

## CEO Report: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

It has been another excellent year for Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) in many ways. Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year was a special one, as it saw us purchase our largest ever nature reserve through The Wildlife Trusts and Aviva Temperate Rainforest Project, and appoint our first ever MWT Head of Conservation & Land, who gives us the leadership and focus for our biodiversity conservation and restoration across our land and sea. We further developed our governance and business trading arm, broadened our partnership working and corporate support, and hugely expanded our education and engagement work, with the focus now being strongly towards communities and connecting every IOM school child to Manx nature. The following pages summarise what I believe are the highlights of the year.

**Strategic Development:** A series of workshops were held with CEO and Trustees to agree the crux strategic issues, which were endorsed by Council. These are Conservation Leadership and Focus, maximizing the opportunity offered by the Agri-environment Scheme (AES), improve our fundraising, and our visibility across the Island. The first less formal strategic meetings between Trustees and senior staff were held, to discuss corporate engagement and our land ambitions. Now that we have a Head of Conservation & Land in post (alongside our Head of Engagement), the next phase will be the development of an MWT delivery plan in 2024.

**Wildlife Limited:** At the start of the year, we re-branded our ecological consultancy delivery as Ecology Vannin and moved the business into our trading arm Wildlife Limited, so providing a degree of separation from the main charity. Our ecological consultancy work continued to grow in the year (14% up on the previous year) and in addition to raising important funds for MWT, we are having an increasingly positive impact for nature through our work with Island developers. We remain of the firm belief that our ecologists give far more informed ecological advice and have the best interests of Manx nature at the core of their delivery, compared to consultants coming from the UK. One example being our leading work in the Isle of Man with Hartford Homes in the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) within their development projects. We were delighted to welcome Greg Watson to our team as our Trainee Ecologist and administrator for Ecology Vannin, and he has made an excellent start in his first role since graduating from Nottingham Trent University.

Within our Gift Shop, we appointed Ali Hodgson to the position of Manager in August 2023, and since then the 'Ali effect' has positively transformed our Gift Shop, with increased sales, including an excellent Christmas period, and the installation of an Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) system that was switched on in February 2024. Sustainable products and linkage to MWT's work are now at the core of our retail offer in Peel and at our two Nature Discovery Centres.

**Partnerships and Collaboration:** We have continued to build strong partnerships with many organisations in and outside the Isle of Man. Our links and joint working with the IOM Government remain crucially important to us. This year saw the appointment of a new permanent DEFA Chief Officer (Scott Gallagher), following a few years of this role being delivered on an interim or acting basis. So much of MWT's work aligns and/or compliments that of DEFA, so the Chief Officer role is crucially important for MWT and our ambitions. We are looking forward to working closely and positively with Scott and his team going forward. MWT remains firm advocates for our UNESCO Biosphere, and for the development of sustainable eco-tourism. I have continued to represent MWT on the IOM Biosphere Partnership group and the Visit IOM Agency Board. Our status as the only whole nation UNESCO Biosphere in the world is something we must celebrate and use to the Isle of Man's advantage.

Our engagement with the federation of The Wildlife Trusts (TWT) continued to expand this year, the highlight being the two on-line events streamed from the Isle of Man in March as part of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations (see later section). The TWT Irish Sea Network is made up of representatives of all the Wildlife Trusts who are in and around the Irish Sea (from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man), who work collaboratively to agree and drive the narrative and key marine conservation priorities for the Irish Sea. The Network meets face-to-face one a year and in 2023 the meeting was hosted by MWT in the Isle of Man (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> June). The key output was the agreement and adoption of our Irish Sea Marine Spatial Planning report. The 94 TWT Chairs and CEOs now meet and interact regularly, which is predominantly held on-line, with face-to-face gatherings taking place this year in the Netherlands for a 'Seeing is Believing' tour to see expansive re-wilding projects, and in Lancashire for the TWT Leaders Conference.

