

TOURISM FEASIBILITY STUDY REPORT



Prepared for Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project
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Radnorshire
Wildlife Trust
Ymddiriedolaeth Natur
Sir Faesyfed



Context

The Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project and stakeholders recognise that tourism is an important element of the local economy and is a growing economic sector into which both farmers and other landowners are diversifying. A main attraction to the focus study area is the beautiful landscape, a natural and historic environment rich in wildlife with the remains of past human activity.

Radnorshire Wildlife Trust aims to restore rhôs pasture habitat, a common component of the landscape of Mid Wales, though undervalued for its species richness and ecosystem services potential.

The Trust working in partnership with [CARAD – Community Arts Rhayader And District](#), [Rhayader by Nature | The local natural history group](#), local farmers, landowners and community organisations recognised that the preparation of a Nature-Based Tourism Feasibility Study would be a vital step toward encouraging further investment and growth in the wildlife tourism market.

The Trust successfully received two-year funding for the Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project from the Welsh Government's 'Sustainable Management Scheme' (SMS), under sub-measure 16.5 of the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

The SMS aims to support collaborative landscape-scale projects delivering action that improves natural resources in a way that delivers socio-economic and environmental benefits to farmers and rural businesses and communities.

The objectives of this feasibility study were to:

- Research the current offer for and providers of nature-based tourism in the project area, including the different audience groups that are currently targeted.
- Assess the viability of nature-based tourism.
- Identify ways in which wildlife tourism can be better marketed to a range of audiences.
- Research and develop the potential for a “Wildlife Experience” tourism offer to enable visitors to get closer to nature and better understand Radnorshire’s wildlife.

Acknowledgments

This study was conducted with the valuable input and guidance of the Tourism Working Group, consisting of staff from Radnorshire Wildlife Trust and volunteers from CARAD and Rhayader by Nature.

The research team also wishes to acknowledge the contributions that stakeholders made, landowners and farmers, local tourism and walking operators towards this study; Jen Velu - Visit Wales, Bill Stow - Rhayader 2000, Alan Austin - Rhayader Walkers, Kate Blair and Amanda Hill - Ramblers Association and the Paths to Wellbeing Project and Lisa Denison - Quiet Walks.

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Thanks also to Jennifer Browne and Eleanor Breen for proofreading the final report.

Constraints

Due to continuing difficulties because of Covid 19, many face-to-face visits were curtailed. Questionnaires were sent out to enable input from landowners and tourism providers within the study area. However, the response was limited possibly due to the time of year (lambing) and extreme weather conditions in February. Therefore, the sample size was smaller than the research team would have liked.

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1. Summary

The study has identified key strategies for growing nature-based tourism within the project focus area. The potential benefits are:

- the project builds upon the points of difference between the focus area near Rhayader and other destinations, i.e., the existing tourism demand, natural landscapes, focal wildlife attractions, arts and cultural heritage.
- the events and experiences are likely to be a catalyst for encouraging initial market interest and then help support the collaborative development of wildlife tourism packages.
- the potential to disperse the benefits across the project area and beyond.
- the possibility to showcase to local communities and businesses the value and contribution of nature-based tourism and wildlife experiences.
- the opportunity for involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the development of leading experiences and the potential for new guide businesses to emerge to mediate and manage experiences.
- the opportunity to start integrating and linking wildlife watching experiences with other traditional holiday pursuits such as walking and sightseeing and with other tourism markets, i.e., food tourism.
- the potential to integrate tourism and wildlife experiences with arts and cultural heritage, to widen the offer to appeal to a range of audiences.
- the possibility to showcase best practices and seek future funding, to support the need for a sustainable strategic approach to wildlife destination development and marketing to reap the potential economic benefits while preventing disturbance to focal species and habitats.

2. Background - The Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project

The project aims to restore rhôs pasture habitat across Radnorshire. Working with local farmers and landowners and coordinating events and exhibitions across the area to raise awareness and connect people with this habitat.

Some small and fragmented areas of rhôs pasture remain in the focus area, several of which are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and they support some of the most endangered wildlife in Wales. By restoring adjacent areas of marshy grassland, the existing rhôs pastures will once again become connected as a continuous landscape feature and they will act as species-rich reservoirs to improve the biodiversity of the surrounding fields.

To address the need to sustain individual farm businesses alongside land management, the investment will be needed in the development of nature-based tourism activities and infrastructure.

The project partnership will celebrate the cultural, inspirational and aesthetic value of the rhôs pasture habitat in Wales. Improved access will create recreational and health benefits for both local communities and visitors to the area.



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries are found within the project area and could be “one to spot” as part of a wildlife experience/holiday package.

