



Gwent Wildlife Trust

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- ### GWT Milestones
- 1963: Magor Marsh acquired
 - 1965: Wildlife Report
 - 1970: Flora of Monmouthshire
 - 1970: Henllys Bog acquired
 - 1980: First member of staff employed
 - 1981: First proper offices in Monmouth's Shire Hall
 - 1983: Silent Valley acquired
 - 1985: Move to offices at White Swan Court
 - 1987: Formally known as Gwent Wildlife Trust
 - 1991: Pentwyn Farm acquired
 - 2001: Springdale Farm acquired
 - 2003: Magor Marsh further land acquired
 - 2003: Derek Upton Centre built
 - 2005: Head Office moved to Sidden House
 - 2008: Wyeswood

History

Join us
Protect local wildlife



Gwent Wildlife Trust is looking forward this year to 2013 - our 50th anniversary! Our plans for next year include celebrations and special events to mark this exciting year. Please keep an eye on our website for the latest news and have a look out for our Events Guide 2013 in January which will tell you more about it.

We'll be updating our history to account for the last decade but until then, here's a great article written by one of our founding members taking us through our history to 2003.

Gwent Wildlife Trust 1963 – 2003: Forty Years Young!

John Kelly, elder statesman of Gwent Wildlife Trust.



We have come a long way from those tentative beginnings as Monmouthshire Naturalists Trust in the 1960s. Gwent Wildlife Trust has become a highly effective and professional body with a dedicated staff supported by a membership of more than 4500.

The Trust's first objective in 1963 was the conservation of Magor Marsh, the last remnant of fenland on the Gwent Levels. Over the years, the reserve has been expanded to almost 100 acres, with a third being acquired thanks to the spring 2003 membership appeal. The construction of the Derek Upton Centre means Magor Marsh is now set to play a big role in introducing people to the wonders of the Levels' natural environment.

During those first years the 200 or so members (ordinary subscription £1, juniors 10/-, life £15) worked hard to raise funds through staging coffee mornings, raffles and sales. Lord Raglan, our President at the time, appealed for financial support from industry and public bodies. Not withstanding these

practical approaches, our Chairman Pat Humphreys noted that our members were 'looked upon as cranks running around in the countryside with binoculars and butterfly nets'. This actually denoted that those members were out in force recording the wildlife status of our countryside! This voluntary recording led to the 1965 Wildlife Report, and important contributions to A E Wade's 1970 Flora of Monmouthshire.

In 1980 the Trust employed its first member of staff, Dr Stephanie Tyler. Soon afterwards, the Trust became heavily involved in training projects supported by the Manpower Services Commission, including the seminal Grassland Survey. A re-assessment of aims and objectives in 1987 led to employment of two permanent staff, the name change, first to Gwent Trust for Nature Conservation



- 2012: Barecroft Common fields acquired
- 2012: The Wildlife Trusts 100th Anniversary
- 2013: GWT's 50th Anniversary

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...groups have been another constant support. However, the employment of full-time professional staff changed the Trust's internal dynamics and transformed our ability to deal with the objectives we had set ourselves. This was exemplified in our drive to secure Pentwyn Farm at Penallt, a unique piece of Gwent countryside. This smallholding, including its ancient meadows and a collapsing medieval barn, came on the market for £150,000 in 1991. The public appeal raised the sum within the six week deadline – an incredible feat.

At 125 acres the Silent Valley Local Nature Reserve near Ebbw Vale – ancient beech woodland, with wet flushes, grassland, bracken and heather – is the Trust's largest reserve. It has been managed by the Trust since the

1980s. In 1999 grants were secured to enable the Trust to appoint staff to make the most of this wonderful reserve for people and wildlife. Visitor numbers soared, and around 40 schools have used the reserve to experience wildlife in the valleys.

One of the most important functions of the Trust has been to keep abreast of issues which impact upon the environment. 1974 saw the publication of the Goss report on 'Development Potential of South Gwent'. Despite the Trust's efforts, this recommended the Severn and Usk Barrages and Sevenside International Airport. If the battle over the report was lost, the Trust has been successfully fighting the war ever since, with none of these proposals yet succeeding.

These days, the Trust plays a major part in effective coalitions, on everything from the M4 Relief Road to the housing development which hangs menacingly over the future of the wildlife-rich wedge of countryside between Cwmbran and Pontypool. This partnership approach extends to proactive initiatives for species and habitats, focused by the agreement of imaginative and challenging Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

We acquired Springdale Farm near Usk in 2001 thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Countryside Council for Wales, Monmouthshire County Council and the incredible generosity of our own members. It boasts 40 acres of species-rich unimproved grassland, 60 acres of grassland which had lost much of its wildflower interest, a stunning ancient wood and breath-taking views over the Usk valley. The special flora is now spreading back over the depleted grassland. We have also venture into stock-farming.



Since 1965 the Trust has produced a newsletter. However the current magazine is a far cry from those early efforts. Today the membership receives three copies produced jointly, and very economically I might add, in partnership with the other five Welsh Wildlife Trusts. They are in full colour – stylish, lively and beautifully illustrated. Combined with increasing media coverage, and our website lovingly maintained by a volunteer, the Trust is making the most of this information age for the benefit of wildlife.

Whilst some of us from those early days of the Trusts might lean more heavily on our walking sticks, the Trust seems to get younger and younger by the day. The Trust now manages 32 reserves situated throughout Gwent. We are able to address an expanding range of conservation issues, thanks to an ongoing and fruitful membership drive, and the manner in which our good record enables us to attract funding. Our achievements over the past 40 years have been manifold.



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