We received increased corporate engagement and support from businesses in the Island and are delighted to have been selected by the IOM Chamber of Commerce to be their Charity Partner for two years, which was launched at a gala dinner at the Comis Hotel. Renewable energy is a topic gaining more focus in the Isle of Man and in response MWT produced our Renewable Energy Policy (available on our website). In short, we believe climate change is real, it is being accelerated by human beings, and it is a major threat for biodiversity and humans. We believe renewable energy for the Isle of Man is crucially important, but we remain champions of wildlife and therefore want to play our part in ensuring the Isle of Man develops the right renewable energy solutions, of the right quantities and in the right places. To this aim, we have

started to explore the building of a positive relationship with Orsted, who are proposing the development of Moir Vannin, the first offshore wind farm in Isle of Man waters. MWT were guests of Orsted to visit their partnership project with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust at Spurn Point, where Orsted are funding the restoration of oysters and seagrass with both YWT and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.

Engaging with other islands and UK territories offers MWT the opportunity to learn, network, help, and showcase the Isle of Man. MWT are members of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) and through this I was funded by UKOTCF to visit Montserrat in May 2023 (on annual leave from MWT) to deliver horticultural upskilling as part of a Darwin Initiative project, to the Montserrat National Trust, Government and farmers. In November 2023 we carried out partnership working with one of our corporate members, Bet Victor, in another UKOT, Gibraltar, who carried out a team exercise to critique our website user journey (with aim of driving more income/connections).

The British Islands are another important network for MWT. In September 2023 Dr Lara Howe, Graham Makepeace-Warne and myself attended, and presented at, the annual Inter Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) on Sark, which is attended by conservation organisations, and Governments, across the Crown Dependencies and other islands, including the Isle of Wight. Several of the presentation topics and discussions being highly relevant with our work in the Isle of Man. IIEM is 23 years old and has always been held in the Channel Islands, it was agreed in Sark however, that the IIEM meeting will be held in the Isle of Man in 2025, which will be the first time it will outside the Channel Islands.

### **Biodiversity Conservation:**

**Conservation Leadership:** Appointing clear leadership and providing focus for our conservation delivery was our number one priority this year, and to that aim we were delighted to appoint David Bellamy as MWT's first Head of Conservation & Land in December 2023. The appointment was made possible through significant funding over three years from a UK trust fund, who are keen to support biodiversity conservation in areas of the British Isles that are not high profile. They have provided a full salary for three years and an annual operating budget to enable the role to deliver conservation impact through our Action for Wildlife project work. David's first task was to recruit his successor as Agri-Environment Scheme (AES) Officer (Katie Grace is now in place). Delivery of the AES and working positively with farmers is now a priority for all the MWT team. This year 260 of the 343 (76%) of Manx farms are involved in AES and MWT delivered our 500<sup>th</sup> farm visit just before Christmas. Driving towards a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) for the IOM, with at least 30% of land and sea managed for nature by 2030 remains a core strategic goal for us. We estimate that currently the total stands at c.20% so much work still to do.

**Terrestrial Conservation:** We set up the Manx Farmland Birds Group to support our work with Manx farmers and the delivery of the Agri-environment Scheme (AES). This is a multi-stakeholder Isle of Man group is now established, with other organisations in the steering group, including the Manx Ornithological Society, Manx Birdlife and representative farmers. The initial focus is the saving of Tree Sparrows from going extinct, and through our Farmlands Birds Officer, Rob Fisher, we are tackling this by raising public awareness (including the two agricultural shows), installing 21 feeding stations with camera traps, nesting boxes, bird ringing, and data collection from observations around the Island. We received an anonymous donation, which has enabled us to extend Rob's contract by 6-months and we set-up a new volunteer group (Sparrow Spotters) to help collect data on the birds.

The survey of the wallabies in the Ballaugh Curragh we commissioned in January 2023 was made public, which resulted in DEFA setting up a group to discuss the feral goats and wallabies, and agreeing to fund the ecologist/drone pilot to revisit the Island in 2024 to carry out a wider survey. We believe that with more accurate information about our feral animals, the IOM will be able to have a much more informed conversation about their future potential management. We have constructed a wallaby proof fence around a piece of Goshen Nature Reserve and through 2023 and into 2024 we are collecting photographic evidence if the impact on native plant growth inside and outside the zone.

