



Welsh Ornithological Society

Looking forward: 2016-2020

The Welsh Ornithological Society was formed in 1989, and exists to promote the conservation of wild birds in Wales; advance education and study of all aspects of birds in Wales; and to promote and publish results of research into birds in Wales. It has been a registered charity since 1994.

This strategy sets the direction of travel for the Society during the period 2016-2020, a broad set of priorities and parameters to guide the work of Council. The Constitution of the Society (version November 2014 at the time of writing) remains paramount in the decisions that are taken.

The strategy is set under four broad headings:

- Promoting birds and their conservation in Wales
- Growing support for birds in Wales
- Building knowledge of birds in Wales
- Advocacy that benefits birds in Wales

The final section describes how WOS and its finances will be managed.

In devising this strategy, the focus has been deliberately on ensuring that WOS activities deliver value that is not provided by other organisations. If others undertake an activity as well as or better than WOS, we will support that work or deliver it in partnership with them. Three organisations with whom WOS will work closely, but not exclusively, are BTO Cymru, RSPB Cymru and Wildlife Trusts Wales.

1. Building knowledge of birds in Wales

1.1 Priority species

WOS fully endorses the production of *Population Status of Birds in Wales*, and will encourage and urge this to be updated on a regular basis in both a popular form (#2 was published in 2009) and an accompanying paper published in *Birds in Wales* (as in 2010).

WOS will work closely with BTO Cymru to encourage participation by birdwatchers in established monitoring schemes, such as the Breeding Bird Survey and Wetland Bird Survey, in order that sufficient data is collected to produce annual indices of numbers in Wales.

WOS will work closely with RSPB Cymru to encourage keen birders to participate in periodic surveys of scarce and rare breeding species (SCARRABS) and will urge Natural Resources Wales to ensure that such surveys are adequately funded where species occur in Wales.

WOS will encourage participation in a new survey of breeding seabirds in Wales, contemporary data for which is needed urgently, and will work with The Seabird Group to ensure sufficient funding is available from statutory agencies, reflecting the importance of Wales' seabirds to the UK populations.

An assessment by WOS (Brenchley and Thorpe, in prep.) has identified a small suite of priority species about which little is known of their populations in Wales, since their numbers or range fall between that monitored by SCARRABS and BBS/WeBS etc. WOS will work with Bird Clubs to organise surveys of at least one of these species during the period 2016-2020, co-ordinating with BTO and RSPB to ensure that such a survey integrates well with the timing of other surveys.

In the longer-term, WOS wishes to be in a position to play an active role as a partner in any future Atlas of Breeding and Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland, discussions about which it is anticipated would start early in the next strategy period.

1.2 BirdTrack

WOS is proud to be a partner in BirdTrack, and will actively promote its use by birdwatchers to collect and share sightings, particularly in Wales. A pre-requisite is understanding why *BirdTrack* is not adopted by active birders in some parts of Wales. Our support will include:

- Encouraging bird clubs in Wales to support the use of *BirdTrack* by members, including hosting training events (run by WOS, subject to funding) in the use of *BirdTrack* and smartphone app.
- Encouraging county recorders/Bird Report editors to understand how *BirdTrack* data can be accessed and used to illuminate county reports.
- Promotion of *BirdTrack* at Conferences, in e-newsletters etc, and the use of summary data in the *Welsh Bird Report*.

1.3 County bird recording

WOS will support the network of county recorders and bird report editors, who play a valued role in collating and communicating bird records. We will provide a regular forum for county bird recorders to come together, to share ideas and to ensure the most effective use is made of these records. We will encourage birdwatchers in Wales to maintain records of their own sightings and share them with county recorders, via *BirdTrack* and other means.

1.4 Welsh Bird Report

The WBR, published each December, provides an opportunity to draw together information on birds from across Wales. We believe that there is a need for such a publication and that new developments in monitoring and recording provide a timely opportunity to develop the *WBR*. Historically, the *WBR* synthesises the information collected in the county bird reports, which might only have been available locally. However, as such information increasingly appears online and new datasets are available through enhanced bird-recording, the *WBR* should:

- develop into an assessment of the populations of bird species in Wales, working with partnerships managing key schemes (Breeding Bird Survey, *BirdTrack*, Wetland Bird Survey, SCARRABS) to produce a reference document that is valued by birders and conservation groups. It will continue to use information collected and reported by each county, but will add greater value through its assessment of trends.
- make greater use of the headlines in the *WBR* to draw wider public attention to the status of birds in Wales through the media, and potentially through its circulation to Assembly Members and Welsh Government.

