

Annual Review 2021-2022

Chairman's Report

Our plans to transform the land at Pentwyn into a haven for wildlife and biodiversity are brought to life in an illustrated Vision which we have created to guide us over the next year, five years and 30 years. We have already hosted a number of visitors at Pentwyn including our Patron Iolo Williams, and the Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts Craig Bennett. In May we were delighted to show round James Owen who is Deputy Director of Land Management for the Welsh Government and in charge of developing the new Sustainable Farming Scheme.

We have been sorry to say goodbye to a number of Trustees and pleased to welcome others. Jenny Fox stood down in September. She was followed by Pam Knight and then our Treasurer Heather Price who retired at the end of 2021. Since then, we have also had to say farewell to Helen Barnes and Vanessa Garwood. These five Trustees brought significant skills to Council which will be sorely missed, as will their friendship, and I thank them all.

More happily, in the Spring we Co-Opted two new Trustees, Jen Newman and Rosie Wood. Jen is currently the Visitor Experience Manager in the Elan Valley, employed by Dwr Cymru Welsh Water. She has particular expertise in arboriculture. Rosie has recently retired following a career in senior management in the public, private and third sectors. She has fulfilled senior roles at, for example, Natural England (working closely with Defra,) the Audit Commission and the Care Quality Commission. She is a Trustee both at The Badger Trust and the Middle Marches Community Land Trust where she is also

Vice-Chair. Rosie has kindly agreed to serve as Interim Treasurer for a year or until a permanent replacement for Heather is found. Local organic farmer Richard Thomas was then Co-Opted at our May Council meeting. Richard keeps a small herd of Dexter cattle at his farm near Painscastle. He is also a lead Advisor for Natural England on National Trails, covering the South-West and West Midlands including the Offa's Dyke Path. Welcome to them all.

Until the spring most of our meetings were held online, as they were throughout the pandemic. Now, however, we are largely back to meeting in person, and in May we held our first face-to-face Council meeting for two years. Two members who were unable to come in person attended online, so we now have the catchily-titled "hybrid meeting" to add to our portfolio.

Since the spring the Trust has been going through its first comprehensive external governance review, generously funded in part by The Oakdale Trust. Our consultant, Uday Thakkar, has now delivered his draft report, which we will discuss in Council over the coming weeks.

In tandem, we have been working to create a new formal Strategy and Business plan for the Trust. Trustees and Staff have been taking part in face-to-face discussion sessions facilitated by a consultant, Janel Fone. Members will be updated on both the governance review and the strategy at this year's AGM. We are confident that from these processes will emerge a robust framework within which RWT can operate and progress over the coming years.

Jenny Chryss Chair

Honorary Officers

2021 - 2022

President

Julian Gibson-Watt

Vice-Presidents

Nina Laborde & Ray Woods

Chairman

Jenny Chyrss

Vice-Chairman

Chris Ledbury

Company Secretary

Edmund Hayward

Treasurer

Heather Price (to 31.12.21)

Rosie Wood (from 20.02.22)

Members of Council

Helen Barnes (to 03.03.22)

Gafyn Blakeway

Jenny Fox (to 23.09.21)

Vanessa Garwood (to
23.02.22)

Pam Knight (to 4.01.22)

Stephen Simmons

Bill Stow

Alice Tite

Jen Newman (from 20.02.22)

Honorary Legal Advisor

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Company No. 2132736

Chief Executive Officer's Report

2021 was a year of growth, growth in impact, staff and volunteer numbers and supporters. We began this financial year as a body of 6 staff, growing to 22 posts – which equates to 16 full-time employees. This has greatly increased the spread and volume of our work. We have engaged with land-owners, communities, members, and stakeholders across a wide range of activities, as part of our 4 main projects. Further increases in staff number may come, as funding bids develop in 2022-23.

This increase in size, has come with a comparable increase in turnover, meaning we have had to update our office systems. 2021 saw us appoint RWT's first Finance Manager, Christine Sampson. Christine, working part-time, has been busy moving us on to accounting software, and away from cashbooks; designing reports so we can track and monitor the progress of our grants as part of a move to full profit and loss accounts.

We have also appointed our first Digital Marketing and Fund-raising role, undertaken by Chloe Jackson, working part-time for 2 days a week. Chloe has been able to transform our approach to all things online, making videos, utilising online advertising, and tracking our engagement with members and supporters. This activity has seen our supporter numbers rise. Supporters are kept up to date on RWT's work through our e-newsletter, which reaches over 1200 inboxes, and rising, every month.

