work to inform these new management plans (where the current information base is too poor to inform them at present) and thereafter to monitor project impact. Survey results and management plans will reported to and shared by BARS (in the early phase of the project, prior to its closure) and through the two local LBAP partnerships.

The project targets were: *We will achieve the restoration of these habitats, and support the priority species that depend upon them, by implementing a wide range of well-established best practice*



*management methods. Creating 8 new management plans, where none exist, to ensure that management is informed and appropriate, and to guide and secure the project legacy.*

The following eight management plans have been consulted on internally as they are internal working documents. These will guide management of our reserves over the long term and continue to evolve as we learn more and/or see results of suggested management. Interested parties have access to documents.

- Craig Cilhendre
- Elizabeth and Rowe Harding
- Gelli Hir
- Killay Marsh
- Kilvrough Manor Woods and Redden Hill
- Llanrhidian Hill
- Peel Wood
- Priors Wood and Meadow

The new management plans for the reserves needing them, are complete. Surveys have been carried out, comprising of aquatic macro invertebrates, ground flora vegetation, canopy, quadrat meadow vegetation, moth trapping, and breeding bird surveys. This information has and will continue to feed into the management plans. Finally, since management plans are working documents, they will need adjusting for new finds such as the Great Crested Newts in Prior's and other things that come up over the years to come.

Records for all sites were reported on BARS, until BARS no longer existed in November 2016. Most species records of the past 3 years from these sites have been shared with SEWBRc, Glamorgan's Local Environmental Records Centre.

Reserve	Baglan Badger Sett	Coed Barcud	Coed Gawdir	Craig Cilhendre	Dranges	Elizabeth & Rowe Harding	Gelli Hir	Killay Marsh	Kilvrough	Llanrhidian Hill	Peel Wood	Prior's Meadow & Wood
No. of records 2015-18	92	44	116	357	563	545	322	171	132	91	54	395
Acre of reserve	0.09	3.98	0.25	39.8	39.7	19	70.8	24.7	21.2	7.6	3	43

Records Total: 2882

A few things have affected the varying number of records on site. As indicated size will indicate how many species will occur on a site and how many would be attracted to it. Some sites have a variety of habitats within them, which will automatically boost the biodiversity. And lastly we have been lucky enough to have experts in certain taxa have visited a few sites, but not others.

### **Changes in the plan**

The steering group partners did not engage as much as we had hoped, however, we achieved an approximate average of 18% student engagement through our own sources.

Funds for Kilvrough track and Redden Hill have been re-diverted to woodland management at Kilvrough that gave us the opportunity to trial a clear fell coupe in the plantation beech, to encourage natural seedling regeneration and allow us to replant with native coppice species. If successful we will be looking to roll this approach out throughout the PAWS (Plantation on Ancient Woodland) site over the next 20 years to establish a more natural canopy structure. The discovery of Great Crested Newts at Prior's Wood and Meadow has prevented the stone for the gateways being installed. Funds have been diverted to fulfilling another aim of the project, offering our volunteers a formal qualification in brushcutter use.



### Training

Brushcutter training has certified 6 volunteer and staff members to carry skills and valuable work forward after the end of the project. Other training that volunteers received included bumblebee identification and survey techniques, winter tree identification and history uses, scythe use, aquatic macro invertebrates, woodland ground flora and meadow plant identification. Staff have received training and ticket certification in First Aid at Work, Tree inspections, All Terrain Vehicle use, Pesticide by Water and Felling Large diameter trees.



Finally I have been lucky enough to be retained by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, as a Conservation Officer. So will be able to continue this work and carry on the legacy!

**Staff**

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