Photo: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/small-pearl-bordered-fritillary>

3. Introduction

Wildlife tourism (a form of ecotourism) is a growing global trend in which humans interact with wildlife, whether flora or fauna. The growth in wildlife tourism in the UK reflects an increase in people seeking experiences with nature. The most recent currently available survey data for Wales ([Wales Visitor Survey 2019: UK Day Visitors \(gov.wales\)](#)) indicates that over 52% of UK visitors came to Wales partly because of the natural environment. Visitors who specifically came because of wildlife and habitat was 27% and for non-UK visitors, these numbers increased to 71% and 29%, respectively ([Wales Visitor Survey 2019 - Overseas Visitors \(gov.wales\)](#)).

Over the last ten years, there has been a growing trend for a greater proportion of the population holidaying within the British Isles due to the economic recession rather than going abroad (Visit England, 2013). This trend is likely to increase further because of the COVID 19 pandemic, which has had a detrimental effect on personal financial circumstances and consumer confidence in holidaying abroad, reflected in recent years with the increase in 'staycations.'

Wildlife tourism facilitates people's engagement with nature and emotional responses, which research has argued leads to increased 'nature connectedness' – an individual's psychological sense of their relationship with nature. This, in turn, is claimed to result in a range of potential benefits: local businesses and communities can benefit from increased income resulting from visitors to the area; an increase in connectedness with nature can be beneficial for mental health, with numerous studies showing positive effects on an individual's well-being; and encounters with wildlife can stimulate nature conservation behaviours in people (Natural England, 2010).

Wildlife tourism is often centred upon 'charismatic species,' animals that are visually appealing to people, encouraging interest or sympathy (Ducarme, Luque, & Courchamp, 2013). For example, the "Big Five" - are promoted as the ones to spot in Africa (Lindsey, Alexander, Mills, Romanach, ~ & Woodroffe, 2007). The focal species may be a 'flagship species' through which other wildlife and ecosystems are supported, either in the distribution of revenue generated or by conserving wider habitat.

Not all wildlife tourism is driven by charisma, as some are motivated by the intention to support or see wider biodiversity rather than charismatic species alone. For example, tourist motivations to visit Nature Reserves may include "abundance of wildlife" and animal and plant species availability. Further, wildlife tourism can be motivated by experiencing wild landscapes, with the wildlife in context providing the "activity, drama and the focus" (Curtin, 2013).

Given the growing interest in wildlife-orientated outdoor activities in Britain and an increasing domestic market, it is timely that destination businesses and managers revisit their strategic approach to tourism and consider how nature-based activities such as wildlife

watching might enhance the existing tourism product and differentiate destinations. Tourism managers and providers need to consider what wildlife tourism is, who wildlife tourists are, and how destinations can accommodate them.

In consultation with landowners and tourism providers, this study aims to provide feasible ideas for businesses interested in developing and promoting their wildlife tourism 'products,' focusing on the wildlife of rhôs pasture and associated habitats.

Rhôs means 'moor' or 'moorland' in Welsh; it is marshy grassland comprising purple moor grass and rushes, often on poorly drained, mainly acidic areas with high rainfall. Similar lowland habitat in other parts of the country has different local names, such as 'wet lawns' (New Forest), 'culm grassland' (Devon) and 'fen meadow' (East Anglia). This habitat is found predominantly in south-west England, south and west Wales, south-west Scotland, and the western edge of Northern Ireland. The UK distribution has possibly more purple moor-grass and rush pasture than in the rest of Europe.

Rhôs pastures (purple moor-grass and rush pastures) are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat.



Rhôs Pasture in favourable condition <https://www.welshwildlife.org/habitat/rhos-pasture/>

Wildlife of Rhôs Pasture

An area of rhôs pasture in good condition has both taller tussocky vegetation and shorter swards of grasses, sedges and herbs. This forms a complex patchwork of various shades of green and brown throughout the year. These rare habitats can support a wide range of wildlife, including otters, breeding waders, amphibians, flowers and insects. Rush pasture in good condition can boast up to 50 different plant species present in just 4m² of grassland. Within the study area, the more uncommon and 'precious' plants it supports are species such as heath-spotted orchid, meadow thistle, devil's bit scabious, sneezewort, saw-wort, marsh bedstraw, ragged robin, marsh cinquefoil, bog asphodel, marsh violet, ivy-leaved bellflower, whorled caraway and pale sedge.

With all these colourful flowering plants, it comes as no surprise that a great variety of insect life abounds, such as small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly (foodplant the marsh violet), dark green fritillary, white barred and hornet clearwing, Devon carpet, five-spot burnet, drinker, silver hook and antler moths and four-spotted orb-web spider (Knight, 2022, pers. Comm.).



