



## Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership Newsletter

Autumn 2023

### LNP Relaunch

The Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) was successfully relaunched in July 2023 with an in-person meeting held at County Hall, Usk. The relaunch was well attended with a total of 13 attendees representing a wide range of partner organisations. We welcomed Sorrel Jones as our new chairperson and the new terms of reference for the partnership were agreed by attendees.

Unfortunately, the weather was against us, and we couldn't do a bioblitz in the incredible edible garden as planned.

There was some great discussion around a variety of projects and initiatives happening across the county, full details can be found in the minutes sent via email on 11/08/2023.



*Figure 1 The Relaunch of the LNP at County Hall*



## Local Places for Nature

Monmouthshire County Council has been awarded Local Places for Nature Funding to deliver *Nature on the Doorstep* of residents and visitors. This year we are focussing on Abergavenny town and a feasibility study has been undertaken to identify sites and opportunities for enhancements for nature and people. The public consultation has now been completed following a busy summer of events, flyering and engagement with stakeholders both within MCC and outside including local community groups and Abergavenny residents. We also held pop up consultation events at key sites which resulted in positive discussions with local people.

The consultation period ended on the 11<sup>th</sup> September and there has been a total of 112 responses to the online survey with mostly supportive comments. We have collated all the feedback gathered and used this to inform which sites will be taken forward and what delivery will look like. The sites that will be taken forward are Lower Monk Street Verge, Major's Barn play area, St Helen's Close play area, green spaces at Dan y Deri, the Bus Station and Croesenon Park.

Once we have the detailed designs back from our consultants, we will be able to move forward on a final focused consultation and then delivery with our grounds teams this financial year. The chosen sites for delivery include improvements such as grassland enhancements and wildflower planting, tree planting and community food growing facilities.



*Figure 2 Community Nature Spaces delivered in 2021/22 in Monmouth through Local Places for Nature Funding.*



## Green Corridors

Monmouthshire County Council has been awarded funding through the Welsh Government Shared Prosperity Fund, via the Gwent Green Grid Partnership, to continue with developing 'The Green Corridor Green Infrastructure Project' which covers Monmouthshire's main settlements. The aim of the project is to identify small to medium green sites for biodiversity enhancement, located within 'Green Corridors' which criss-cross our urban settlements and have already been mapped. Not only will they act as 'stepping stones' for wildlife travelling through to the larger landscapes (on the edges of our settlements), but they will increase the ecological resilience of these Green Corridors and enhance community well-being.

We are working alongside local Town and Community Councils, local environmental groups, and have carried out an online public consultation this summer with residents, advertising the consultation through posters on sites, social media and attending environment fairs and holding some pop-up events. 99 residents responded and the majority agreed that green sites can contribute to improving Biodiversity and agreed on the importance of connecting our Green Corridors for wildlife. On the survey we also asked for green sites that local communities would like to recommend, as additional sites for the project. Feedback from the survey is currently being collated and will feed into suggested project designs. Costings and specifications for the enhancements are also being drawn up currently.

The 'stepping stone sites' we are focusing on this year are: Old Hereford Road (Abergavenny) Redwick Rd Park (Magor) Hendre Close/Rockfield Avenue & Watery Lane/Rolls Avenue (Monmouth), and Rogiet Playing Fields (Rogiet).



*Figure 3 Fruit tree planting and a pollen laden bee*



## Wildflower Plug Planting at Woolpitch Wood

In October, we were joined by students from Thornwell primary and St Mary's primary schools in Chepstow at the Woolpitch Wood community nature space site. The students did a great job helping us plant a mix of native wildflower plug plants into the grassland areas to provide a resource for pollinator species. The students worked hard and weren't afraid to get muddy, we're looking forward to seeing how the plants establish and enhance biodiversity here.



*Figure 4 Students from Thornwell Primary School helping with wildflower plug planting.*

As well as planting the plugs at Woolpitch Wood, we have also donated trays of plugs to Thornwell primary school for use within their school grounds, as well as Woolpitch Community Orchard group and Severn Crescent Community group.

We are also hoping to arrange another plug planting day at Strongbow Road, another community nature space in Chepstow with nearby schools.



*Figure 5 Students getting stuck in*



## Greener Abergavenny

We attended the Greener Abergavenny event on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October, a fabulous event celebrating all things green in the town.