Our membership has also increased, passing the long-held target of 1000 in summer, rising to 1217 in May 2022. And welcome to all new members who may be reading this report for the first time, your support is invaluable to us. The unrestricted income your support provides, makes planning and funding core functions such as governance, admin, and finance easier. You are also valuable members of the community, who can support and champion nature, climate, and our work with communities. The larger our membership, the bigger our voice.

As we moved in and out of lockdown, it was at times, a challenging year, with staff working largely from home. However, when restrictions were eased, we managed to make the most of the opportunity to run and attend events, ensuring RWT had a good presence within the community in summer 2021. We are well adapted to online working now, meeting on video calls regularly. However, with a new team in place it has been as important to make sure we meet in person, onsite, to keep those human connections and build a positive team spirit. The year ahead will hold many challenges, some external, and global, some local. Whatever happens we feel that RWT has built an excellent team and is in a strong position to ensure we continue to do all we can for nature's recovery and to inspire people to take action for wildlife and climate. Our Save the Wye campaign has been supported across Wales



and England and has facilitated many useful meetings with decision makers.

Thank you to all those that have supported this, both in name and with donations. We have been working on a practical solutions thread to our work on the Wye, its condition being vitally important to nature in our vice-county as the catchment covers almost the entire area.

We have also been active in supporting the community lead Citizen Science groups working to test water quality and monitor the health of the Wye; hosting a dedicated member of staff, funded by an appeal run by River Action, for 12 months, starting in spring 2022.

Nature Reserves

2021 saw Jonathan Stone move on, after being with RWT for 18 years. He finished in April 2022 This was sad news for the team, but we wish Jonathan well and thank him for all his hard work for RWT. We have recruited a replacement, who will start in September 2022. Over the spring and summer, we have had some help from 2 people working on contract support. We have felt the lack of a full-time person in this role and at Pentwyn, the summer period has been very busy. The team have worked together well, covering essential works but we are all looking forward to having a full complement of roles in place come autumn 2022. As Covid restrictions eased in Wales we witnessed a 50% increase in visitors to our larger, more accessible, reserves. Our facilities and the access we could provide to them varied with the situation; sadly, we were unable to provide refreshments at Gilfach at any point in 2021 but are pleased that this has returned in 2022. Volunteer numbers have remained strong, with numbers growing as people move to the area or refocus their lives. This has been assisted by the creation of a volunteer co-ordinator role, funded by the Covid recovery grant, distributed by Powys County Council. We have utilised this post to build our network of volunteer wardens and increase the level of practical support we have for some of our most accessible reserves, such as Burfa Bog and Withybeds.

We have been successful in securing Nature Networks Funding for £66,800 for capital works at Burfa, Llanbwchllyn and Gilfach. The project, focuses on grassland and wetland management, running from September 2021 to March 2023 and will pay for bridges, boardwalks and livestock handling pens, electro collars (no-fence) for cattle, tools, and equipment.

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PROJECTS

Cefn Cenarth – woodland for a biodiverse future

This project, funded from September 2020 by the Landfill Tax Communities Scheme, finished in September 2021. The project conducted monitoring, increased the number of volunteers involved with the site and improved and increased the interpretation on site.

Stand for Nature Wales

This pan-Wales Wildlife Trust project, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund  has had a busy year, seeing us start a youth group, for 9–24 year-olds. We currently have 11 members, all within the younger age range. Contacting older teenagers has been challenging, but we have set up a youth e-news, with 42 subscribers and growing. We have launched a trainee scheme for young people but are yet to find our first recruits. Successful applicants will receive training and experience in practical conservation over 3-12 months, working across the teams in RWT, under the title: Nature Recovery and Climate Change traineeship. Getting to this stage has been a lot of work for the SFN team, but we feel that this area of work can become a great legacy for the project and offers long-term funding potential increasing continuity and the opportunities for young people in the area.

We ran events at a wide variety of locations and working with our youth group have supported community initiatives such as Toad patrol in Llandrindod.

We are currently working in 7 schools in the Vice-County, including Presteigne High School, which we hope will lead to more work with older teenagers. We have undertaken wildflower meadow creation, tree planting, litter picking and vegetation clearance in 'wild' areas with schools to help encourage community involvement and the next generation of environmentalists. We are now working with over 250 children on a regular basis.