The five-spot burnet <https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/five-spot-burnet>

Common frogs breed in shallow pools between tussocks and may be hunted by otters during the mating months of March and April. Molinia tussocks provide important habitat for common lizards, field voles and shrews, and water voles may be present within the watercourses and feed and nest in the tussocky vegetation on stream sides.

<https://www.elanvalley.org.uk>

4. Study Setting

The Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project is focused on the area in the northwest of Radnorshire, with many of the landowners involved in the project located around Llanwrthwl and Nant Glas near the town of Rhayader. The Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project aims to restore biodiversity and raise the socio-economic and cultural heritage value of rhôs pastures with landowners and communities.



Map of Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project Study Area

This study looks at opportunities within the project boundaries and draws on case studies from around the UK, which could offer a guide to possible pilot wildlife experiences for development.

5. Methodology

The study began by mapping the current opportunities close to rhôs pasture habitats, existing camping and caravan sites, national trails, public rights of way and the spectrum of wildlife opportunities a tourist may encounter in the project area.

A business survey questionnaire was developed (Appendix A) and sent to landowner stakeholders and tourism providers and was followed up by telephone and face-to-face discussion. Recognition of this habitat and the difficulty of access was given, which may lead to issues regarding product development, for example, visitor facilities, carrying capacities and impacts on wildlife, to help the project team and interested stakeholders determine future strategic direction.

6. Results

The relationship between the natural landscape and tourism demand was frequently stated as a key facet in discussion, local tourism literature and websites. The desire for aesthetically pleasing landscapes and the opportunity to see wildlife are important influencers in trip decision-making.

Evidence suggests a growing demand for wishing to see wildlife while on holiday (Wales Visitor Survey, 2019). There was no definitive explanation for why the market is expanding. However, it is likely to be a complex combination of more active and experience-seeking tourism behaviour, a growing interest in nature and conservation, greater wildlife media coverage and an inherent desire to connect with nature coupled with the promotion of getting out in nature for health and wellbeing benefits.

Recognised as the Wildlife Centre of Mid Wales, Rhayader and its surrounding area have long been famed for rare and beautiful wildlife (<https://www.visitmidwales.co.uk/destination/>). Destinations have for a long time used charismatic and iconic species in their destination marketing and content analysis of the use of the wildlife in local tourism brochures and websites for Rhayader and the surrounding area reveals frequent adoption of the Red Kite to depict place identity and to elicit a desire to visit. <https://rhayader.co.uk/things-to-do>

Case study 1: Gigrin Farm. An example of a thriving wildlife tourism business.

Gigrin is a family-run upland sheep farm of approximately 160 acres. The land is at 700 feet rising to 1200 above sea level providing wonderful views of the Wye and Elan valleys. Gigrin became the official Red Kite Feeding Station in the winter of 1992/93 following a request from the RSPB, who had witnessed the late landowner feeding the kites.

The RSPB had noted this spectacle and came to the farm with a proposal that they should open to the public as a red kite feeding station as it would have an impact on the young kites that were being lost over the winter and would also draw people away from nesting sites where losses occurred due to disturbance.

This was a major step into the unknown, but the landowner had the foresight to take on the challenge. Around six red kites were roosting on the farm at that time, by the winter of 2006, over 400 were coming in for food, and now about 600 or so can be seen each day during the winter months.



The Tower Hide at Gigrin Farm for watching kite feeding.

Kite Feeding at Gigrin Farm is a big draw for visitors and is often noted in accommodation guest books as a memorable and spectacular wildlife experience. The farm's Red Kite Centre is now well known throughout the world. <https://www.gigrin.uk/about-gigrin-farm/>

Walks and Trails

Preliminary analysis revealed an almost endless number of rambles and places of special interest within the local area. The book produced by the local natural history group Rhayader by Nature (2015) provides a guide to 15 walks and 12 easily accessible viewing spots.

Collectively they capture the essence of the Rhayader district and provide opportunities to see incredible wildlife (Dennison *et al.*, 2015). Although the self-guided walks in the book are not specific to rhôs pastures, the combination of detailing local walks and places to visit with chances of encountering wildlife sights and sounds at different times in the year could act as a template to develop future guides focused on rhôs and associated habitats.

The Wye Valley Walk is a well-established long-distance, regional route following the river's course for 136 miles from near its source on Plynlimon, high in the Cambrian Mountains to Chepstow. Map analysis showed that a section of the Wye Valley Walk from Rhayader to Llanwrthwl west of the A470 passes adjacent to Coed Dolifor Nature Reserve (Woodland Trust) to Llanwrthwl. South of Llanwrthwl, the walk goes close along the banks of the Wye, where it may be possible to view rhôs pasture on the other side of the river on the large meander in the river at Dolcreigfyn. This area of rhôs is accessible perhaps from Doldowlod caravan park. <https://doldowlodcaravanpark.co.uk/site/>

Several agri-tourism businesses within and on the periphery of the focus area provide opportunities to wander through their farm's tranquil areas and explore the woodlands and wetlands for bird and wildlife watching. In addition, the Willow Way hosts a range of

workshops on Shakespeare's text, poetry, art and nature. The trail can be viewed by appointment and is supported by the open-air living willow theatre, The Willow Globe, which offers performances, festivals and workshops.

