



Natur Gwynedd

Caring for our biodiversity from the mountains to the sea

A summary



www.gwynedd.gov.uk/biodiversity



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Bioamrywiaeth Cymru



Biodiversity Wales

What is BIODIVERSITY and WHERE can I find it?

Carpets of Bluebells in a springtime oakwood. Rainbow-coloured dragonflies zooming over a garden pond. The haunting calls of a Curlew on a wet autumn night.

Biodiversity - the variety of plants and animals we share this planet with - is all around us here in Gwynedd.

Mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and plants, some are more obvious and better known than others. And all of them depend for their existence on habitats. Our woodlands, wetlands, rivers and the seas around our shores are their life support systems. "Natur Gwynedd"!

What's happening to our BIODIVERSITY?

Much of our biodiversity has been in decline for decades. The UK has lost over 100 species of plants and animals in the last century. Many more are on the verge of extinction. Some of Gwynedd's once common species like the elegant Lapwing, a farmland bird of wet pasture, and the Skylark, have declined enormously. Many of the colourful flowers of our hay meadows and cloddiau, and the insects that depend on them, have declined too.

Why? Mainly because their habitats have dwindled. Woods have been felled. Meadows rich in flowers such as the burnt pink Betony have been ploughed up. Wetlands, with their plants like the butter-yellow Flag Iris, have been drained away.

GOVERNMENTS TAKE A LEAD:

The need for action worldwide to halt biodiversity loss was recognised at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, where world leaders committed themselves to achieve a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

What's so important about BIODIVERSITY?

Plants and animals - biodiversity - around us enrich our lives. Think of the chorus of birdsong on a spring morning. Or a summertime walk along a flower-filled country lane. Because one species of plant or animal depends on another, biodiversity is a complex web of inter-dependency. We are a part of that web. Just think, for example, of what would happen if we lost all of our bees. Few of our crops would ever be pollinated and set seed. Much of our food supply would be gone. Just one reason why we can't sustain our lives without biodiversity.

So what are we doing for BIODIVERSITY?

As one of its main actions from the signing of the Biodiversity Convention at the 1992 "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro, the UK Government has encouraged plans to be written for all the threatened species and habitats in the UK. These set out what action is needed to bolster the populations of threatened plants and animals and to increase the area of habitats they need.

Most of this action, whether by conservation bodies, by voluntary organisations, by Local Authorities, or by individuals, has to be done locally. Usually it is done by many of these working together - by partnerships. The actions are set out in Local Biodiversity Action Plans such as this one, "Natur Gwynedd".

Developing NATUR GWYNEDD

To start "Natur Gwynedd", our Local Biodiversity Action Plan, we began by building these partnerships. And we set up two public biodiversity seminars, in 1999 and 2000, to stimulate local interest, to discuss the process and to produce a list of rare or notable species and habitats for the county. Then, with our partners, we wrote species and habitat Action Plans - 33 so far - for those plants and animals we identified, consulted relevant experts to get the best possible advice and updated the whole document in 2003 after more public consultation.



Pink Sea Thrift and white Sea Campion on sea cliffs at Mynydd Cilan, Llŷn Peninsula, May 2004.

THE AIMS OF NATUR GWYNEDD

- To help conserve the biodiversity of Gwynedd and, thereby, contribute to biodiversity conservation in Wales, the UK and the world.
- To develop effective local partnerships to make sure that what we do will be maintained long term.
- To increase our knowledge of Gwynedd's biodiversity.
- To raise public awareness of biodiversity in Gwynedd.

Natur Gwynedd PARTNERSHIP

A very large number of individuals and organisations are involved in the Natur Gwynedd partnership. In addition to Gwynedd Council they include Agencies such as the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency Wales, voluntary organisations such as BTCV Cymru and the North Wales Wildlife Trust, the Farming Unions, and the University of Wales, Bangor. Some have helped write the plans and will help implement them. Others are promoting their importance to raise the profile of Natur Gwynedd.

Natur Gwynedd covers areas of Gwynedd County outside the Snowdonia National Park. The area also extends out to sea to cover a range of marine species and habitats, and here no boundary has been set.

Putting the plan into ACTION

Even while Natur Gwynedd was being written, practical work had already begun. For example, surveys have been done to record Water Voles. Nesting boxes have been erected in places to encourage rare Barn Owls. Education and awareness raising has also been going on, for example by giving advice to schools on improving their grounds for biodiversity.