Rhos Pasture Restoration Project

This Welsh Government funded project completed its 1st year

of 2, engaging with over 20 landowners and working with the community through arts and heritage. We have been supporting landowners with advice about grazing regimes, undertaking surveys and baseline monitoring, and conducting practical management such as fencing and rush cutting.

We have commissioned feasibility studies on tourism, eco system services and Rhos products, which have been very insightful in to how we can promote the cultural, social and economic value of this internationally important habitat. Commissioning and appointing these contracts required a lot of hard work from the team, now they are complete, 2022-23 will be the year to share these findings and build on their recommendations. We have also been carrying out practical workdays on Rhos pasture, allowing people to learn and engage with a key mid-Wales habitat, learning more about its wildlife. Through the Arts and Community post we have appointed an artist in residence, who is working with landowners and who will showcase their work through a series of exhibitions in 2022.



Green Connections

Green Connections was formerly signed off by Welsh Government, the funder, in July 2021, but we began the project 'at risk' in April 2021 and what was a 3-year project had been condensed to 2. This has been challenging at times, but we have a strong team in place, and we have been able to deliver a high output of work to date. RWT host and co-ordinate this project, working with our sister Wildlife Trusts across Powys. This project is broad and has been well received by landowners and the community with all staff reporting that demand for advice and help exceeds the resources we have. We plan to seek further project funding to extend this work stream as working with landowners, statutory bodies and Community groups is key to achieving our strategic aims.

In 2021 the project visited and gave advice to 15 landowners, which were mostly small holdings, owned by private individuals. In 2022 we will focus on connecting landowners and their work in priority clusters, tying in with the biodiversity hotspots mapped in the nature recovery network. The advice and support given ranged from practical site management to soil samples and surveys.

We are working with Powys County Council to support their efforts to improve the management of road verges for wildlife. We also Chaired, and attended, the Local Nature Partnership; a chance to showcase our work, build support from community actors, and show support for Powys County Council's work with the Nature Recovery Action Plan. We have been particularly active in Presteigne, Rhayader, and Llandrindod Wells.

Citizen Science

We directly supported the training and set-up of Friends of the Lugg Citizen Science groups and have been supporting the Friends of the Upper Wye.

Working with River Action, we have been able to Crowdfund for a support post for Citizen Scientist groups, which began in 2022. The concern for the condition of the River Wye remains high, with more and more local action groups starting up. RWT want to ensure that the efforts of the community are put to best result, and we feel we have a role in helping to co-ordinate efforts. In 2022 we hope to secure further funding for more work in this area.

Pentwyn

Probably our most significant development in 2021 was the purchase, using a 'philanthropic' loan from 4 private lenders, of Pentwyn Farm, a 164-acre livestock farm, which we will manage extensively for wildlife. We began by holding an event for the surrounding community to come and meet us, followed up by events for members and volunteers. We have developed a 30-year vision for the site and have commissioned a video and illustrations to help promote this, as part of an appeal. Please check our website and social media streams for updates on these. We have been fundraising to repay the loan, submitting several grant applications. We were grateful for a donation of £1,750 from SWG Construction, which we will use for some early fence repairs, to allow us to graze the site, our plan being to tender for low numbers of cattle in 2022.

We have also secured a legacy pledge, which makes a substantial contribution to repayment and have begun receiving grant funding from our first round of applications. Our public appeal to help raise funds for the loan repayment will begin in late Summer 2022.

We have struggled to appoint a project manager, recruitment has been hard for all Trusts and NGOs during the past year, as competition is high. We have reformulated the role as a Head of Reserves and Land Management; a permanent post, which we hope will bring success.

2021 was focused on laying the foundations for this ambitious and long-term project. 2022 will see us focus on surveys and baseline studies while building support in the community for our work and fundraising to repay the loan.

Legacies, Gifts and Fundraising

We received several substantial legacies and gifts over the year for which we are very grateful.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

Our principal target is to continue the success we have had this financial year, both financially and in terms of our impact.

I will be working with staff and trustees to update the RWT strategy and business plan, detailing how we will manage and invest our recent legacies to ensure resilience around our systems and support functions, and to facilitate growth in activity and staffing numbers. Practically this means starting with a vision for what we want Radnorshire and Radnorshire

Wildlife Trust to be like by 2030; what will we have achieved, what will be happening with nature and in our communities. We will be seeking views on this process over the coming year, so keep an eye out for updates and eNews.