Wildlife Guide Provision

Analysis and discussion with tourism providers did not find any local businesses currently offering wildlife guide provision other than events run by the Wildlife Trust and Trust volunteers and the Local Natural History Group, Rhayader by Nature. In recent years this provision has been further limited by COVID-19 restrictions.

Marketing

Measuring the actual economic impact of wildlife in a tourism setting is highly complex. Wildlife-related activities may not be the sole purpose of a tourist's visit, yet the county's wildlife can be a unique selling point for attracting both domestic and international tourism spend (Curtin, 2013). Serious wildlife tourists visit destinations for the primary purpose of seeing specific species. In contrast, casual wildlife tourists, on the other hand, are interested in a wide range of attractions where wildlife viewing may be one activity that they participate in while on holiday. Tourists can vary in experience and outlook, and it is the human dynamic of wildlife tourism that needs to be incorporated, planned for and managed. The conundrum is how best to reap the positive aspects of visitation such as direct and indirect visitor spending, the opportunities for interpretation, raising awareness and education about the natural world, and the potential income for rural businesses while managing the negative impacts caused by a growing number of visitors who may descend on fragile habitats and species (Morrison, 1995).

The Mid-Wales landscape encompasses many habitats from rivers, valleys, woodlands, meadows and mountains and abundant wildlife. Rhayader and district are well catered for in terms of tourism marketing and a list of marketing organisations is provided in the references and resources section of this report. In addition, farm accommodation providers interviewed during this study have their own websites, social media and direct marketing methods. There are also helpful toolkits that have been developed to support tourism in Wales, which can support marketing strategies <https://www.visitwales.com/info/travel-trade/useful-information/toolkit>

7. Recommendations

Favourable conditions for successful wildlife tourism are often based on the appeal of particular species, such as the rare, exotic, charismatic and flagship, accessible habitats and watching animal behaviour that occurs within a relatively small spatial area (Reynolds and Braithwaite, 2001). The potential for wildlife experiences in the project area is vast, the range of focal species is broad and does not merely include the charismatic or flagship species but also the unusual and the unique, such as birds, bats, glow-worms, moths and butterflies.

Crucial to our research which informed the recommendations to develop the potential for a wildlife tourism offer that has arts and heritage as its driver is the 2009 'Development of Wildlife Tourism for Rhayader and District' report and the recent follow-on work and knowledge of staff and volunteers at CARAD and Rhayader by Nature.

As stated in the 2009 report, *“most local people are supportive of the development of wildlife tourism, with the majority of visitors to the Rhayader area coming to enjoy the scenery, wildlife, walking, exercise, fresh air and peace and quiet.*

The 2009 report was extensive and much has been actioned since then, including the appointment of a community arts and heritage officer who has done much to action some of the findings. Through consultation, we have found the following observations and recommendations still stand:

Recognition that the quality of the visitor experience would increase through:

- Provision of new and all-weather wildlife viewing areas and walkways/trails
- Improved and creative interpretation of “What to Spot,” possibly using information technology
- Provision of more out-of-season experiences and facilities
- Provision of leaders/guides with wildlife identification skills, or by making the connection and developing working relationships between walking businesses and wildlife specialists.

Wildlife Photography and Guided Walks

The 2009 report makes specific reference to photography – noting:

“Winter can be a difficult time for visitors as well as wildlife, but a large array of charismatic species can be encountered. Dippers can be heard singing, ravens displaying, as well as other additional winter wildlife. However, the scenery and local landscape are spectacular in their

own right, especially the autumn colour in October and November. Photography is a very large hobby and industry with many wildlife watchers also armed with cameras. Opportunity exists to market the area for photography. Several shops host local landscape photography and many operators have facilities for providing temporary indoor exhibitions”.

During winter, an incentive for a wildlife photographic competition could be advertised to help promote out-of-season tourism, such as photographing animals in the snow or nocturnal animals.

There is potential for further development of activities such as guided walks, combined with the development of wildlife packages and workshops at Doldowlod Estate and the Willow Globe, forming the hubs for piloting seasonal wildlife experiences. The Knepp Estate in West Sussex showcases a range of popular guided “safaris” and workshops. Their website is a useful resource to see what is possible to achieve and ideas for costing workshops and guided walks/safaris <https://www.kneppsafaris.co.uk/safaris>

Contemporary Art – The catalyst for increasing nature-based tourism

Over the years, reports and consultations have identified an interest in developing an arts and heritage programme to complement and enhance the tourism offer in Radnorshire.