**Biological Recording:** We were awarded the contract by DEFA to coordinate the Manx Biological Recording Partnership (MBRP) and were delighted that Dr Jenny Sharp joined us as the part-time Biological Recorder, working closely with Dr Philippa Tomlinson. Our biological recording team Jenny and Philippa have started brilliantly, with excellent progress in clearing the back log of data, resulting in over 20,000 new species records added to our Island database Recorder6 this year. We continued to collate data into a format to allow us to publish a Manx State of Nature, with several organisations and people contributing their data, and this is set to go live on-line in 2024. Butterflies are a key indicator species and we have been successful in recruiting a new volunteer Butterfly Recorder for the Island, Phil Waring, who is already supporting UK-wide national recording schemes by getting up-to-speed with the Levana recording system, allowing us to upload our records to UK Butterfly Conservation.

**Temperate Rainforest Project:** The Wildlife Trusts (TWT) federation secured c.£44m in funding from Aviva in a 100-year project to restore temperate rainforests in the British Isles. Graham Makepeace-Warne joined the TWT on-line group and led the way for us, supported by Andree Dubbeldam who identified that a prime piece of land in the Isle of Man for this project that was on the market. In March 2023 we bought 105 acres at Creg y Cowin. Since then we secured DEFA funding from the Woodland Grants scheme for the trees, and have commenced tree planting in partnership with the IOM Woodland Trust and 100s of volunteers, with our vision being to create agro-forestry, with farming and nature in harmony. This is a tremendously exciting project for MWT, which aligns with our (and specifically Andree's) long-term vision for our woodlands. We are aiming to secure more appropriate land through the Aviva funding and land at West Baldwin, which we have named Glion Darragh, will be next.

In tandem with our Aviva project, in January 2024 we completed the signing of the IOM's first on-island carbon credit scheme, through which three IOM based corporate businesses have funded the purchase of two fields (c.19 acres) at Crossags, which is part of the MWT Hairpin Woodland Park. This is the first on-island carbon off-set scheme for IOM businesses, which delivers high integrity carbon credits – whereby we are creating broadleaf forest with high biodiversity, which will be owned and maintained in perpetuity by MWT. The businesses are delighted that, in addition to carbon credits awarded under the Woodland Carbon Code and verified by the Soil Association, their staff can help plant the trees, and that they can visit the project any time and see its development. We believe such high integrity carbon credits can play a vitally important part in helping the IOM achieve its habitat and biodiversity targets, and we are scoping where our next such project will take place in the Island. Ensuring, of course, that we plant the right trees in the right places.

All our trees and woodlands must be managed effectively as they grow and develop, and to help ensure all MWT land with trees on it is as safe as possible for staff and visitors, this year we commissioned Manx Roots to work with our ecologists to produce an MWT Tree Risk Management Strategy. The supply of trees for our woodland projects will also be crucial in future and we are delighted to have secured funding this year from the TWT Aviva project, to develop a tree and native plant nursery in partnership at Milntown Gardens and employ a nursery supervisor for three years to get the nursery fully up and running and sustainable.

**Marine Conservation:** We set-up our Manx Eelgrass Group (MEG), funded by KPMG, to support the DEFA Blue Carbon Project, with our primary focus to survey and map the area and abundance of all the seagrass around the Island. MWT staff visited the Project Seagrass nursery in south Wales, and funding was obtained from Sea-Changers to purchase a BRUV (Baited Remote Underwater Video) system, and from Sea-Changers and the Wildlife Park to purchase an aerial drone, with the aim of surveying seagrass and conducting a whole Island seal survey in 2024. Building work completed for the Seal Rehabilitation Centre in partnership with a veterinary practice in the north of the Island. All our historical Seasearch survey forms were digitized by volunteers, and added to the British Isles on-line mapping and database. Our small shark tagging programme achieved some notable items this year, with 'Manx' tagged Tope recorded in Scotland, Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal. We bought and distributed new tagging guns and shark slings to the local angling boats and purchased 'Top Tagger' caps to give to anglers who have tagged a number of sharks for the project.