This development will, necessarily, take two or three years to come to fruition, starting with the 2015 *WBR*. It will serve a different purpose to the annual *State of Birds in Wales*, led by RSPB Cymru and supported by WOS, by providing greater detail for all species in Wales, and illuminating the data with the information collated at county level.

1.5 Welsh Records Panel

WOS will continue to support the WRP, a sub-committee of Council, to maintain the standard of recording scarce and rare birds in Wales. WRP provides an important link with active birders and rare-bird enthusiasts, and a means of documenting birds that may not be rare in a UK context, but remain so in Wales. WOS will publish online the annual WRP publication *Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales* and will publish an updated list of birds recorded in Wales every three years (2016 and 2019 in this period).

1.6 Small grant scheme

Resources mean that funding major research projects is not a priority for WOS, however we will actively encourage volunteer-led research and conservation projects through advice and funding, allocating a sum annually to projects that meet WOS criteria. We will provide greater direction to priorities in Wales (e.g. through Brenchley and Thorpe, in prep).

WOS will promote the grants more actively and effectively, through third-party media, universities, BTO Cymru etc. The grant scheme will run annually until 2020, and then be reviewed, assessing its uptake and effectiveness in delivering its objectives.

2. Promoting birds and their conservation in Wales

2.1 *Birds in Wales*

The Society's annual journal, published each September, will provide an outlet for good quality studies about birds in Wales by paid and unpaid ornithologists. It will be perceived as a solid reference, with a good pedigree among ornithologists. For this period at least, we envisage that its production will continue as a paper-product, but will keep under consideration the likely eventual move to electronic distribution. To achieve this, WOS will:

- work with key university departments to encourage students to publish papers drawn from their studies
- through the small grant scheme, encourage the writing up of project findings to a wider audience through *Birds in Wales*
- ensure that there is a sound process of peer-review for papers published
- by 2016, redesign its cover and format to meet the expectations of members for a vibrant and modern publication
- maintain high standards of production, especially the reproduction of figures, maps and images, using the website to make available additional or colour material that is prohibited in the paper version by cost
- maximise opportunities for wider publicity of at least one key story per issue, to the birding and/or regional media
- by 2017, publish the *Welsh Birds/Birds in Wales* archive online for public availability, ideally through the National Library of Wales (or alternatively via the Biodiversity Heritage Library), while retaining the current year's journal for subscription-paying members.

2.2 Conferences

The annual Conference has proved to be a popular and successful event over the last five years, and we will ensure that this remains the case, with a high standard of speakers and attracting new attendance. It is the only all-Wales gathering of bird-focused people and a good means of recruiting new support for WOS within the locality.

The Conference will be both a celebration of birds and birdwatching in Wales, and a forum for meaningful discussion, plus a valued social occasion. We will organise a Conference each autumn, in conjunction with RSPB Cymru and BTO Cymru, whom we will urge to help promote the event to their supporters in Wales.

The Conference will move around Wales, to locations in west Wales (2016), southeast Wales (2017), north Wales (2018) and mid Wales (2019), and so on. We will continue to seek to fill venues of 100-150 people, but explore the possibility of organising a larger conference in 2019, the 30th anniversary of the Society.

WOS will celebrate and honour the people who have contributed greatly to ornithology in Wales, through the Lifetime Achievement Awards, nominated by members and presented at the annual Conference.

2.3 Website and social media

E-media is the Society's most cost-effective means of communication and it is important that it remains relevant and up-to-date in a fast-changing world.

During 2016, the website design and structure will be reviewed with external assistance, and a new website launched that is smartphone/tablet-friendly, has a modern feel and is more easily updated. A Welsh-language website will be available (subject to funding) by 2017.

As part of the development of the website, the aspiration is for WOS to have an integrated membership database that permits access to member-only information and subscription to the e-newsletter.

The WOS Twitter account will continue to be actively promoted, and used more effectively as a tool to increase membership support.

Council will explore other social media channels, reflecting changing trends in popularity. Facebook is considered the next priority.

Content of all of the above (and the e-newsletter, see below) are essential to their success and their value to members/readers. Further work is required to ensure that WOS has a steady stream of interesting stories to promote via its website and social media, and that volunteers have sufficient time to implement these.

2.4 E-newsletter

The e-newsletter will provide an additional member benefit, providing contact between the bi-annual mailings (of *Birds in Wales* and the *Welsh Bird Report*). It will be published every two months.

During 2016, effort will be made to seek opt-in from all WOS members with an email address (as of August 2015, reach was 66% of members).