Artist-led interventions can address many of the key concerns of visitors, businesses, and farmers. They can provide investment and experiences sympathetic to the surroundings, good value for money, and a unique marketing angle to attract more visitors.

Case Study 2: INSTAR. Creating deeper connections to the natural world through contemporary art.

One UK based arts organisation is worth referencing <https://www.we-are-instar.co.uk/about>

“With our deep relationship with nature, we have a passion to make a difference and to fight for the protection of the natural world. We are rooted and committed to researching and developing our knowledge and experience, to further our understanding and awareness of the challenges and changes facing the natural world. Through our projects and collaborations, we believe we can restore a sense of wonder where one was lost and build a fresh sense of wonder when one had never existed before, enthusing a creative approach to the natural world is the best way towards a future that loves and cares for the natural world.

We have worked within the environmental sector for many years, leading projects and contributing to activity within the field of nature conservation. We greatly value and endeavour to continue establishing new relationships with conservation charities and projects, bringing a creative approach to the work they are aiming to achieve.”

Artist-led walks, interactive technologies and interpretation panels.

The unique wildlife elements of the rhôs pasture, as described within this report and well documented in others, could be 'brought to life in innovative ways through working with artists. Sound art maps and encouraging visitors to record and upload their own sound experiences encourage people to connect with their surroundings, bringing benefits to well-being.

An example of an artist-led participations audio project is Sounds of the Forest, where you can "*recharge under the canopy and record your sounds of the forest.*" This project came out of the annual three-day Timber festival at the heart of the National Forest in Feanedock, UK; this festival celebrates the connection to trees and woodlands through music, art and ideas.

In 2020, the festival had to be postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak, but thanks to the support of Arts Council England, it continued to connect people with nature by collecting the sounds of woodlands and forests from all around the world to create a beautiful soundmap bringing together aural tones and textures from the world's woodlands. This concept could be developed across Radnorshire, inviting people to visit the different natural areas and record one minute of the sounds they hear.

There are many examples of artist-led walks in nature, and many may have taken place in Radnorshire already. An example of a particularly successful project that was publicly funded and also acquired a considerable amount of publicity and an increase in visitors from far and wide is the art trail in the Peak District created by Jarvis Cocker follows in the footsteps of some of those who took part in the mass trespass onto Kinder Scout in 1932.

<https://letsgopeakdistrict.co.uk/be-kinder/> had the aim of getting people to think about how to protect the landscape, Jarvis Cocker created the walk in collaboration with the National Trust, which looks after Kinder Scout, as well as Turner Prize winner Jeremy Deller and other artists. Under the name BE KINDER, the art trail is inspired by the mass trespass on 24 April 1932 when three groups set out to trespass onto the moorland of Kinder Scout, the highest point of the Peak District, approaching from different directions. It was part of a campaign credited with forging the way to open access to the countryside and the creation of the UK's national parks – of which the Peak District was the first in April 1951. This is just one example of something unique about an area – in this case, the creation of the first national park is used as a hook to create an artist-led experience.

Case Study 3: Chester, Designed by Nature

An interesting case study is the recently commissioned six-month community arts project called Chester, Designed by Nature, which aims to embrace and explore the world surrounding us through a free programme of art, activities, performance, storytelling, and extraordinary large-scale sculptural interventions will appear across the city.

Artist Jack Brown worked with Cheshire wildlife trust, collecting night camera footage of local wild animals. The footage captures a glimpse of foxes, badgers, mice, hedgehogs, deer, and beavers. His work looks at the overlooked, things that should be given more than a passing glance, moments that would benefit from magnification. <https://wildrumpus.org.uk/shop-front-night-camera-animal-jack-brown/>



Shop—front-night-camera-animal, Jack Brown

The project has three seasonal bursts to be developed with Cheshire-based outdoor arts specialists [Wild Rumpus CIC](#) and partners such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Designed by Nature is a chance to be inspired by our surroundings and develop a renewed appreciation for and a different perspective on nature and its seasonality.

As stated in the 2009 report, exhibitions and competitions create interest and can be quickly established and possibly championed by a celebrated professional photographer like Andrew Fusek Peters <https://www.fusekphotos.com/0816f178c6-content>; He is an artist who

encourages and inspires children to explore their creativity through poetry and photography by engaging with nature.

The study area is unique, and visitors will pay to participate in organised workshops to see habitats and photograph scenes that aren't easily found elsewhere. There is a lot of potential to harness opportunities for wildlife experiences and successfully deliver a range of income-generating experiences, whether they are artist-led walks like Be Kinder or other income-generating self-sufficient and sustainable workshops like those offered at the Knepp Estate in England and at Denmark farm in Wales.

