

Coetir
Anian



Cambrian
Wildwood

What's been happening at
Cambrian Wildwood?

September 2023

“Bwlch Corog is always a nice place to come, it’s good to feel part of an important long term project.”

-Volunteer

The past year has seen significant changes at Cambrian Wildwood, with many positive steps being made to secure the future of nature restoration and nature connection at Bwlch Corog.

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Welcome to new staff

Our Project Director, Simon Ayres, retired in December 2022, having worked tirelessly to establish Cambrian Wildwood and set it on firm foundations. We then welcomed our new Director, Katy Harris, who has longstanding experience in the conservation sector in mid-Wales, working at the Centre for Alternative Technology, Coed Lleol – Small Woods, and RSPB Cymru.



Katy Harris

We also created two new staff posts. Deb Joffe joined the team in October 2022 as Fundraising Manager. Deb has worked and volunteered in the charity sector for fifteen years and is experienced in small charity grant making, fundraising, and development. In June this year, Neil Groves was appointed as Habitat and Species Manager. Neil's background is in practical land management, ecological monitoring and working with volunteers and contractors.



Deb Joffe



Neil Groves

The Cambrian Wildwood team is still expanding! We are currently recruiting for a Project Officer to assist with delivery of our education and community activities, including volunteer days, provide administrative support for the team, and help with practical land tasks.

Money, money, money!

Our financial position has dramatically improved. We secured funding from numerous sources including major grants from the National Lottery's Nature Networks Fund, Esmée Fairbairn, the Waterloo Foundation, the Postcode Community Trust, and Wales's National Peatland Action Programme. We now have sufficient funding for 80% of the budget up to April 2025.

We're also deeply grateful to our supporters who made a significant contribution towards our work through the Big Give Green Match Fund fundraising appeal, raising a total of £7,275. We continue to rely heavily on individual donors to support costs which are hard to raise elsewhere.

Keep an eye out for our Wild Isles funding appeal, launching in October.

Another recent achievement is our accreditation as Living Wage Employers.



"I feel connected to the land and the future by helping to improve the environment for people and wildlife."

-Spencer, volunteer

Restoring the land

The Ancient Woodland

The understorey in the larch plantation is looking healthy, with bilberry and other native shrubs growing, thanks to a gradual programme of thinning that also provides a source of wood for our campfires.

On the lower slopes of the site, above our existing woodland, our tree planting is supporting the development of wood pasture, while on our upland areas, it provides a seed source for the future. All planted areas contribute to the formation of wildlife corridors across Bwlch Corog and between neighbouring woodlands. This year, with the help of volunteers, we planted over 1300 native trees including sessile oak, downy birch, aspen, wild cherry and hazel. We are building a comprehensive map and baseline survey of tree cover on site, so we can monitor progress.

"It's good to feel that I'm contributing to restoring nature and mitigating climate change."

-Simon, volunteer



Previous tree planting had suffered from being browsed by the horses and cattle, so we obtained funding from North Wales Wildlife Trust to purchase tree cactus guards and to fence off 2.5ha on the ffridd where natural regeneration is strong. The cactus guards are a simple metal structure which can barely be seen in the landscape – they're a great deterrent to nibbling horses and can be re-used when the trees are grown enough.

In the pipeline...

We have recently been awarded The Woodland Investment Grant (TWIG), which will support us to make further improvements such as a circular path through the woodland and facilities that will allow us to process our own wood.

Restoring the land

Peatland

The regeneration of the peatland is a core part of our project. We have continued sustainable grazing of upland peat areas using our small herd of horses and our neighbouring farmer's Highland and Welsh White cattle on rotation. A 2020–22 grant from the Wales National Peatland Action Programme (NPAP) allowed us to undertake vegetation scraping and planting sphagnum plugs in 36 trial plots chosen strategically across the site.

Following consultation with an ecologist and with the help of a specialist contractor, we scraped the purple moor grass from some areas, using the contours of the land to create small dams before planting sphagnum moss plugs.



As is the nature of experimentation, the scraping had mixed results; very positively there has been a complete reset in vegetation with *Molinia* coverage going from >95% to <2%. Some of the sphagnum died in a drought shortly after planting, and coverage of other key bog vegetation such as heather and bilberry is still low. More promisingly, in the wetter scrapes many of the sphagnum plugs have survived and increased in size from about 5cm to 15cm. On our latest visit to the scrapes, we were pleased to see that the small 'ponds' are alive with lizards, frogs and dragonflies. We have further funding from the NPAP to continue this work in 2023–5, giving us an opportunity to adapt our techniques based on last year's discoveries and undertake surveys to monitor long-term change to the vegetation.

