

Morgan Parry Foundation- What I would do to safeguard Wales for future Generations

By Danielle Rouse

Wales, the culturally rich country situated on the eastern edge of the Irish Sea, beautiful coastlines rich with heritage and wildlife one could only dream of. Wales has prided itself on its heritage and its beautiful landscapes, but there is a lot more to Wales once you dig deeper into the world of natural history and conservation, two things which are extremely important to me and areas I will continue to campaign for and put my time into. It is a wildlife haven for endangered wildlife as well as a major tourist area from Cardiff Bay to Pembroke and Anglesey.

Wales is home to the first Bird Observatory in the UK, Skokholm. This bird observatory is based on Skokholm Island which is just off the coast of Pembrokeshire. It plays a vital role in the conservation of sea birds by providing cliffs and nest boxes for nesting birds (to use as well as nest boxes for European Storm Petrels). The island is home to 45,000 breeding pairs of Manx Shearwater, not to mention the 120,000 pairs on Skomer Island and a further 16,000 on Bardsey Island in North Wales, meaning that over half of the world's breeding population of Manx Shearwater are on Welsh Islands! The scientific data which has helped to support the conservation for this species is vital, all three islands, and Ramsey Island, another island off Pembrokeshire all contribute to this. Regular census work is carried out during the breeding months to monitor the number of birds breeding and the success rate of the young, all islands partake in the ringing scheme set up by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), by putting a ring bearing a unique number on the young as well as adults it provides data on the flight paths, nest site selection as well as the lifespan of these birds. Bardsey Island holds the world record for the oldest Manx Shearwater with a female being 48 years old; however she was ringed as an adult meaning you could probably add a few years onto that, but a brilliant achievement for the Island and for Wales. I, myself (do) partake in Ringing for the BTO and have visited Bardsey to help ringing the young to contribute to the fantastic data set they already have, June 2016 will see me visiting Ramsey island to carry out the Manx Shearwater census work again to collect data on the breeding patterns and the success rate of the young fledging. People help to fund the amazing work done with Manx Shearwaters and help the conservation work that has evidently led to this species' survival on species that are on the brink of extinction such as Puffins. Research on other declining species such as the Puffin, without this data it would be difficult to target the roots of such declines.

Skokholm and Skomer are both home to breeding Puffins and both ring the young as well, Puffins in recent years have had poor breeding seasons making the decline in the species all the more drastic. Puffins have now made it onto the IUCN Critically endangered list along with seven other British birds, the reason is that puffins are not surviving to adulthood to then breed, Skomer Island in particular allows people to get up and close with these wonderful little creatures and people adore seeing them. The funds raised by the Wildlife Trust from people visiting Skomer Island allows the Island and its population of breeding Puffins, Manx Shearwaters, Razorbills and many other birds to thrive in a protected area since there are no land based predators such as Cats and Rats which have become a problem on other islands, only avian predators such as Gulls and Owls. I would love to see more schools visiting places like Skomer, Skokholm, Puffin Island, Bardsey and Ramsey to show children these amazing and charismatic species (that are facing extinction) and how we can help them. For example, educating children on not leaving waste on the beach will help the species whilst out fishing (for food) to feed their young to not get tangled in fishing line or cans.

There are numerous places around Wales that are owned by Natural Trust, Wildlife Trust or RSPB that can be exploited by schools, but often they are only visited in passing. Children and Families are the future of Wales and its wildlife, there are places around which families can venture to, usually they are wooded areas but there are places such as Parc Slip in Bridgend, the Wildlife Trust Centre at