2.5 *Birds in Wales – an avifauna*

Only two books cover the birds of the whole nation: Lovegrove *et al.* (1994) and a supplement of the latter covering 1992-2000 (Green 2002) published by WOS. WOS will support and encourage the production of either a further update, or preferably a whole new volume, if volunteer(s) come forward to offer to undertake such work. WOS would favour an online publication route unless a convincing business case can be made to publish as a book that does not place a financial risk upon WOS.

2.6 Wales tetrad atlas 2008-11

Several bird clubs and partnerships in Wales collected breeding bird data at a tetrad-level during the fieldwork for the BTO-led 10-km Atlas during 2008-11. This has been published in different forms (books, websites etc) during 2013-15. WOS will publish Wales-level tetrad maps online during 2016 in order that they are available for public conservation use, and which can be incorporated into a future avifauna of the *Birds in Wales*.

3. Growing support for birds in Wales

3.1 Membership

WOS will continue to be a membership organisation, as the best means to show that birds in Wales have popular support and to sustain funding of the Society's work in the future. The aim is to grow the membership as a means of increasing resources available, rather than necessarily increasing the annual subscription.

Membership has reached a plateau in recent years, with little active effort to attract new members. During the lifetime of this strategy, WOS will aim to double its membership, requiring a net increase of 50 memberships each year.

December	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Memberships	250	300	350	400	450	500

To achieve this, WOS will:

- Be clearer about its membership offer, including its membership categories
- Make active use of social media to promote WOS membership
- Raise awareness of WOS through publicity in the birding and Wales media
- Explore with Bird Clubs how to encourage greater participation
- Explore promotion of membership to birdwatchers outside Wales, especially those in adjacent counties who regularly visit Wales

3.2 Inspiring young people

There is a broad consensus that lack of engagement with the natural world, particularly by young people, is a strategic threat to wildlife conservation. WOS supports the energies of other organisations (e.g. RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, Field Studies Council) who work with children under 18, but this is not an age group with which WOS has the focus to make a real difference.

WOS will focus on its support on the 16-25 age group through:

- Annual student awards, made in memory of Derek Moore, to encourage and facilitate studies of birds in Wales, and to reward high standards of writing up. Brenchley and Thorpe (in prep.) will be used to provide suggestions for university projects of value to conservation.
- A number of free places for 16-25 year olds at the WOS annual conference
- Bursaries to facilitate travel, training fees and/or specialist equipment
- Stronger links with named contacts leading relevant courses (and BTO student ambassadors) at universities in Wales, and adjacent cities, such as Liverpool, Chester, Gloucester and Bristol.
- Stronger links with Field Studies Council, which has four Learning Locations in Wales and one in nearby Shropshire, to determine how staff and students can engage more directly with projects on birds in Wales

3.3 Building awareness

It is perceived that awareness of WOS is low among birdwatchers in Wales. There are not, currently, the skills and experience within Council to develop this. During the lifetime of this strategy WOS will develop its capacity in this area, by:

- Seeking one or more trustees with PR experience and a willingness to put time into building awareness of WOS and its work
- Developing a coherent brand for WOS products: journals, e-newsletter, social media, Conference
- Ensuring a year-round supply-line of subjects and stories of interest to the birding community (via magazines, websites, posters in hides/visitor centres and our own e-media) and occasional stories to the wider media, particularly newspapers and radio.
- Making greater use of the profile of the WOS President to raise awareness of the Society.

- Exploring the costs and potential return on having a WOS stand at the Birdfair, either on our own, in partnership with a similar organisation (e.g. SOC) or under a broader banner (e.g. Visit Wales).
- Prioritising development of our work bilingually, starting with the website and journal abstracts.

3.4 Partnership with Bird Clubs in Wales

Collectively, it is thought that bird/wildlife clubs in Wales have at least 2000 members. Most are independent, though there are also several bird groups within local Wildlife Trusts. Most of the independents have been affiliated to WOS for several years and WOS is keen to continue to build on this, but neither WOS nor Clubs have a clear view on what each wants from this relationship. During 2016, WOS will:

- Appoint a trustee with responsibility for managing and developing WOS's relationships with bird groups
- Meet with bird groups to understand better what each wants and can offer through the affiliation. This might include support that WOS can offer more effectively at a central level, potential for WOS/bird group organised bird surveys, a WOS champion on each group committee, a WOS update at club AGMs, recommended speaker list, promotion of group events.
- Agree whether the £50 annual affiliation fee is a barrier to support and whether it should continue
- Identify areas in which bird clubs would welcome support and training, for their organisation or for their members.