Case Study 4. Denmark Farm Conservation Centre

Denmark Farm Conservation Centre near Lampeter, Ceredigion, showcases a range of possibilities for landowners to facilitate wildlife events and experiences. In the 1980s, this was an intensively managed farm with few opportunities for wildlife. The picture is very different today, and nature has created a wildlife haven. The centre runs wildlife-inspired training events and experiences throughout the year and provides accommodation, with an eco-lodge open all year and camping in the summer months.

<https://www.denmarkfarm.org.uk/>



Denmark Farm Conservation Centre

8. Conclusions

To make any destination an exemplary wildlife tourism model, there needs to be a cohesive development and management plan to improve the wildlife tourism infrastructure, widen the appeal to capture the out-of-season tourist, and capture the desires of the wildlife enthusiast. An integrated and joined-up approach to wildlife tourism development and conservation would enable a sustainable industry that directs the visitor pressure away from honey-pot sites, provides education and interpretation, outlines voluntary codes of conduct for tourists and operators, instigates research into carrying capacities, and proposes visitor management plans for holistic wildlife experiences.

This report has demonstrated how the presence of wildlife and wildlife watching opportunities is potentially more than a niche market. Wildlife guides and organised events were considered a fundamental mechanism for generating direct income while protecting species and minimising disturbances. A sustainable wildlife tourism industry may be currently limited in the study area due possibly to poor networking and information exchange regarding promotion and managing visitor numbers. There is a need to nurture strategic working relationships between destination marketers, conservation NGOs, and private sector operators to co-create an engaging visitor experience or package for all types of wildlife tourists.

How the arts can drive the potential to increase nature-based tourism around rhôs pasture and its associated habitats was only part of the brief and further work specifically on what has already been successful and what both the local community and visitors could benefit from may need further consideration. Particularly if additional funding is sought as a case for investment, in terms of the need and audience development potential, including what people would be prepared to pay and how it could be sustained in the long-term. There is a case to pilot and evaluate some targeted activity to ascertain impact potential.



Rush Baskets made as part of the project at the Willow Globe, Radnorshire Wildlife Trust

9. Action Plan: The next steps

Adding value to the existing offer and improving infrastructure

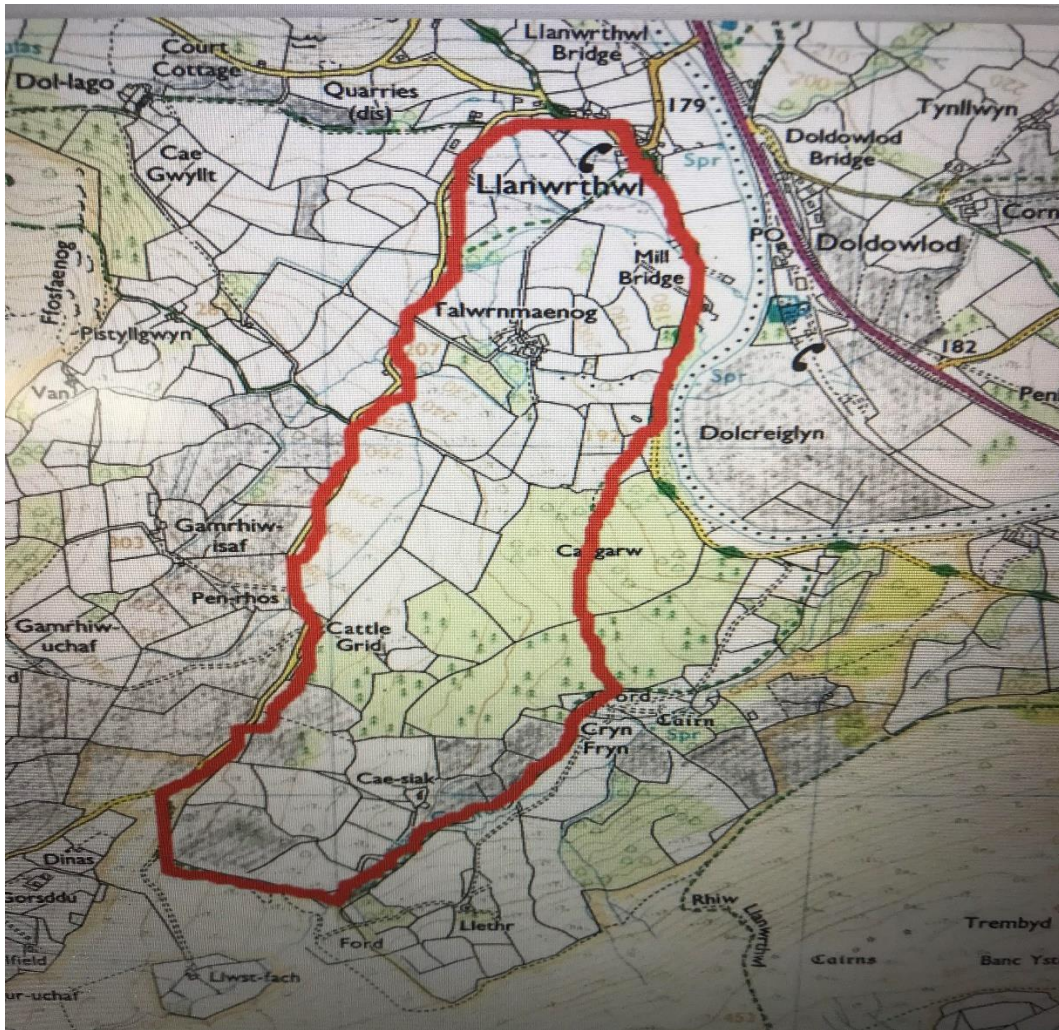
Due to the “hard sell” of rhôs pasture alone as a wildlife experience, the study found that it would be more feasible to bring awareness and appreciation of this important habitat into existing tourism offers through developing wildlife packages that include rhôs and associated wildlife. For example, The Rhôs Pasture Restoration Project will be building a new accessible viewing platform to offer views over the marshy grassland-rhôs pasture mosaic at The Willow Globe Penlanole, with the establishment of a pond to add wildlife interest.