Teifi Marshes and WWT Llanelli where families can have a relaxed day out with activities for children. To me, these places are vital for moulding the next naturalists that will take over the duty of safeguarding Wales. I have helped with WWT by running events that will cater for children of all ages, from the Monday Munchkins (6mths-3yrs), to Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Special needs and family events. There are things which I consider myself well knowledgeable in such as Marine life and Birds in particular and I love running events to share my knowledge with children and families. Protecting land is vital for conservation and safeguarding for future generations to experience the same wonders as we have, but it's a shame to see centres closing such as Kenfig NNR where they held events for children to get involved in and be part of the young conservation/naturalist movement. I would love to see opportunities for younger people to get involved in things and given the same opportunity as youths or adults. BTO allow any ages to partake in ringing but to get a C permit you must be 16 or older and that's brilliant! I have had some young children attend our ringing sites who are naturals in holding birds and take a keen interest and I would hate for that to be discouraged because of their age. Once you find that spark of a naturalist in someone that young it's extremely disappointing to then put it out, for example some places if you want to volunteer you have to be 16 or older yet other places such as the Lapwing Champions with Parc Slip they encourage children of all ages to take part. I would love to see more things like this for younger children as well as those in their teens to get involved with, it's not only adults that can help conserve Wales, it's the children, the future naturalists, the future safe guarders of our wonderful Country who are as equal as anyone else.

The Welsh coastline is a beautiful site , and many know that, with its picture perfect look and a number of our beaches being voted the best in Britain and even the world. It's not just the beaches that are amazing, our oceans around Wales are full of life. Bottle-nosed Dolphins are a common sight along the coast of Pembrokeshire, this area is protect by the Marine Act which Morgan Parry himself helped to bring together, Cetaceans are one of my absolute favourite group of creatures and they are severely under recorded. There is very little data on Orcas, which are rarely recorded in Wales, you get many more amazing species such as Harbour Porpoise, Common Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin, Bottle-nosed Dolphin, aswell as other marine mammals such as Grey and Common Seals, Basking Sharks, and recently a suspected Mako shark. People are extremely delighted to see cetaceans and marine mammals but they are not recorded regularly, only organisations such as Marine life that go out and survey for these wonderful creatures are inputting the data into collection points such as Sea Watch Foundation where the data really does make a difference, I would love to see more citizen surveyors out there watching and noting down these beautiful creatures and that is one of my aims by writing this, these mammals need protecting more than ever and I want to be at the forefront in doing this. I have got my certificate from ORCA to survey these wonderful creatures around the UK as well as further afield, I have written articles and done interviews on the importance of data collection in marine mammals and would love to get more people involved by doing events through organisations such as Wildlife Trust or just young people/families with an interest in marine life to educate others on how to identify what they see and then this information can be inputted to Sea Watch Foundation to help the data set to have more marine protect areas over the Welsh Coast for important mammals such as Porpoises who breed in our waters.

I would love to get more local children involved in activities such as School BirdWatch with the RSPB or PatchWork Challenge where children can work together to identify what they see and submit the records to the Birdtrack database. These activities haven't got to be done alone, they can be done as a group which makes it even more enjoyable, with my knowledge from countless surveys and a huge passion for wildlife and data collection, I want to help encourage and educate others on the beauty of Welsh wildlife and hopefully inspire others to follow suit and go out and simply enjoy wildlife. It would be perfect if the next generation took up data collection, the more data collected the greater chance we have of safeguarding our wildlife. This year the Big Butterfly Count was a massive hit with

families, children and adults, and provided a great insight into the life and dispersal of butterfly species across the UK. I would love to get children to continue their interest in butterflies.(and not just do these adults,). Moths are another neglected wonder and recently I have been running moth-spotting sessions down my local park using the Butterfly Conservation ID leaflet(which has unfortunately met its fate so gone back to self-made laminated sheets), it's easier for children to match the moth to pictures instead of searching through the books in search of the right moth. I place the traps out in my garden and then take them down the park in the morning (for) to empty the traps and identify, it's a great enjoyment and pleasure to see children just smiling about moths.