Biodiversity and Species

Species monitoring and re-introductions

We have had some exploratory conversations regarding reintroductions. Initially, the most favourable species were considered black grouse, red squirrel, and water vole. Initial conversations with neighbouring landowners indicated significant interest in reintroducing black grouse, however the RSPB advised us that black grouse are not faring well in Wales overall at present, due to climate change and habitat loss.

Cambrian Wildwood maintains membership of the Mid Wales Red Squirrel Network. We also obtained funding from Nature Networks Fund to undertake feasibility studies for three species that may have most potential for reintroduction. This will happen in 2023-5.

We have undertaken several species surveys e.g. breeding birds and moths this year and now have funding to expand our programme of ecological monitoring. We are encouraging volunteers to participate in this wherever possible.

“Now the trees are coming back, new pony lawns have been nibbled, and bluebells are peeping through the bracken. It's still only patchy, but the changes are happening faster than we imagined.”

– George + Jan, volunteers



Connecting People with Nature

Programmes and activities

We hosted about 1000 visitors in 2022-23. These included attendance at our nature connection activity days and camps, primary schools programmes, community events, volunteering days, and study visits. There are Welsh speakers at all our events and some are led in Welsh.

Highlights include:



'Wild Days Out' for teenagers from the local area enjoying activities such as den building, charcoal making and tree planting.

A new pilot programme for 'Tiny Tots' – aimed at parents and carers with children aged between 2 – 4 years of age. These sessions build confidence in being outdoors, give ideas for simple activities, and provide time to socialise in a relaxed atmosphere. Participants enjoyed playing games, treasure hunts, stories and nature craft activities.

A wonderfully busy Community Nature Day held in June. Three local experts led activities based on the wildlife at Bwlch Corog – we saw moths close up, enjoyed a bird walk, and learned about the lichen. There were plenty of activities for children and lots of homemade cake to enjoy whilst chatting around the campfire. The day ended with a story and song from a local storyteller.



Dan Jones Images

"I meet friends from all around, I learn loads, Cambrian Wildwood is pretty much my family."

-Wild Days Out Participant

Two successful youth camps were held in June. Cambrian Wildwood enables young people to step back from the expectations and pressures of everyday life and enjoy time in nature. We are extremely proud to offer them this opportunity to develop relationships, learn new skills, build self-confidence and just relax!

Connecting People with Nature

Volunteers

Our volunteer programme continues to thrive. There are monthly 'workdays' at Bwlch Corog and we have had up to 25 people attending. These include local people and, very importantly, a regular group of refugees and asylum seekers who make the long journey from Wolverhampton. This is part of a treasured historical relationship with City of Sanctuary Wolverhampton.

The volunteers do a wide range of tasks, including tree planting, vegetation monitoring, bracken bashing, and erecting the yurt. We are developing the activities programme and aiming to make it as inclusive as we can.

Our volunteer programme got a huge boost this year through a grant from WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Action). This money will pay for a new youth volunteering programme, Nature Ambassadors, which will introduce and train young people who do not have access to wild green spaces to volunteering for nature.



"I feel tired but very happy today, I love working a lot, it's wonderful planting a tree."

-Esmerelda, volunteer

Sharing Learning and Experience

It is important to us that we are able to share what we do at Bwlch Corog with others in the field. We're pleased to be increasingly involved with the Tir Canol partnership whose staff have helped us with recent species monitoring.

We welcomed students from the Centre for Alternative Technology and the universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff – students were studying a number of disciplines including wildlife conservation, human geography and forestry. It's a privilege to listen to the ideas of these young people and hopefully, inspire the next generation of conservationists.



Coed Cadw (Woodland Trust) – our freeholders and key partner – sent a group of Woodland Trust staff from across the UK, who are studying Woodland Trust work in mid Wales and discussing landscape scale conservation ideas. They enjoyed visiting our Celtic rainforest – finding interesting lichens, mosses and bryophytes, and looking at some of our ancient and veteran trees, as well as our stand of aspen.

The National Trust Moors for the Future Group visited to learn about our work on peatland restoration. They were particularly interested in our management of purple moor grass as its dominance is a common problem on many of their own sites.



With Coed Cadw, we hosted a training session on adding trees to the Ancient Tree Inventory. These trees are an important part of our heritage and play a crucial part in maintaining a healthy ecosystem as they provide homes for thousands of species of plants, animals and fungi, including many that are rare. We were pleased to learn that we have crab apple and downy birch trees that fall into the category of 'ancient tree', common ash and sessile oak that are 'veteran trees' as well as others that are 'notable trees.'



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