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Volunteer to Help the Landscape Come Alive

In November 2014 a new project began called the Alun and Chwiler Living Landscape Project which is funded by WREN and Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water along with generous donations from members of the public. WREN is a not-for-profit business that awards grants through the Landfill Communities Fund from funds generated by FCC Environment, delivering community, environmental and heritage projects countrywide.

The two rivers that have been targeted for this project have long been known locally as important wildlife hotspots and support a huge variety of species and habitats, some highly protected. However, changes in management practices over many years have created less-than-ideal conditions in the rivers and the surrounding environment for supporting this biodiversity.

The living landscape project aims to create more optimal habitat, as well as restoring some of the existing habitat to an improved status, the result being an even better ecologically functioning network in the two river corridors and surrounding landscape. Kristian Dales, Sales & Marketing Director at FCC Environment said:

"FCC Environment and WREN are together committed to supporting projects which protect, maintain and expand some of the country's most unique ecosystems. We're looking forward to seeing how the Alun and Chwiler Living Landscape Project progresses and will help the UK meet government targets to improve and increase biodiversity."

Some past projects within the living landscape area include the Wheeler Water Vole Project and the Alyn Valley Himalayan Balsam Project. The water vole project found signs of water vole on some sites along the river Wheeler and we aim to resurvey the area to see if anything has changed and also to better inform management plans. The survey area may also extend into the Alyn Valley as field signs of water vole have been



Water vole is one of the target species

found here too. However, in order to undertake such an extensive survey we will need help in the form of volunteers! Training will be provided and if you are really lucky you may even see a water vole...



Invasive Himalayan balsam

Himalayan balsam season is fast approaching and we need people to help with clearing Himalayan balsam from both rivers.

Continued on page 2....



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Tell Us What You Think!

We'd love to hear what you think about our newsletters. You can provide feedback via this short survey at

www.surveymonkey.com/s/Q32NJEL

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This plant has received a lot of attention within the conservation community over the past few years and to great effect on the river Alun where the efforts of staff and dedicated volunteers have managed to clear the banks from Llandegla to Rhydymwyn to the point where there are now only a few isolated plants found each year and our native wildflowers are slowly reappearing. This year there is a balsam pulling event on the river Alun followed by a buffet nearby on 2nd July in Mold at 18:00-21:00. If you are thinking of joining in then please call Loggerheads Country Park on 01352 810614 so that we can order the right amount of food! In addition, staff will need assistance with river walks/balsam pulls on the Alun and Chwiler, groups and individuals are equally welcome.

These are just two of the volunteering opportunities available as part of the Alun and Chwiler Living Landscape Project, more exist currently and even more will undoubtedly arise as the project progresses!

If you would like to be involved with the project as a volunteer or if you own land on the banks of the Alun/Alyn or Chwiler/Wheeler please contact Amy at amygreen@wildlifetrustswales.org. You can also follow the project's progress on Twitter [@ACLLproject](https://twitter.com/ACLLproject). To help create a Living Landscape in the Alun & Chwiler Valleys, you can donate to our fundraising efforts via www.justgiving.com/alun-chwiler.

Denbighshire Muntjac

This Reeves's Muntjac was spotted in January this year on a bushcam in a Denbighshire woodland.



Like other invasive deer, the species can adversely affect woodland habitats. You can report any sightings via the Cofnod website at: www.cofnod.org.uk.

Help Get 'Ratty' on Record

Have you seen 'Ratty'?

Water voles were previously immortalised as "Ratty" in Kenneth Grahame's classic children's book *Wind in the Willows*. At the time the book was published in 1908, water voles could be seen along many of the country's rivers. However since then, their numbers have declined by 90% nationally.



walks or are lucky enough to see them at a local pond or ditch, but they are keeping the information to themselves and we would like them to share it with us so that we can target conservation efforts more effectively.

To report your water vole sighting please visit www.cofnod.org.uk and click on the 'Record a Water Vole' icon.

The main reasons for the decline of water voles are the reduction in suitable habitat and predation by American mink.

As part of the North East Wales Coastal Water Vole Recovery Project we are asking for the public to join in the 'vole hunt' by reporting any sightings they have of water voles in the North East Wales area.