I have done many recordings of nocturnal behaviour of mammals and have been in talks with WWT Llanelli to see whether a viewing session can be done to show children the precious mammals that come out in the night. This should hopefully show not just children but family's as well that these "vicious" mammals like badgers are often called are lovely creatures simply looking for food. I would like to set up feeding stations to get a variety of species such as Water Voles, which is one of the biggest reintroduction success stories and are not often seen, foxes and otter are two extremely hard things to see but are brilliant to watch. Setting up feeding stations in wildlife friendly zones will enable people to feel like they are contributing to the success and protection of these species. Using infrared cameras will pick up the species and a copy can be made for children to take into school and hopefully engage others in the protection of species. Hedgehogs have declined dramatically, almost at a 25-40% rate which is horrific! By providing safe zones for these creatures to feed, this will hopefully encourage them to go through gardens instead of crossing roads which is the common death hedgehog's face. Hedgehog homes are brilliant for the winter and allow them to hibernate in a safe place instead of searching for piles of leaves or bonfires where they often get recklessly burned alive. A study was done by the Wildlife Trust through their #EveryChildWild campaign which stated that 32% of children have never seen a Hedgehog alive, if they are declining by 40% in 2015, what hope do future generations have of seeing one if something isn't done now?

The biggest concern to me personally is the importation of food we can simply grow in our wonderful of country. Houses have very small gardens these days but that doesn't mean growing your own fruit and vegetables is a lost cause. Most communities have enough land for allotments to be built on, in my little village we have a community allotment where the cafes can purchase their supplies from, as well as a farmer who sells home-grown fruit and veg, and a local butchers. Living where I do and seeing how close the community is and the healthier eating people are trying to do, it's a shame to then see places like Dominoes, Subway and Southern Fried Chicken stores to be opened next door, cheap food is not the answer, yes it may kill a few seconds but in the long term it isn't good for you at all. I would love to make a small allotment maybe only big enough to grow a few things but for children to use and take pride in what they are doing, I would love to have children choose to eat something healthy which they have grown instead of opting for some unhealthy fatty food like Mcdonalds. I would give out packs to children interested with ideas of food they can make, the veg or fruit they can grow and include some packaged seeds in there for them to grow at home, I would love to get the whole community involved by having a "grow-your-own" event in the local hall where children and families can sell their left-over stocks and to purchase 'supplies' so to speak such as seeds or recipes off local people. Communities are better together, and providing a reward at the end where children can show off their crops and take pride in what they've done, encouragement in healthy food such as using their crops to make a cake, food or drink to then take to the food fayre at the local hall would also be ideal. Allotments are hard to come by so providing packs where children and families can use them in their own gardens, even growing something as easy as lettuce or strawberries would give a since of pride and help to create a more eco-friendly community and even save money.

One of the biggest issues throughout the world is waste. Litter is either left on our streets causing mammals to associate them with food from humans which has happened with foxes in city centres

causing outrage in people and a call to cull them, other waste usually ends up on our beaches and in our oceans. A movement has been happening on social media called Three Minute Beach Clean and has gained a massive response from communities, I would love to have people picking up any rubbish they find and placing them in bins provided by either myself or the council, I would target one or two popular beaches first to see how things are and if people are indeed collecting rubbish and placing them in bins then it would be brilliant to have a few more placed on other beaches. Realistically only one bin would be placed on each beach with the advertisement for 'Three Minute Beach Clean' with a board showing the affects littering can cause to marine mammals, the bins will be places on routes where council or beach staff will be emptying other bins making it part of the system and allowing them to be emptied. Another major threat to our wildlife is balloon or Chinese lantern releases, these releases look pretty but the aftermath is devastating to wildlife. If we want to create a litter free and wildlife friendly Wales then allowing these to be released on a huge scale e.g Wedding parties releasing 300 or more balloons is insane!, these 300 balloons don't magically disappear, they end up in our oceans, often around the necks or in the stomachs of seabirds, turtles and other marine life, or littered across our streets. Wales is most known for his beautiful landscapes and which means tourism plays a vital part in the economy, so having balloons or Chinese lanterns littered around tourist areas will not go down well. Not only do these Chinese lanterns cause havoc with wildlife, they cause damage to property! These lanterns have a lit flame inside them meaning if the flame hasn't gone out before they touch down the risk of a fire is considerable, it's usually the property of people who aren't part of the release that get vandalised and ruined. You can't force people not to do something but you can make people aware of the consequences of the actions they do and to make them think about the aftermath of their "beautiful" release. These things cannot be justified by saying it will be a memory, the release happens quickly and is over in a few moments but the aftermath of this will continue to affect us and our wildlife for months if not years to come.

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