During the spring and summer of 2004 a roadshow took Natur Gwynedd to as many communities as possible. Staff and volunteers from many partner organisations gave talks on a wide range of Gwynedd's biodiversity, including jellyfish and turtles, farmland birds and moths. Others led walks. Popular events for children included a rockpool safari and an afternoon of marine sand sculpture.

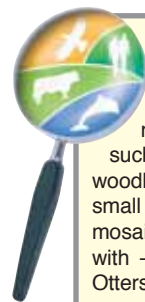


Creating marine sand sculptures at Black Rock Sands, Natur Gwynedd Roadshow, May 2004. Photograph by Paul Kay.

HABITATS in Gwynedd

Gwynedd has an array of habitats. Hills and moorlands, wetlands, woodlands and marine habitats are just a few. Action Plans have been developed for many of them.

WOODLANDS include upland oakwoods, upland ashwoods, parkland with veteran trees... ..and wet woodland.



Focus on Wet Woodland

Occurring on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, in river floodplains, in flushes on valley sides and on wetlands such as fens and bogs, alder, willows or birch are typical of wet woodland. We estimate that there is around 860 hectares of it, in small pieces, spread across Gwynedd. It often occurs as a mosaic with other habitats. Some of the other habitats it co-exists with – such as wetlands – and species dependent on it, like Otters and Lesser Horseshoe Bats, have their own Action Plans.

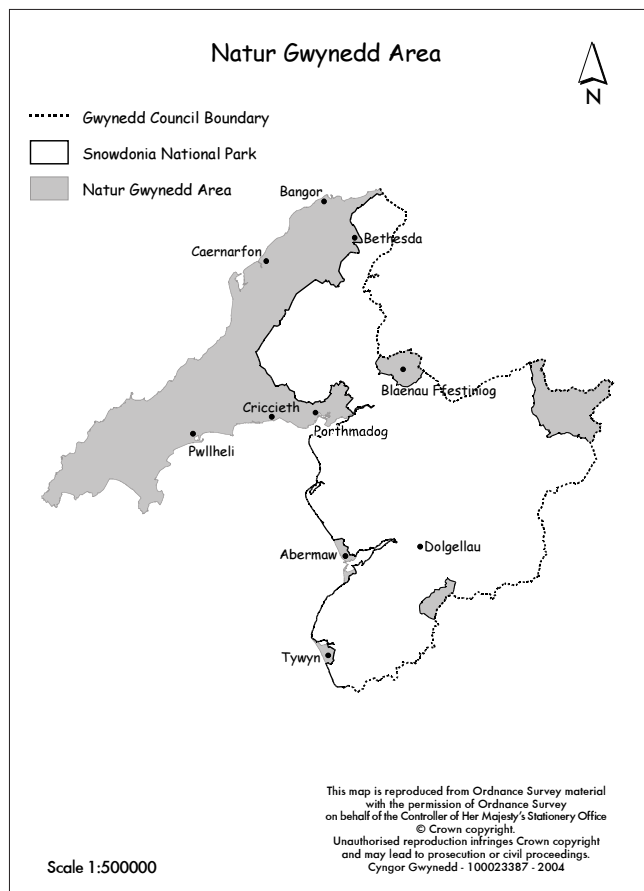
Some wet woodland has disappeared because of felling. Other examples are suffering damage from drainage, from water pollution and from colonisation by rampant plants such as Japanese Knotweed.

Sample action:

Seek funding for better woodland management by developing a scheme to include paying grants to owners for restoration and / or the creation of wet woodlands.

Target / timescale: By 2005.

By whom: Gwynedd Council and relevant partners.





Seawatching at Uwchmynydd, Natur Gwynedd Roadshow, June 2004.

LOWLANDS include field margins, heathland, meadows and pastures, hedges... ..and traditional cloddiau.



Focus on Cloddiau

Cloddiau are characteristic of the Llŷn Peninsula. They consist of a raised earth bank, usually stone faced, possibly with a hedge planted on top. They are important landscape features – and they are a brilliant habitat for plants and animals including invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals. Some of these, such as Bluebells, Chough and Adders, have their own Action Plans.

Some cloddiau have been removed to create larger fields. Others are suffering damage. They need maintenance and many have been neglected. Traditional maintenance skills have been lost. Severe mechanical trimming of vegetation, or cutting it at the wrong time of year, is one of several problems.

Sample action:

Use planning conditions to ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of cloddiau.

