



Welsh Ornithological Society

Looking forward: 2021 - 2026

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 CONTINUED direction of travel for the Society during the period 2021 - 2026, a broad set of priorities and parameters to guide the work of Council. The Constitution of the Society (current version at the time of writing – November 2019) 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. The current version (Johnstone and Bladwell 2016 - is *Birds of Conservation Concern in Wales 3: the population status of birds in Wales*) should be revised during the period of this strategy.

WOS will work closely with other organisations to further bird conservation in Wales notably:

- **BTO Cymru:** to encourage participation by birdwatchers in established ongoing monitoring schemes such as the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and one-off species surveys such as the Welsh Chat survey (2012/13), in order that sufficient data are collected to produce annual indices of numbers in Wales.

- **RSPB Cymru:** to encourage keen birders to participate in periodic surveys, such as the Willow Tit survey due to be completed in 2021. WOS will also support the periodic surveys of the scarce and rare breeding birds (SCARABBS).
- **Natural Resources Wales:** to work with NRW led groups such as Gyfinir Cymru (Curlew Wales), the proposed new Raptor Monitoring Scheme and other projects as they may develop, as well as alerting NRW to important gaps in information.

In addition to the above, WOS will encourage and, where appropriate and practical, initiate local or Wales-wide species surveys based on the WOS assessment of a small suite of priority species about which little is known of their populations in Wales (Brenchley and Thorpe, 2017). This assessment concentrated on species whose numbers were thought to have fallen or their range decreased and were not covered by or adequately covered by existing monitoring schemes or surveys such as SCARABBS and BBS/WeBS etc. WOS will work collectively with partners, Bird Clubs, universities, students and young ornithologists to organise surveys of at least one of these priority species during the period of this strategy, co-ordinating with BTO and RSPB to ensure that such a survey integrates well with the timing of other surveys and keeps 'key' species under review. Where capacity allows, WOS will mentor young ornithologists in bird identification and survey techniques

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 towards the end of this strategy period. The aim would be to undertake an all-Wales tetrad Atlas in the future.

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 endeavour to 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. WOS will endeavour to make more use of new 'virtual' meeting technology, such as Zoom, to encourage participation. 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 at the end of each year, 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* has synthesised 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 (BBS, BirdTrack, WeBS, SCARABBS) 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 through its circulation to key Assembly Members and Welsh Government.

The Welsh Bird Report will continue to be developed as a key source of reference for changes in Welsh Bird Populations.

1.5 Welsh Birds Rarities Committee

WOS will continue to support the WBRC, a sub-committee of Council, to maintain the standard of recording scarce and rare birds in Wales. WBRC 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 WBRC publication *Scarce and Rare Birds in Wales* and will publish an updated list of birds recorded in Wales every three years. Panel will provide regular reports to Council.

We may need to insert a short paragraph about a possible new Welsh Raptor Group once that has been agreed and formalised?

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, as outlined in the application form. Grants are most likely to be awarded to those applicants who will study/survey the priority species identified in Thorpe and Brenchley (2017). WOS Council will actively discuss new ways of encouraging uptake of this scheme such as themes and additional/different application windows.

2. Promoting birds and their conservation in Wales

2.1 Birds in Wales

The Society's annual journal, published each summer, will provide an outlet for good quality studies about birds in Wales by all ornithologists but work by non-professional ornithologists will be particularly encouraged. It will be perceived as a solid reference, with a good pedigree among ornithologists. WOS will actively pursue more options for improved online access to broaden awareness and usage of this valuable resource. 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;
- 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; and
- Ensure continuation of the archive 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 continue to move around suitable venues across Wales. However, WOS also needs to be conscious of its carbon footprint and ability to make conferences and possible themed meetings more widely accessible. Options for having online events will be actively explored.

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 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.

The website design has been updated and WOS will continue to keep developments under review as technology and social media develops.

As part of the development of the website, WOS has modified its membership database that permits access to member-only information and subscription to the e-newsletter.

The WOS Twitter and Facebook accounts will continue to be actively promoted and used to disseminate information about birds in Wales and WOS activities generally with the aim to increase awareness and membership support.

Council will explore other social media channels, reflecting changing trends in popularity. 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.

Effort will be continued to seek opt-in from all WOS members with an email address (as of June 2020, reach was 91% of members).

2.5 *Birds of Wales – an avifauna*

WOS will publish and promote this book during the period of this strategy.