We have a basic understanding of water vole distribution in our project area but we have lots of gaps and many of the sightings are very old. At the moment people might be spotting water voles when they go on



The Ups and Downs at Talacre Dunes

Sand dune systems such as Talacre undergo constant change. They are referred to as 'dynamic systems' where natural erosion from wind and waves is constant. Though often more severe in the winter months, people pressure from tourism and the thousands of visitors to the area each year during the summer months can also add to the erosion. The dunes and beach management at Talacre therefore requires a multifaceted approach.

furniture such as fences, waymarker posts and life ring stations were washed up or lost altogether. The beach car park was unusable until May and vehicular access for visitors was impossible.

Now in Spring 2015 the area has made a remarkable recovery as the dynamic nature of the site swings full circle. Sand deposits at the base of the frontal dune system



Dunes breach in December 2013



Storm damage debris

Natural Erosion

The Winter of 2013/14 saw two significant storm events at Talacre which left the frontal dune ridge considerably smaller and narrower than has been seen in 20 years. Estimations were that between 5 and 10 meters of frontal dune had been washed away in the storm with height reductions to less than a meter in the most affected areas, directly behind the Talacre

lighthouse. Most significant was a 'breach' of the front dune ridge where wave action broke through and surged into the areas behind the dune. The areas between the front and rear dune ridges sustained prolonged flooding for a number of months. Species and habitat were adversely impacted with the loss of terrestrial habitat for hunting and resting for amphibians and reptiles, and ground nesting birds. Plant damage was also sustained due to salt water ingress.

The public access throughout the site was restricted. There was considerable damage to infrastructure as site



Sand trapping technique 2014

through the winter months have helped to begin the process of slowly rebuilding the dune ridge. Sand trapping techniques such as fencing and Christmas tree planting take advantage of this process to enhance the sand deposition rates.

Human Factor Erosion

Footfall alone creates a significant amount of erosion throughout the site. Management techniques in place to lessen this impact

include the provision of waymarked routes which can then be maintained to reduce the distribution of visitors. Fences are used as a direct means of excluding people from particularly sensitive areas and interpretation panels educate visitors as to the sensitivities of the area.

Talacre Dunes is managed in conjunction with Flintshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales, with consultation from a number of special interest organisations.

New Discoveries From a Decade of Dormouse Diaries

A female hazel dormouse is gently held by a volunteer working with the North West Dormouse Partnership. The partnership, which includes Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Denbighshire County Council, Chester Zoo and the Wildlife Trusts has been collecting scientific data from dormouse populations in North Wales and Cheshire since 2005. The project, in which each individual dormouse is marked with a microchip, is providing important information on dormouse habitat use, life expectancy, population size and breeding behaviour which is helping to guide more effective dormouse conservation in the UK. The work has been running for 10 years making it the biggest study of this type to be carried out on a small mammal species in the UK. It has unearthed fascinating new traits in this tiny mammal species.

DNA extracted from hair samples has proved that female dormice have a promiscuous side, with offspring sired by multiple fathers in the same litter. The study also found that female dormice can sometimes breed twice in the same year, and that very occasionally they breed before they are a year old.

Both these behaviours have been observed dormice in Europe, but rarely in the UK. In fact, breeding in 'young of the year' had never been recorded in the UK before.

Chester Zoo's biodiversity officer Sarah Bird said:

"Our study has shed new light on the ecology of our dormice and highlighted factors which are important for their survival in the UK. Promiscuity in females had never been recorded before; it will increase genetic diversity within litters, helping population survival. Equally important are the other breeding behaviours we have seen. It is likely that years when females breed twice, and the young of the year also breed, are when populations can really increase. These behaviours are probably critical for healthy sustainable dormouse populations in the UK."

We have been able to visit the site four times each year for the last 10 years and Chester Zoo vets have marked

over 1000 dormice with tiny microchips in that time. This has enabled us to build up a huge amount of really important and unique data. We know a huge amount about these dormice now – including how long they live, how their weight fluctuates throughout the year and how many survive winter hibernation."



Checking a dormouse nestbox



Hazel dormice are protected under European law and the UK is required to monitor the species. Since recording began in the UK in the early 1990s, a decline in both the number of dormice, and the range of the species, has been observed. Experts believe the decline to have been taking place for at least 100 years due to loss and fragmentation of their habitat.