4. Advocacy that benefits birds in Wales

WOS members care passionately about the state of birds and their conservation in Wales, and WOS will support other conservation organisations that have greater capacity to resource and understand complex issues that affect bird ecology. In particular, we will seek to work closely with groups such as RSPB Cymru and Wildlife Trusts Wales to ensure that representation to government from WOS supports the broad thrust of their campaign on issues, such as land-management and marine protection. WOS will be selective about the issues on which it engages, in order to ensure that we are not over-stretched and can maintain credibility by pursuing our priorities to maximum effect.

During this period, WOS will focus on the legal protection of birds in Wales, the science behind licensed control and its enforcement, since this is an area where we believe that WOS expertise is strong, the government *status quo* looks weak and we can add value to decision-making and to public support.

WOS will also strongly advocate adequate funding for science on which to base all decisions affecting birds in Wales.

5. Management of WOS

WOS is a charity registered in England and Wales, its trustees governed by charity law. As part of the strategy process, WOS agreed that its Constitution is fit for purpose, that it does not anticipate employing staff nor buying or managing land. WOS Council will meet three/four times each year, but will organise additional virtual meetings in order to maintain momentum and around specific projects.

5.1 Responsibilities of Council

The Constitution requires a Council of eight to 12 trustees, including honorary officers. Succession planning in 2014/15 should ensure that honorary officers do not have to retire at the same time, but

it will be important that trustees continue to review and plan future succession throughout the strategy period.

The strategy requires responsibility be taken for other areas of work by trustees, and this will shape the guidance for future members of Council elected by members.

Role	Responsibility
1. Chair	Chairs meetings, leads strategic direction, resolves problems, provides public face of WOS. Works with Treasurer to propose and manage budget.
2. Vice Chair	Deputises for chair but also expected to have a responsibility from those listed below
3. Treasurer	Maintains accounts, manages budget, ensures meet Charity Commission regulations, explores opportunities for external funding, grants and sponsorship
4. Secretary	Plans, organises and minutes meetings, manages correspondence
5. Membership secretary	Maintains membership database, oversees membership income and reminders, manages membership mailings and Conference bookings
6. Conference organiser	Organises annual conference, liaises with venue, speakers, exhibitors and partner organisations, floor-manages event
7. Editor	Plans and delivers <i>Birds in Wales</i> and <i>Welsh Bird Report</i> to deadline
8. Grants and bursaries	Manages small grant scheme, student research award and free conference places for 16-25 year olds, and young conservationist bursary scheme
9. Bird Club liaison	Regular contact with named members of affiliated bird clubs, organises annual (?) meeting, maintains calendar of activities for website
10. PR and media	Plans and delivers programme to raise awareness and promote membership of WOS in UK birding and Wales media
11. Website and social media	Maintains and develops website (English and Welsh), enewsletter and promotes WOS through social media
12. Conservation officer	Takes lead on casework, support for campaigns, consultation responses, advocacy and liaison with other organisations

Additional responsibilities (e.g. being the WOS contact point for *BirdTrack*) will be allocated to volunteers, but are not in themselves a Council role. In addition, representatives of BTO Cymru, RSPB Cymru and the Chair of the Welsh Records Panel are invited to attend and report to meetings.

5.2 Financial matters

5.2.1 Financial reserves

WOS will maintain financial reserves around £5000 during the strategy period, to ensure that the Society can maintain its operations for a period in the event of an unexpected change in the level of income or expenditure or to take advantage of an unforeseen and low-risk opportunity to further its objectives.

5.2.2 Budgets

WOS's financial year is January-December. At the July meeting of trustees, a budget will be proposed for activities during the following financial year. If this includes a proposal to increase membership subscriptions, the budget cannot be finalised until after the AGM, when the outcome of a vote on such a motion would be known.

5.2.3 Expenses

Trustees are entitled to claim justified expenses for work on behalf of WOS, though can choose to waive them. As part of the budget process, likely expenses will be identified (e.g. travel to *BirdTrack* meetings in Thetford).

5.2.4 External funding

The budget process will identify activities that will be dependent on external funding and agree the process required to achieve this. Sponsorship will be sought for the Conference, small grant scheme, young conservationist bursaries, journals. Grants may be sought for projects, such as training events.

5.3 Maintaining the support of members

The viability of WOS is dependent on its membership, and it is important that all trustees maintain an informal understanding of members' views and perceptions about the Society.

WOS will undertake periodic online surveys of its members' views, covering such subjects as the feedback from the Conference, support for the journals being online, members' use of social media and the Welsh language, willingness to become more involved in WOS activities. These will be used to inform decision-making by trustees, though will not be binding.

Approved by Council, 21 November 2015