

WOS Chair's Report 2025 – 2026

This report covers the 12 months since our last AGM, on 1 November 2025.

This has been a year of change as new members of Council settled down in their roles and learnt more about the workings of our charity. In particular, taking over the role of Treasurer took longer than anticipated but Gwenan Williams has now completed the handover and is ensuring that the charity's finances are being put to effective use. The revised constitution gave us more flexibility to spread the workload by increasing the size of Council and progress, albeit slow, has been made. Early in 2026, Emma-Louise Cole also left Council as other priorities took precedence and in June, our long-standing Membership Secretary, Alison Noble, retired. Thankfully new people were co-opted onto Council and we welcomed the input of Anya Wicikowski, Saffron Forester, Ian Spence and Joshua Brown. This has brought in a good combination of youth and experience. Saffron takes up a new role within Council, that of Youth member. However, WOS has been unable to recruit a Secretary and this has created extra work for myself, as Chair, and meant that WOS has been less efficient than usual. Recruiting to this post in 2027 is an absolute priority.

We are working to make the running of the charity more efficient in other ways and to this effect, signing up to a membership management package, membermojo, is beginning to prove its worth. This was made most obvious after the membership subscriptions were increased after the 2025 AGM. Ian Spence has done a sterling job taking over from Alison on a temporary basis and paving the way for a longer term Membership Secretary to be recruited in 2027. We have also spent time planning changes to the look of our website so that it is fully bilingual, more attractive to visitors and also easier to navigate. We hope to launch this early in 2027. To tide us over until the new website goes live, Giles Pepler, kindly agreed to continue to be the website manager until the end of 2026.

There have been many other achievements in the past year. Our 2025 conference last October was very successful. We focussed on bird recording and how the information gathered from this very basic activity was helping our understanding of bird populations and why we should all try to do more recording, particularly with Bird Atlas 2027-31 almost upon us. Yet again WOS produced a calendar, using the winning photographs from our 2025 photographic competition.

Rachel Taylor, Julian Hughes and Jon Green have again produced high quality publications that help to mark out our unique niche in Welsh ornithology. Josh Pedley took over as Newsletter Editor and along with the Comms team (Siôn Emlyn Davies, Gwenan Williams, Mike Shewring and Liliana Tarrant Snedden), ensured that our newsletters were the usual very informative and interesting read.

Our grants schemes have continued to attract more applicants and we are now spending over £4,000 every year on both research and community projects. It is likely that our grants scheme will grow in the next few years. A small amount of money really can make a difference.

This past year we have had the capacity to start adding to our list of Position Statements. Over the years WOS is often asked what our attitude is to certain development proposals or other potential threats to our wild bird populations. Responding to every individual application is not always within our capacity so in this respect it is useful to have Position Statements that make our general views clear. This year we have produced Position Statements on Gamebird Licensing and Fish-eating Birds.

Over the next few years, one of our main projects will be our contribution to Bird Atlas 2027-31. This, once in a generation, repeat survey brings the opportunity for more birdwatchers to make a practical contribution to our knowledge of Welsh birds. WOS is, for the first time, an official partner in this Britain and Ireland (plus the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands) project. We have the ambitious aim to map the relative abundance and wintering and breeding distribution of all our bird species, at a finer scale than has ever been done before. Hundreds, if not thousands, of birdwatchers will contribute data and by taking part WOS hopes to recruit new members and strengthen our relationship with the Welsh birdwatching community.

Finally, I thank all the Council members, Mike Shewring as the new Vice-Chair, newly co-opted Council members and of course our President, Iolo Williams, for their support over this year.

Anne Brenchley
October 2026