This parcel of land is bordered along the south and west by a bridleway, which is slightly raised above the pasture, offering easy access for all and opportunities for wildlife watching and walks that enables viewing the habitat safely without walking through the rhôs (which is difficult to walk through due to the tussocky nature of Molina grass, boggy areas and hidden ditches). Similar opportunities for viewing rhôs are provided at Doldowlod Estate, which has parking close to a spectacular area of rhôs for viewing or getting in a bit closer.

Establishment of a Rhôs Walking Route

In addition to the existing nature trails that have been developed at Penlanole through the meadows and woodlands, the bridleway offers potential for a circular walk through rhôs pasture on neighbouring land, heading north to join the B-road for a short distance to pick up the public footpath which goes through rhôs pastures at Cornel before linking again with the bridleway back to Penlanole. This route needs more research of the possibilities and liaison with the landowners, where public rights of way (PRoW) cross their land in partnership with the local council PRoW Officers for support with improving condition and signage before being able to promote this as a walking route.

However, the opportunity mapping exercise also identified a circular route south of Llanwrthwl (Wright, 2007), which follows an unclassified road to Hodrid (also part of the Wye Valley Walk) and then public rights of way through woodland to the Nant Cymrun. Here the route runs alongside several parcels of rhôs pasture identified as part of the project, back along a quiet road to Llanwrthwl. This route could also offer the opportunity to include an interpretation board to raise awareness of rhôs and associated habitats and species in the village or adjacent to the habitat near Pen-Rhôs.



Map (© Crown copyright 2015) showing the opportunity for a short circular from Llanwrthwl, with rhôs pastures shaded grey along the nant Cymrun. This route is published in the booklet “Walking around Rhayader and the Elan Valley” (Martin Right, 2007), and therefore it is hoped would be accessible. It is described as a 3 mile (1.45 hr) “gentle walk in a wild setting”.

This leads to the following action to support the development of potential Rhôs Walking Routes.

Becoming more sustainable by working together

There is potential to collaborate with other projects in the study area, such as The Ramblers Cymru’s Paths to Wellbeing Project’ funded through the Welsh Government Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing (ENRaW) scheme. In Mid Wales, the Paths to Wellbeing Project will be working with the people of Llechryd, Penparcau, Rhayader, and Llanwrthwl to help put walking at the heart of these communities.

The researchers of this study have discussed the opportunity to work in collaboration with the Paths to Wellbeing Regional Officer – Mid Wales with regards to the potential to share

knowledge and best practice and the possibility of support through their local walk leadership training, which could lead to increased business start-up opportunities for wildlife guides.

For landowners that have rhôs pasture on their land to provide wildlife events or experiences without accommodation facilities, there is an excellent opportunity to work with well-established accommodation providers in the area to provide an immediate solution.

Maintaining the momentum and piloting new initiatives

The study has found a lot of interest for developing a wildlife package, but this will need additional funding. Possible funding mechanisms are provided for follow-up in Appendix B.

Photography – a sustainable income-generating opportunity

Finally, the importance of wildlife photography to the area should not be forgotten. Radnorshire has many excellent professional and amateur photographers who have visited or live nearby. Andrew Fusek Peters is a famous wildlife and landscape photographer of ‘Dip’ fame who lives on the Shropshire borders.