We used our stall to share ideas for our Community Nature Spaces and Green Corridor projects as well as chat to local residents about any ideas they have for future projects and opportunities within Abergavenny.

We also supported Colette Mooney, our Climate and Nature Awareness Officer with an activity for children, creating paper bunting using leaf crayon rubbings and finding out what trees mean to young people.

Overall, it was a busy event and a great opportunity to have some useful conversations about what is important to residents when it comes to their green spaces. We have used this information to inform our designs for the community nature spaces and green corridors sites.



*Figure 6 Community Nature Spaces and Green Corridors Display*



## Monmouthshire Local NRAP

Work on the Monmouthshire Local NRAP is now forging ahead at pace. The plan will aim to provide practical achievable actions designed to help reverse the decline in biodiversity and build ecosystem resilience. The NRAP will include a strategy and the first set of action plans for priority species and habitats will be published by the end of the financial year. Part 1 will also include a General Action Plan to provide a set of actions not related to a specific habitat or species that have been identified as local priorities to deliver nature recovery in Monmouthshire.

We would like to set up a working group of LNP members to be responsible for reviewing action plans before they are published and undertake an annual review of actions for monitoring and reporting. Please email [localnature@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:localnature@monmouthshire.gov.uk) if you are interested in being part of the group.

We would also like to include case studies of nature recovery projects undertaken by LNP members, if there is anything you would like to share please get in touch.



*Figure 7 Wildflower meadow in Monmouthshire*



## Feature Article – Monmouthshire Bat Group

A small group of Monmouthshire Bat Group members have been on the hunt for a Greater Horseshoe maternity roost in the Wentwood area of Monmouthshire but what the group are starting to find is even more exciting, and as seems typical with all bat work, poses more questions than answers.

The Monmouthshire bat group which covers both Monmouthshire and Newport has approximately 20 members. It is a diverse mix of batty people including those that take part in the lesser and greater horseshoe bat National Bat Monitoring Programme, some are skilled at bat rescue, others lead bat walks, and many just have a general bat interest. A much smaller number of people work on long term research projects. One such project being the ongoing search for rare woodland bats such as Bechstein's bat and Barbastelle bat. For over 10 years Stephen Davison has been running the project focusing on species which rely on good quality woodland habitats. Whilst finding more out about the distribution of Bechstein's and Barbastelle bats, the project also increases our knowledge of the behaviour and distribution of other species including those that were previously cryptic in South East Wales such as Serotine and Leisler's bats.

This project has required an enormous amount of dedication to the cause by Stephen and his wife Linda including finding suitable trapping sites, gaining all the relevant permissions and licences, completing preliminary survey work followed by long trapping nights, deployment, and maintenance of static detectors and, if we are lucky enough to catch a particularly interesting bat, radio-tracking sessions. This hard work has led to the discovery of the only known maternity roost for Bechstein's in Wales.

In May 2022, during a typical woodland bats trapping survey with the Woodland Trust, nightjar churring in the distance and woodcock roving overhead, we made a surprise catch of a pregnant Greater Horseshoe bat at 22:30 in the evening.

Greater horseshoes are one of our bigger bats having a pear sized body weighing up to about 34g. Evolved to roost in caves, they can now be found utilising barns, large houses, and churches in good quality insect rich landscapes. A free-hanging roosting bat, they tend not to be unnoticed for long.



*Figure 8 Pregnant Greater Horseshoe caught at Wentwood, May 2022*

This catch set our minds racing, the bat was extremely unlikely to have flown to our mist nets on a forestry track in Wentwood from either of the known maternity sites in the county near Chepstow or Monmouth. The possibility of another unknown roost nearby is much more likely. We hoped to radio track a non-pregnant bat later in the



season to try to find the roost site, but unfortunately no further horseshoes were caught here that year.

Plan B involved deploying two static bat detectors in Summer 2023 with interested and willing landowners, one to the north of Wentwood (detector A) and the other on a farmyard near Gaerllywd (detector B). Detector A, an Anabat Swift, was funded by the Local Nature Partnership's small grant in 2021. Previously deployed to pick up *Nathusius pipistrelle* at Magor Marsh, it was this time used for three sessions in June and July during which we hoped to confirm more Greater Horseshoe bat activity close to Wentwood. Positioned close to a wooded bridleway on the edge of a neutral grassland, the detector recorded large amounts of data despite the wet summer.