Target / timescale: Ongoing

By: Gwynedd Council and relevant partners.



Colourful clawdd wall on the Llŷn Peninsula, Summer 2003.

COASTAL AND MARINE habitats include mudflats, grazed saltmarsh, sand dunes, saltwater lagoons, underwater rocky reefs... ..and maritime cliffs and slopes.



Focus on Maritime cliff and slopes

Much of Gwynedd is surrounded by the sea. The cliffs and slopes so common in parts of the county such as on the Llŷn Peninsula have a wide range of vegetation types. Lichens dominate where salt spray hits the cliffs. Further up, sparsely vegetated cliff-faces and ledges give way to coastal grassland, heath and scrub on the cliff tops. Vitally important for nesting seabirds, Chough and Sand Martins, these cliffs and slopes are often home to bumblebees and some rare invertebrates. Some of them have their own Action Plans.

Our maritime cliffs and slopes are often under threat from urban and industrial development, from holiday accommodation and from changes in agricultural practices. Sometimes the breeding seabirds they nurture are under threat too, from predation by cats and rats.

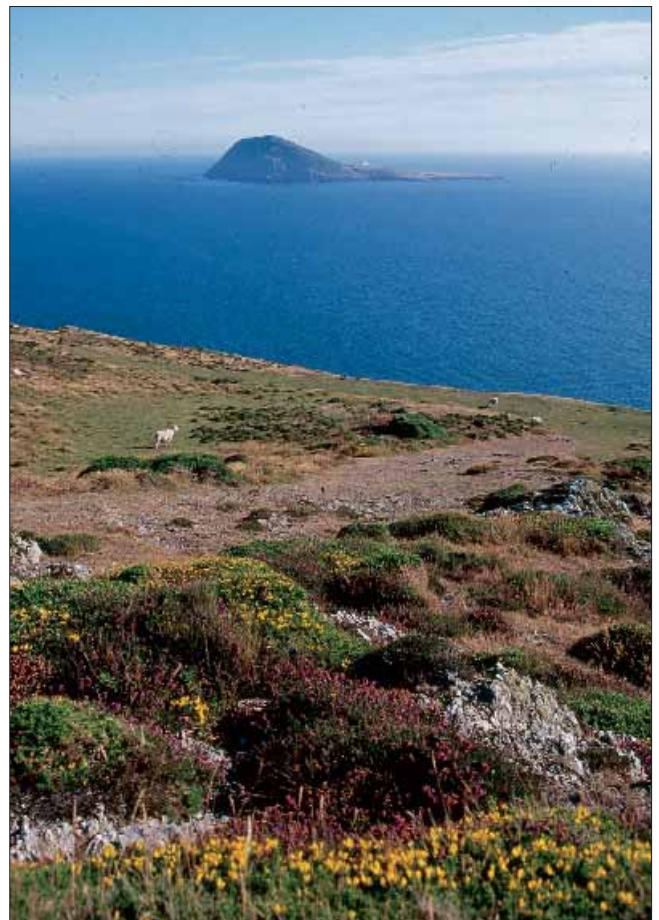
Sample action:

Identify important areas of maritime cliff and slopes in Gwynedd from existing information and survey, including important lichens within the spray zone. Target key sites for management and restoration.

Target / timescale: By 2006

By: Countryside Council for Wales, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Gwynedd Council, National Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust, RSPB Cymru, University of Wales Bangor.

WETLANDS AND WATER COURSES include river corridors, rhos pastures, fens, bogs, reedbeds, lakes and ponds.



Bardsey Island from Uwchmynydd, Heather and Gorse in the foreground.

SPECIES in Gwynedd

There are many species of plants and animals in Gwynedd that are of local importance. But some of these are important in a Wales and UK context too. Many of them now have their own Action Plans. But others will benefit from better care and management of their habitats - or by creating more habitat.

MAMMALS include Pine Marten, Brown Hare, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Otter, Polecat... ..and Water Vole.



Focus on Water Vole

Water Voles – the largest of our British voles and forever known as the delightful “Ratty” of “Wind in the Willows” fame – are about 20cm long and weigh up to 300g. Once common along the banks of Britain’s watercourses, ponds and lakes – nowadays they are believed to be our fastest declining mammal. Within Gwynedd our knowledge of the Water Vole’s distribution is incomplete, but the Llŷn Peninsula could be a stronghold for them.

This intriguing mammal has declined because many of its streams and pools have been polluted; because wet areas around them have been drained; and because of predation by introduced mink and other predators.