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 increase membership from the current memberships (includes other members of the same household) of 320 in 2020. To achieve this, WOS will:

- Be clearer about its membership offer, including its membership categories; development and promotion of corporate and student membership is desirable;
- Analyse the demographics and geographic spread of the current membership with the specific aim to try and increase diversity;
- 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; and
- 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 (2017) 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 as well offering a free place to any student submitting a student project.
- 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 local colleges.
- 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;
- Promoting the WOS branded products: journals, e-newsletter, social media, Conference, pin badges etc.;
- 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;
- Continuing to explore the costs and potential return on having a WOS stand at relevant events and shows such as the British Birdfair, either on our own, in partnership with a similar organisation (e.g. WTs, BTO Cymru etc.) or under a broader banner (e.g. Visit Wales); and

- Prioritising development of our work bilingually, starting with the website and journal abstracts if grants or sponsorship can be obtained.

3.4 Partnership with Bird Clubs in Wales

Collectively, to the best of our knowledge, the bird clubs in Wales have at least 2,000 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 and clarify what each wants from this relationship. During the period of this strategy, WOS will:

- Continue to have a named 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.
- Continue to review 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.
- WOS will investigate the concept of 'County Champions' that could promote WOS activities as well as provide closer links to bird recorders and bird clubs.

WOS will investigate the use of 'memoranda of understanding' to develop this relationship with Bird Clubs and other possible organisations, as recently developed with Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory

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 and ensure that bird conservation is not weakened after Brexit, 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

WOS is a registered charity and as such must operate under the guidance issued by the Charity Commission. All Council members are trustees of the charity.

The Constitution requires a Council of eight to 12 trustees, including honorary officers:

- Chair
- Vice-Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer

Succession planning in 2020/21 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 effective working of Council depends on recruiting and retaining a key set of skills. Regular analysis of skills and the identification of any gaps in skills should be undertaken.

The responsibility of the honorary officers are broadly as follows:

Role	Responsibility
Chair	Chairs meetings, leads strategic direction, resolves problems, provides public face of WOS. Works with Treasurer to propose and manage budget.
Vice Chair	Deputises for chair but also expected to have a responsibility from those listed below
Treasurer	Maintains accounts, manages budget, ensuring these meet Charity Commission regulations, explores opportunities for external funding, grants and sponsorship
Secretary	Plans, organises and minutes meetings, manages correspondence. Is the key contact with the Charity Commission and maintains register of trustees.

In order for the charity to deliver its aims and function effectively, Council also needs to ensure that the following tasks are carried out:

- Manage membership: maintain database, oversee membership income and reminders, manage membership mailings
- Annual conference organisation: liaise with venue, speakers, exhibitors and partner organisations, bookings etc
- Editor: to plan and deliver *Birds in Wales* and *Welsh Bird Report* to deadline
- Manage Small Grant Scheme, Student research award, young conservationist bursaries and Lifetime Achievement Awards
- Affiliate and Bird Club liaison: maintain regular contact with named members of affiliated bird clubs
- Manage Public Relations and media: issue press releases as appropriate, produce e-newsletter and manage social media
- Manage Website: maintain and develop website
- Maintain conservation expertise and knowledge: take lead on casework and undertake consultation responses, provide evidence for campaigns, advocacy and liaison with Welsh Government

These responsibilities are shared between the remaining Council members where the right skills are present. However, when there is a skills gap, Council maintains the right to appoint/co-opt external

volunteer experts, who are not in themselves Council members to undertake particular tasks (e.g. being the WOS contact point for BirdTrack) Another example would be the creation of an expert panel to help out with conservation consultations.

In addition, representatives of BTO Cymru, RSPB Cymru and the Chair of the Welsh Rare Birds Committee are invited to attend and report to meetings.

5.2 Financial matters

5.2.1 Financial reserves

WOS will maintain financial reserves in excess of £5,000 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 Expenses

Trustees (Council members) and other volunteers invited to do work for WOS by Council are entitled to claim justified expenses for work on behalf of WOS, though can choose to waive them.

5.2.3 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, 11 July 2020

Revised, approved by Council, *****

Johnstone, I. and Bladwell, S. (2016) Birds of Conservation Concern in Wales 3: the population status of birds in Wales. *Birds in Wales*, **13** (1) pp 3-31.

Thorpe, R. I. and Brenchley, A. (2017) Promotion of Bird Surveys and Monitoring in Wales: current and required. *Birds in Wales*, **14** (1) pp 49-62.

'Tick list' for check at each Council meeting – many of these will be covered on our usual agenda items anyway

Building knowledge of birds in Wales	Update on current surveys WOS is involved with / promoting and what we should be looking at in future. Need ongoing discussion
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	on promoting grant scheme and continual improvement
Promoting birds and their conservation in Wales	These areas are usually covered in our regular agenda items. Discuss need for new work.
Growing support for birds in Wales	Need discussions on membership strategy at next few Council meetings, partnership with bird clubs and what we have done to build awareness
Advocacy that benefits birds in Wales	Discuss current advocacy at each meeting and need for any new pressing issues
Management of WOS	Most of this is covered by usual agenda items but need to record at each meeting that we have done everything needed to comply with Charity law.