**MWT Nature Reserves:** Our nature reserves increased and expanded in the year, with Goshen extended by c.4 acres costing £10K, which was funded by the legacy left in memory of Anne Kaye and we were pleased to welcome Anne's family to formally open the new land. Ballachrink was officially opened to our members by His Excellency Sir John and Lady Lorimer on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023. We were delighted that the MUA agreed to change their ongoing management of the Lhen Trench mouth at Cronk y Bing, which will mean far less use of digger vehicles in future. At Lough Gat y Whing more coppicing/clearance work commenced January 2024 and Gat y Whing is now re-established within the BTO's monthly Wetland Bird Survey (last counted there in 1983). Onchan was renamed Onchan Community Wetlands, with our Community Ranger, Hannah Phillips, and a group of volunteers, supported by corporate sponsorship from Utmost International, taking on the development and maintenance of this nature reserve. At Billown Quarry in partnership with COLAS, the tree planting and landscaping was completed, and the lease was signed making this officially an MWT nature reserve. MWT are now for the first time the owner of a small flock of sheep, as we purchased six Loaghtans, which are now grazing at Billown.

Good progress at the Hairpin Woodland Park (HWP), as we moved towards the formal opening in 2024. An updated Engagement Plan was produced, with the signage and interpretation under way, planning approval was gained for the welcome pavilion, and the Logstacle Course completed. Felling of 1.5 acres of conifer plantation carried out. Several of our nature reserves need to be First Registered, and we have started the process of carrying this out so that all our land title is clear. Priorities are Lough Cranstal, Cooldarry, and Cronk y Bin, which we aim to be elevated to the status of a National Nature Reserve with DEFA.

## Public Engagement:

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** MWT was founded in 1973 and so in 2023 we celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> year! We have a tremendous 50<sup>th</sup> year, and great praise goes to Graham Makepeace-Warne and his Engagement Team for making the year such a landmark success. The purchase of Creg y Cowin as part of the Aviva/TWT Temperate Rainforest project was completed the week prior to the visit of Liz Bonnin, the President of TWT, and Craig Bennett, the CEO of the Royal Society of the Wildlife Trusts, who brought a team to the Island to help us celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. While in the IOM the TWT broadcast two livestreamed events, a TWT Town Hall, which was held at Lloyds Bank in Douglas, and joined on-line by staff across the TWT Federation and a WildLive event, broadcast from the Manx Museum, with a panel of Liz Bonnin, Minister Clare Barber (DEFA), Zeldá Betham (Aviva) and our MWT CEO Leigh Morris, being interviewed live by Craig Bennett about the temperate rainforest project.

We held our fantastic 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ball at the Comis Hotel on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, and an equally wonderful thankyou event for all MWT volunteers on August 8th at Government House hosted by our Patrons Sir John and Lady Lorimer, where we made a presentation to our Reserves Officer, Tricia Sayle, who was celebrating 25 years as a member of the MWT staff team. Well done, brilliant, and thank you Tricia! In addition to the events, we produced a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary magazine supplement, a set of Isle of Man stamps, featuring the artwork of our then Artist in Residence, Clare Payne, and a set of MWT coins again depicting key species of Manx biodiversity. I was particularly pleased that we launched our Fenee Ghlassey (Green Champions), within our 50<sup>th</sup> year, once again at Government House, at a lunch with our Patrons on December 4<sup>th</sup>. These individuals are people who have devoted their lives to helping Manx Nature, and it was wonderful to give our first Fenee Ghlassey the recognition they deserve.

**Community Engagement and Team Wilder:** Lucy Chapman has done a brilliant job of leading Team Wilder initiative for us, which aims to engage, educate and, most importantly, when possible, empower people to take positive action for nature. Lucy gained funding from the Manx Lottery Trust to purchase our new MWT mascot Tappee (pronounced tar-vee) the Tern. Tappee went on tour last summer and now makes regular appearances at events. Lucy also initiated and secured funding to create a wildlife theatre project with the renowned Hello Little People, which goes live later in 2024.