Photography courses, books, magazines, and social media following present opportunities for Radnorshire and the Rhôs Pasture Restoration project to visually market to wider audiences.



10. References and Resources

Arts Council of Wales, [Corporate and Operational plans | Arts Council of Wales](#)

Chester: Designed by Nature <https://wildrumpus.org.uk/chester-designed-by-nature/>

Butterfly Conservation <https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/marsh-fritillary>

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Appendix A: Development of Wildlife Tourism Business Survey

Current Offer:

1. Do you **currently offer** nature-based/wildlife tourism as part of your holiday-let/farm business? Can you explain a little about this and what you find interests your guests most?
2. What is your **current audience** and **capacity**? Is it primarily couples of a certain age, families, single explorers, global travellers, holidaymakers from the UK, or more local /national? (Please provide a general overview if you can).
3. How do you **currently market** your tourism business; do you promote wildlife experiences, and do you have a specific target audience in mind?
4. Is your business a member of any tourism associations, exemplars, or business awards?
5. What are your views on the current levels of tourism to the area and your business?
6. What are the **barriers/challenges** that prevent you from offering any or more wildlife experiences to your guests?

Future Opportunities:

1. What opportunities would you like to expand on / explore anew if additional resources were available?
2. What other ways would you consider to **better market** your business to various audiences? E.g., a local “wildlife stays brochure,” Airbnb experiences, Trip Advisor, social media (Facebook, Instagram), other ideas
3. Do you collaborate with other local tourism providers in the project area? Would you welcome a more supportive cooperative approach and how would you like to see that happen?

Appendix B: Potential Sources of Funding for Longer-Term Sustainability

Grants online are the UK's most comprehensive and up to date UK grant funding information service <https://www.grantsonline.org.uk/region-news/wales/>

Arts Council Wales

For any artist-led intervention, Arts Council Wales is an obvious source. “Create” supports priorities as set out in their corporate plan, “For the Benefit of All,” enabling the Arts Council to meet priorities around reaching more deeply into all communities across Wales, nurturing creative talent, and supporting sector resilience.

The program is open for applications of up to £10,000 all year round – for anything over, some deadlines appear to be roughly quarterly. They are particularly keen to work more effectively, collaborating more imaginatively with like-minded partners across Wales. As well as a possible source of future investment (small pilot projects), it could be opportune to look at whether there are any partnership/MOU agreement type arrangements with Arts Council, The Wildlife Trust, or Tourism bodies and try to establish some common aims for longer-term, sustainable working.

Here is a helpful example [Memorandum of Understanding between Arts Council England and The National Trust](#)

Esmee Fairbairn

The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation has been supporting, amongst other things, arts and nature for 60 years. As a UK-wide organisation, it covers Wales. Their most recent strategy aims to improve our natural world, secure a fairer future and strengthen the bonds in communities in the UK at its core. They do this by contributing all that they can to unlock change by people and organisations with brilliant ideas who share those goals.

Recently they launched the Environmental Finance and Learning Fund, a new collaborative fund, to help unlock significant new funding for nature recovery. They also administer a grant scheme called Space for Nature with the aim of:

Protecting and creating more space for nature enables the restoration of damaged ecosystems and degraded landscapes. It's also essential that the benefits of being close to nature are accessible to all.

Esmee Fairbairn is aware that the scale of nature’s decline in the UK cannot be addressed by our existing nature reserves nor without fundamentally changing the way we use land. They recognise that this decline is mirrored by a growing movement for connecting with nature and finding and creating more wild spaces for wildlife - enabling natural processes to shape land and sea, repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes.

This is an excellent time to encourage people's enthusiasm to achieve better land use and build the evidence for policymakers. As well as supporting the restoration of nature across the UK, the foundation also wants to engage communities to lead change so that nature is accessible to all to preserve and improve species health and habitats.

They are particularly looking for projects that have long-term outcomes around:

- Space for nature, and biodiversity, is restored at scale in the UK.
- More wild spaces for people in the UK to access, understand, enjoy, and value - particularly those who have not experienced wild nature.

Creative, Confident Communities – Another Esmee Fairbairn grant-giving strand:

As well as preserving and improving species' health and habitats, Esmee Fairbairn also wants to support projects that strengthen the bonds in communities, helping local people to build vibrant, confident places where they can fulfil their creative, human, and economic potential.

Places where the local economy works better for the people who live there, where there is equality of access to arts and culture, and where communities are at the heart of change.

They particularly want to support work that:

- Transforms places through a collaborative approach to culture co-created with local people alongside cultural organisations and other regional players.
- Is led by local people, is inclusive, and represents the diverse communities in a place.
- Is ambitious with the potential for scale through a cross-sector or multi-agency approach.
- Is linked to wider networks and can share learning and contribute to a broader understanding of co-creation and co-design.