Sample action:

Encourage the recording of Water Voles by the public to be passed to Menter Môn for collation, by issuing information on numbers annually and by providing landowners and river users with advice.

Target / timescale: Ongoing

By: Gwynedd Council, Environment Agency Wales, North Wales Wildlife Trust.



Water Vole – photograph by Michael Leach.

BIRDS include Barn Owl, Chough, Lapwing, Ring Ouzel, Green Woodpecker, Nightjar and farmland birds as a group.



Barn Owl – photograph by Darin Smith.

FISH include Lampreys, Salmon... ..and Arctic Charr.



Focus on Arctic Charr

When they are spawning, male Arctic Charr are the most brightly coloured fish in Europe. Their population in Llyn Padarn is genetically unique. When the glaciers in Wales melted at the end of the last Ice Age, these fish were isolated in the lake and physically separated from any other population of Arctic Charr found in a couple of other Welsh lakes and elsewhere.

But their population is not necessarily safe. Pollution from land around the lake, from fertilisers, pesticides and other substances, may be harming them.

Sample action:

Investigate introducing a scheme in the water catchment around the lake to reduce pollution running into Llyn Padarn.

Target / timescale: By 2006

By: Environment Agency Wales, Countryside Council for Wales, Gwynedd Council.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS include Adder and newts.

INVERTEBRATES include Marsh Fritillary butterfly, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, Whorl snails and the Grey Bush Cricket.

MARINE SPECIES include Harbour Porpoise, Dolphins, Leatherback Turtles and Grey Seal.

PLANTS include Floating Water Plantain, Pillwort, Slender Green Feather Moss, Golden Hair Lichen, Waxcap Fungi... ..and Bluebell.



Focus on Bluebell

Locally abundant in Gwynedd, Bluebells are confined to the damp climate of the very west of Europe with the UK being their world stronghold. A common sight in many oakwoods and along hedges and cloddiau, Bluebells are a welcome springtime sight. Coed Dinorwig Local Nature Reserve has some of the most impressive carpets in the UK.

But Bluebells have declined as woods have been felled, hedges and cloddiau destroyed. Trampling by livestock and illegal collecting of the bulbs have also reduced their numbers.

Sample action:

Continue to raise awareness of trampling damage by livestock and discourage people from picking the flowers or digging up bulbs.

Target / timescale: Ongoing

By: Gwynedd Council, Countryside Council for Wales, North Wales Wildlife Trust.



Bluebell carpet in a Gwynedd woodland.



Rockpool "safari", Natur Gwynedd Roadshow, July 2004.

Ideas for what YOU can do to help Gwynedd's Biodiversity:

1. Create a wildlife friendly garden

10 TOP TIPS:

- 1 Plant nectar rich flowers for attracting butterflies and insects. These will also produce fruit for birds and other wildlife. Try to have something in flower all year round.
- 2 Choose locally sourced plants, shrubs or trees which are native to your area.
- 3 Provide plenty of places for creatures to live and shelter, such as stones, piles of wood, cavities or dense shrubs.
- 4 Plant your own hedge using hedging shrubs native to your area or cover a fence with climbing shrubs that produce plenty of berries.
- 5 Use a compost bin to make your own compost.
- 6 Leave rough uncut areas of grass and if you have space, manage part of a lawn as a flower-rich meadow.
- 7 Put up a bird table, bird bath, nest box, bat box or hedgehog house.
- 8 Avoid the use of pesticides – choose natural ways to control slugs.
- 9 Plant trees native to your area or add a shallow pond to your garden.
- 10 Leave ivy to grow – it provides shelter for birds, produces nectar in winter and berries in early spring, providing a valuable food source for wildlife.

For help and advice contact the Snowdonia Wildlife Gardening Project – based within the National Park Offices, Penrhyndeudraeth on (01766) 770274.

Contact the Gwynedd Council recycling officer for more details about compost bins on (01286) 679872.

2. Visit a local nature reserve

There are many nature reserves in Gwynedd run by a range of different organisations. Useful websites with details of how to get to them and what you can see there are:

www.ccw.gov.uk

www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/northwales

www.rspb.org.uk

www.gwynedd.gov.uk

3. Record your local wildlife

Keeping a record of where you see different plants and animals and sending these details to the Natur Gwynedd partnership is extremely useful in helping us conserve and enhance our local wildlife.

Our contact details are:

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Caernarfon, Gwynedd. LL55 1SH.

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