One of our core engagement aims is to inspire and enable more people to garden for wildlife in the Island. One way we are aiming to do this is by supplying a Manx-Pollinator Seed Mix, a mixture of annuals and perennials, which we will encourage people to plant in the gardens and urban areas. Lucy worked closely with Phillip Payne, the Head of Horticulture at Manx National Heritage who created the seed mix, and a trail was successfully carried out at Milntown Gardens during 2023. The aim is to carry out further trials in 2024 and then hopefully make the mix available from spring 2025.

Our Lloyds Bank International funded Community Ranger, Hannah Phillips, is delivering some excellent community projects, notably the revitalization of our Onchan Wetlands Nature Reserve, Milntown gardening Club and Wilder Churches. We were delighted that (just after the end of this reporting year) Lloyds Bank International agreed to fully fund Hannah for two more years.

**Volunteer Management:** Our many volunteers remain absolutely critical to the delivery of all our work. Over the last couple of years we have focused on developing our volunteer management to ensure all our volunteers are well cared for, safe, useful, organised and valued. All our volunteers details are being compiled into one register, which is almost completed. We updated the MWT Volunteer Handbook and identified all the leaders of our volunteer groups (some of which are volunteers themselves).

**Artist in Residence:** Our inaugural MWT, Biosphere IOM Arts Council Artist in Residence (AiR), Clare Payne, was absolutely brilliant, and this was a key factor in the IOM Arts Council agreeing to fund our AiR programme for three more years. Ali Hodgson was appointed as our second AiR in September 2023 and has proved to be just as brilliant as Clare – in fact so brilliant that she is the AiR, Shop Manager, and delivers much of our communications. We aim that the AiR programme sustains for many years beyond the first four we have funding for.

Other highlights in our engagement delivery this year included, another brilliant Festival of the Sea event in Port Erin over two days in July, very well attended, increased marine conservation messaging and we were delighted that Oceanweb continued their sponsorship. We are in discussions with Island Escapes to develop a nature themed eco-tourism offer. We launched our online Nature Recovery Network and Wilder IOM Map website in partnership with DEFA, which allows people to appraise how nature friendly their gardens are, and if they score highly enough, they can add their little piece of the Island to our drive towards 30 by 30. New signage and interpretation panels have been produced for our two Nature Discovery Centres at the Ayres and Scarlett, and signage updates commenced at Cooldarry, Onchan Wetlands and Close Sartfield. The importance of nature for human health, wellbeing and enabling more people to benefit from Manx nature is increasingly important to MWT, and to help our organizational understanding about mental health, eight



MWT staff (including myself) completed an excellent two-day Mental Health First Aid Course with Manx Minds. I am keen we connect to all people in the Island, and so to that aim, our Team Wilder Coordinator, Lucy, and I appeared on a Manx nature themed episode on the Manx Radio Mannin Line in January.

**Education:** Our new Education Officer, Beth Penhallurick, started at the end of April, in the midst of our 50<sup>th</sup> year celebrations! Beth has brought a wonderful new approach to our education, she collated our data for 20+ years of education delivery, and her aim now is to connect to every child in the Isle of Man during their schooling. We are developing an entitlement for every child, and through a partnership with the Outdoor Learning Centre (formally Ardwhallan) to reach every Year 10 student, to give them all outdoor adventure experiences and a greater understanding of the nature they are in. We are aiming to launch this later in 2024. Beth has also created and launched our Wilder School Award to encourage schools and pupils to create space for nature in schools.

I hope you will agree that the year has been a special one for MWT, and I wish to sincerely thank all our members, volunteers, supporters and partners for working with us. The Isle of Man is a beautiful and special place, but it's certainly not perfect for nature, and some parts are under threat and/or need to be restored. It's a critical time for our planet, MWT have much still to do, the Isle of Man has an important role to play as the only whole nation UNESCO Biosphere in the world, and I ask that you all continue to help us in whatever ways you are able.

Thank you.

**Leigh S Morris, CEO, Manx Wildlife Trust (July 2024)**