At an operational level we will set out a plan for seeking successive streams of grant funding to achieve our core charitable objectives and rise to the challenge's nature and society face.

The Wildlife Trusts have a new collective strategy, which will help guide us here in Radnorshire, this runs from 2021-2026; there are 3 principal strands, all working toward nature's restoration, these are:

- Ensure 30% of the land and 30% of the sea is actively managed for wildlife by 2030 and that this is enshrined in law and properly regulated and funded
- achieve net zero as an organisation by 2030 and undertake work to help mitigate, adapt and minimise the impact of climate change.
- empower 1 in 4 people to take action for nature by supporting people and communities to make positive change for wildlife.

These are big aims, but they need to be. The State of Nature shows us that outside of our nature reserves nature is still in steep decline. We must focus on the fact that we can make changes and that there is still time to change the course of those charts that map loss. You will see us slowly shift away from just conservation to creation and enhancement.

Our approach to inspiring and connecting people is subtly shifting too. You will hear us talking more about Team Wilder and our plans to help build community support for change. A cultural move to supporting, encouraging, and facilitating action, rather than always leading and being in control. RWT, along with many other Trusts, have seen a rise in interest in tackling people's concerns within their local area backed by a strong desire to 'just do something positive'; the social science on this shows that movements led by community leaders are proven to be longer lasting, better supported and ultimately more effective, than those brought on to a community.

You will hear us talking a lot more about climate change, and not just through our Stand For Nature project. Climate change is the second biggest threat to nature we face, after its direct destruction. We have begun work on reducing our carbon footprint to achieve net zero by 2030. We have brought our target forward to 2030 as we believe that without a rapid decarbonisation in society and a move to manage the land in a way that sequesters more carbon we will experience severe impacts from climate change: floods, drought and increased heatwaves. This will dry out our precious peat soils and make managing the land, for nature, for food, for tourism much harder. We will be encouraging low carbon lifestyles and advocating and educating about mitigation and adaptation.

We will be looking to work with as many landowners and managers as staff resource allows, giving advice and supporting management for wildlife. We want to see a nature recovery network built across Radnorshire, Powys and Wales and will work with partner organisations, including the 5 Welsh Wildlife Trusts to achieve this. We will champion low impact, regenerative and nature friendly farming and land use and help showcase the positive effect that this has on Wales' economy.

We hope we can buy more land to manage as nature reserve, with the priority being land which is adjacent to existing land holdings. But we will be bold and look at large holdings, within the nature recovery network, that could help secure our vision for a Wilder Radnorshire.

We will also advocate, and when necessary, campaign for nature at all levels of decision making across Radnorshire and Wales. Improving the quality of our rivers is a priority for us; rivers are linking corridors which when healthy are the building blocks for connecting habitats and giving wildlife space to move around at landscape scale. Rivers also provide life within and around their waters and when rich in life sequester carbon, having long been vital in the global carbon cycle. We cannot allow wildlife in and along our county's rivers to be undermined by failing water quality from rising nutrient levels and continued, unchecked, pollution.

We must also rise to face the challenges of a new agricultural subsidy system. We are likely to lose the Basic Payment Scheme, which provides some £30,000 of funding for us each year. We do not yet know what will replace this.

We do know that the Agriculture Bill (Wales) is proposing payments for public benefits, such as clean air, clean water, healthy soils, public access and nature, but we don't yet have the details of these schemes.

The funds from UK treasury to Wales will be reduced, now we have left the European Union and there are moves to increase the role of private finance in the future of land management. RWT will need to prepare for these changes and position itself to play an active role in working with landowners to help them maximise impact under the schemes, while ensuring we can fund our core conservation work on our nature reserves.

We will need to continue to improve and update our systems and perhaps looks to share some 'back office' services with other Wildlife Trusts. This will ensure we have a strong foundation for growth and change.

We will also look to develop an active and outward facing communications and fundraising strategy, which will hopefully lead to a growth in our supporter and membership database. Membership, appeals and legacies are all so important and have contributed massively to the work we have done for wildlife to date.

One thing we are sure of is that there is much to do and plenty of opportunity to work with the people of Radnorshire to ensure that nature is put into recovery, the climate is kept within stable limits and communities thrive. We look forward to working with you all on this mission and thank those that have and will continue to support us.

James Hitchcock
Chief Executive Officer

Gilfach on a misty morning (photograph Silvia Cojocaru)