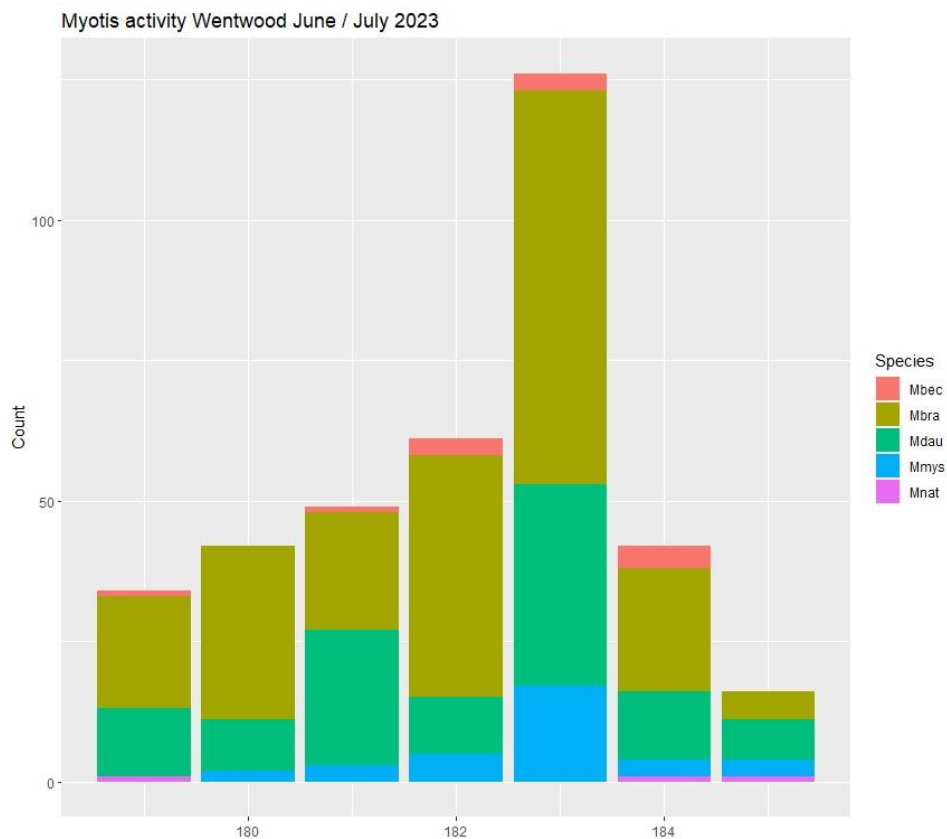


Figure 9 Bar graph showing Myotis activity results in Wentwood June / July 2023

To our disappointment there weren't many passes of greater horseshoe bats recorded on either detector, but they were there in small numbers on data from Detector A. However, to our delight what we had recorded was an interesting level of activity for both Barbastelle and a significant amount of possible Bechstein's calls. Barbastelle bats get recorded and identified on bat detectors quite readily and have previously been recorded in Wentwood. However, the nearest previously confirmed records for Bechstein's are some 5km away towards the Wye Valley.

Bechstein's bats are one of our rarest bat species, reliant exclusively on woodland habitats. The UK is the northern edge of its European range. It is one of our largest myotis species of bat and can be up





to 10g. Confirming the bat here could be important for informing future land management and project work.

Two transect surveys were also undertaken in the Pen y Cae Mawr area taking in the north of the forest and Bluebell Lane adjacent to the Castroggy brook. A transect survey involves walking along, bat detector poised whilst listening and recording bat calls, chatting to fellow bat workers. Sadly, not a single horseshoe was to be heard but we were fortunate to instead hear the nightjar churring and a hungry, noisy, long eared owl along the route.

To confirm our indicative findings, we now plan to undertake further survey work next year including, trapping using mist nets at the site of bat detector A. Whilst sound files are useful, we will not submit a record for the species to SEWBRc until we've had a bat reliably identified in the hand.

Meanwhile, in the Wye Valley, Stephen's mini-research group are continuing the long running trapping and monitoring work in a SSSI to the south of Tintern which forms part of the Wye Valley woodlands Special Area of Conservation.