Today the national downward population trend continues though some evidence indicates the rate of decline may be slowing at last. However, at the North West Dormouse Partnership study site at Bontuchel in North Wales, survey work has revealed a large stable population of dormice.

Sarah added:

"Our survey site in North Wales is on the very north western edge of their European range and, from the very start, we've been surprised by how many hazel dormice are there. That's why it's a very important project and a very important site for study – to understand why this woodland is so good for dormice."

"It is clear that habitat management by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is making a big difference. Leaving woodland unmanaged is not good for dormice. Our 10-year-long study has shown that coppicing small areas of trees in rotation, allowing light to reach the forest floor is certainly helping them here, and it benefits other woodland species too. These methods create a diverse woodland with trees of different species and ages, and lots of other wild plants that provide abundant food and shelter for our dormice."

Flintshire's Great Crested Newt Habitat Improvements

Flintshire Countryside Services and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust Ranger, Mandy Cartwright, has been working with Flintshire Countryside Rangers on improving great crested newt breeding ponds; managed by the countryside service in the Deeside and Buckley Special Area of Conservation.

Mandy carried out pond assessments, which she then collated into a report; detailing a program of works that will be implemented over the next three years.

The great crested newt is relatively long-lived - in undisturbed habitat individuals can survive into their teens. Great crested newts prefer to breed in relatively large ponds that are not supporting fish. Typically, breeding ponds are well insulated and support abundant submerged and marginal vegetation.

Aquatic and terrestrial works have already started on some of the ponds as well as some new pond creations. The works undertaken in the pictures were funded via Building Wildlife Trust Ltd., located at Lower common, Buckley.

The pond in the image was restored in January and the rangers are looking forward to surveying the newts over the next few years.



Wales Biodiversity Week

Wales Biodiversity Week is running between Saturday 6th June and Sunday the 14th June. There is lots going on in North East Wales this year, we have a week packed full of wildlife activities for people to get involved in!



Wythnos Bioamrywiaeth Cymru
Wales Biodiversity Week

6-14 June/Mehefin 2015



Date	Event	Further Info
5-7th June	Loggfest Loggerheads near Mold	See website/Facebook for details
6th June	Water, Earth, Fire (pond dipping, bug hunting and fire lighting) 10am-2pm Betws-y-Coed/ Llanrwst area	Meet at FSC Rhyd y Creuau, The Drapers Field Centre, Llanrwst Road, Betws y Coed, LL24 OHB. For Further information call 01690 710494
6th June	Wildlife Fun Day 2pm-4pm Plas Newydd, Llangollen	Drop in
11th June	Nightlife at Nercwys 8:30pm-11pm Coed Nercwys	Meet in the Northern car park (SJ 218 593) Call 01352 810614 to book your place
14th June	Dune Flowers for Beginners 2pm-4pm Kinmel Bay	Meet in the Kinmel dunes car park, by the promenade kiosks. Booking is essential, please call 01492 575337
14th June	Garden Wildlife Fun Day 11am-4pm Wepre Park, Connah's Quay	Drop in

More Events...

When Wales Biodiversity Week has finished, there are plenty of events to enjoy throughout the year.

Visit our partner websites to find the latest listings:

Conwy County Borough Council
www.conwy.gov.uk/wildlifeevents

Denbighshire County Council
www.denbighshirecountryside.org.uk/events/

Flintshire County Council
www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Council-Apps/Events.aspx

Wrexham County Borough Council
www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/leisure_tourism/countryside_news.cfm

North East Wales Wildlife
www.newwildlife.org.uk/events/

North Wales Wildlife Trust
www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/whats-on

Cofnod
www.cofnod.org.uk/Calendar



Continue the Conversation

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www.bionetwales.co.uk



Follow Us!

Like our North East Wales Biodiversity Network page on Facebook to be updated on biodiversity action in Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham. Regular posts are uploaded to the site informing you of exciting news, events, photos and projects in the area. It is a quick, simple and free way to discover what biodiversity activities are taking place and what you could be involved with in your county.

We also have a Twitter account which similarly to Facebook, updates you with regular tweets on interesting Bionet news, successes and events. So follow us now at :

Facebook: www.facebook.com/NEWBionet
 Twitter: @newbionet