This work has generated over 800 nights of data on bat activity. Trapping focuses on how the bats are using the site in the spring and autumn during swarming. Bechstein's are a relatively common catch at this site however, radiotracking in this location is incredibly difficult because of the topography. Part of the ongoing project here is to keep an eye out for odd looking Myotis bats that could be Alcaho bat which has only been identified as a resident in the UK since 2010 and is known to be in Wiltshire.



*Figure 10 Bechstein's Bat Caught in the Wye Valley, September 2023*

If anyone wants to join the bat group, please email the membership secretary via [MonmouthshireBatGroup@gmail.com](mailto:MonmouthshireBatGroup@gmail.com)



## Celebrating Eco Action in Schools

The LNP and our environmental education colleagues are looking to gather information on what schools in Monmouthshire are doing to help reduce their day-to-day environmental impact.

We will use the information gathered in an initial questionnaire to celebrate the achievements of schools across Monmouthshire and create a network for knowledge and skills sharing. We can also identify any gaps where we could provide advice, training or potential resources.

Our aim is to support all schools in Monmouthshire to achieve and set goals for addressing environmental issues and empower students to make a difference.

The questionnaire is currently being developed and will likely be sent out to schools in the new year.



Figure 11 Childrens drawings of pollinators created during a school workshop

## Social Media

If you don't already, please do follow us on Facebook, X (Twitter) and Instagram, where we will share updates and stories of nature activities and opportunities across Monmouthshire.

[Facebook – Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership](#)

[X – Mon LNP](#)

[Instagram – Monmouthshire Inp](#)





## News and Events from Elsewhere

### Severn Estuary Partnership

The Severn Estuary Partnership in collaboration with the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities and Natural England are currently running a project seeking to develop a better understanding of the public's understanding of the impact of disturbance on waterbird species in the Severn Estuary. The outputs of the project will inform the development of possible interventions for the Severn Estuary, aimed at minimising the impact of disturbance in particularly sensitive areas.

An online survey aims to capture these views. [You can view the survey in English here.](#) Or to complete the survey in Welsh language, click [here.](#)

The survey launched on 10 October and will close on 8 December. Any support you can provide before the survey closes will be greatly appreciated.

### SEWBReC – Gwent – Glamorgan Recorders Forum

The next SEWBReC Gwent – Glamorgan recorders forum will be held in person for the first time since 2020 and will be taking place on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at the Sony Theatre in Bridgend.

Celebrating 20 years of SEWBReC, the event will have a range of interesting talks, awards, quiz and cake!

The free event is open to all with an interest in wildlife and recording in South Wales.

More details can be found here where you can book your place:

[Gwent-Glamorgan Recorders' Forum 2024 Tickets, Sat 20 Jan 2024 at 10:00 | Eventbrite](#)

### Gwent Wildlife Trust

Gwent Wildlife Trust have talks scheduled from a range of speakers for the next few months all held at The Grange, Usk, Monmouthshire:

#### ***Otters on the River Usk***

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023 – 7:30pm – 9:00pm

Speakers: Sarah du Plessis & Emily O'Rourke (Cardiff University Otter project)

#### ***In Search of Wildlife with a Camera***

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 – 7:30pm – 9:00pm

Speaker: Chris Hatch

#### ***The World's Most Powerful Forest Eagles***

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 – 7:30pm – 9:00pm



Speaker: Steve Roberts

***Gwent's Butterflies***

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – 7:30pm – 9:00pm

Speaker: Andy Karran

Full details of the upcoming talks can be found here:

[Events | Gwent Wildlife Trust](#)



*Figure 12 Wildflower meadow in Monmouthshire*

## Funding Opportunities

### Keep Wales Tidy

Keep Wales Tidy is offering Local Places for Nature packages to transform unloved spaces into nature gardens or community food growing spaces.

The pre-paid packages range from small gardening projects to orchards and large scale makeovers. Each one includes native plants, tools and other materials.

Full details can be found at their website here:

[Local Places for Nature - Keep Wales Tidy](#)

## Next Meeting

The next LNP meeting will be held online via Teams on the **31<sup>st</sup> January at 5pm**, the Teams link will be sent out following this newsletter.