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Wetlands for Wales

*A Strategy for the Third
Millennium*



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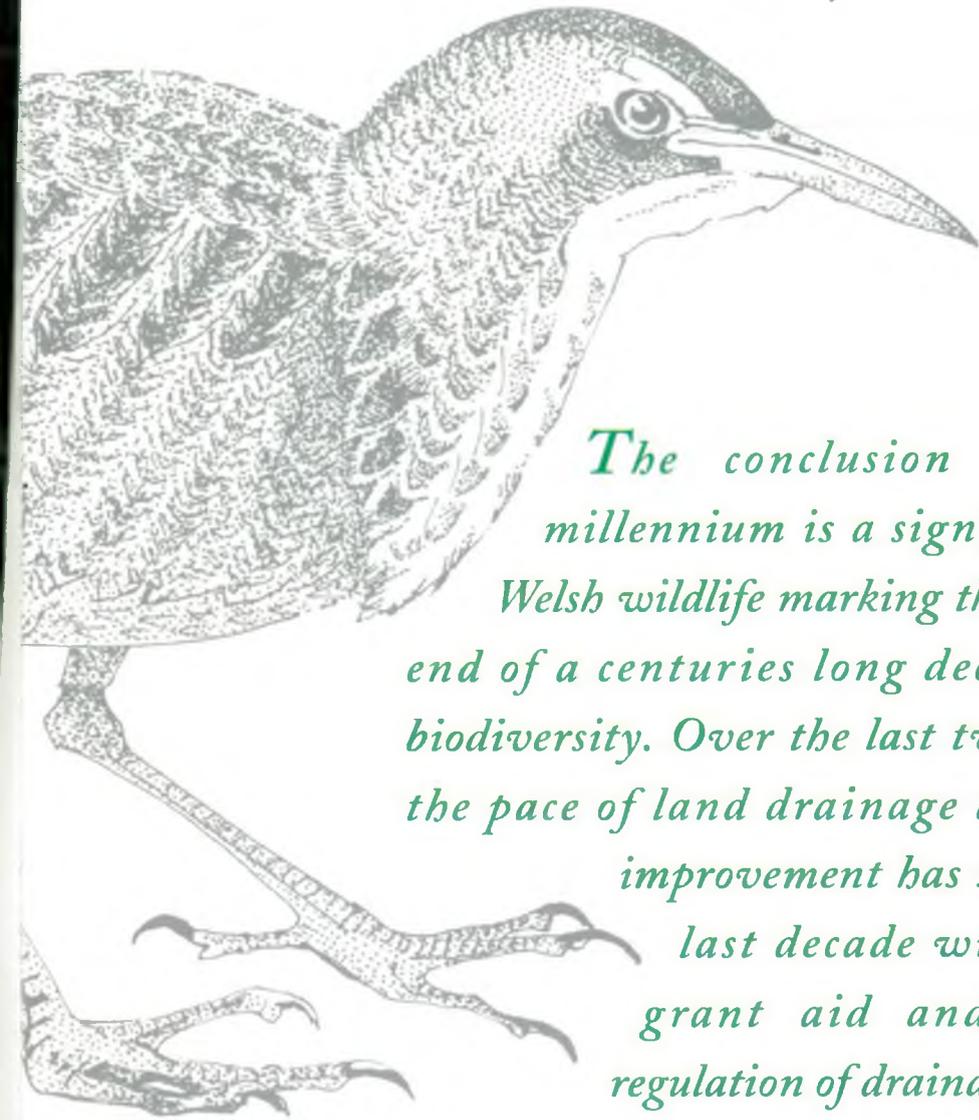




“Our vision for the future is the restoration of a mosaic of wilderness areas throughout North Wales.....”



The front cover shows a Marsh Harrier and restored fen at Cors Erddreiniog, NNR



The conclusion of the second millennium is a significant period for Welsh wildlife marking the beginning of the end of a centuries long decline in wetland biodiversity. Over the last two hundred years, the pace of land drainage and agricultural improvement has slowed only in the last decade with the demise of grant aid and the improved regulation of drainage bodies.

The Bittern, no longer breeding in North Wales.

In North Wales*, our legacy from the rush to improve (and also neglect) has been one of catastrophic decline in wetland habitats, species and landscapes:

- Reedbeds on Anglesey continue to decline with 38% of sites reduced in extent since 1983. Breeding populations of bittern, marsh harrier and bearded tit are now extinct.
- Botanically rich mire vegetation on the Llyn peninsula declined by 65% between 1920 and 1988.
- Birds of wet grassland and coastal marshes have declined dramatically during the 1980s as a result of agricultural intensification, lapwing 54%, redshank 58% and snipe 60% down.

* includes mid Wales as far as Aberystwyth.

The Welsh Context

With one or two exceptions, most of the important wetland sites in the Region are found in North Wales and include 6 National Nature Reserves, 5 EC Special Areas for Conservation, 2 Ramsar sites and the only Biosphere Reserve in Wales.

The range of wetland sites include shallow lakes, saltmarsh, estuary, raised bog, rich and poor fen, wet grassland and reedswamp habitats. On a National scale, this diversity and extent is paralleled only by Broadland, supporting a wide range of wildlife and wilderness landscapes:

- 500 of 1500 British vascular plants are found on lowland wet grassland.
- 32 Red Data Book/candidate species are dependant or partly dependant on lowland wet grassland.
- Calcareous valley mires on Anglesey and Llyn support an orchid rich vegetation type found nowhere else in Britain.
- Rare invertebrates and several bird species such as bittern and marsh harrier are entirely dependent on reedbeds.

Nant Ffrancon, a key site for restoration in the National Park.



The Dee Estuary, an internationally important wetland.



*Lapwing
- a species under threat*

The UK Context

Mounting concern over habitat damage and biodiversity losses led to the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) at Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

One important outcome was the Convention on Biological Diversity from which arose the U.K. Action Plan on Biodiversity (1994), a National Strategy to enhance biological diversity.

Key objectives relating to wetland habitats are:

1. To conserve and where practicable to enhance;
 - the overall populations and natural ranges of native species and the quality and range of wildlife habitats and ecosystems.
 - internationally important and threatened species, habitats and ecosystems.
 - species, habitats and natural and semi-natural habitats where this has been diminished over recent past decades.
2. To increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving biodiversity.

NRA and its partners have initiated a wide range of projects and propose further work to meet these objectives.



Volunteers helping to restore a reedbed.

The NRA & Wetlands

NRA has a duty to further conservation with respect to its own activities and those which it authorises (Water Resources Act 1990). A general duty on NRA to promote conservation is implemented through strategic, collaborative projects which are developed to resolve issues raised through our Catchment Management Planning process.

From April 1996, these duties will apply to the water management functions of the Environment Agency.

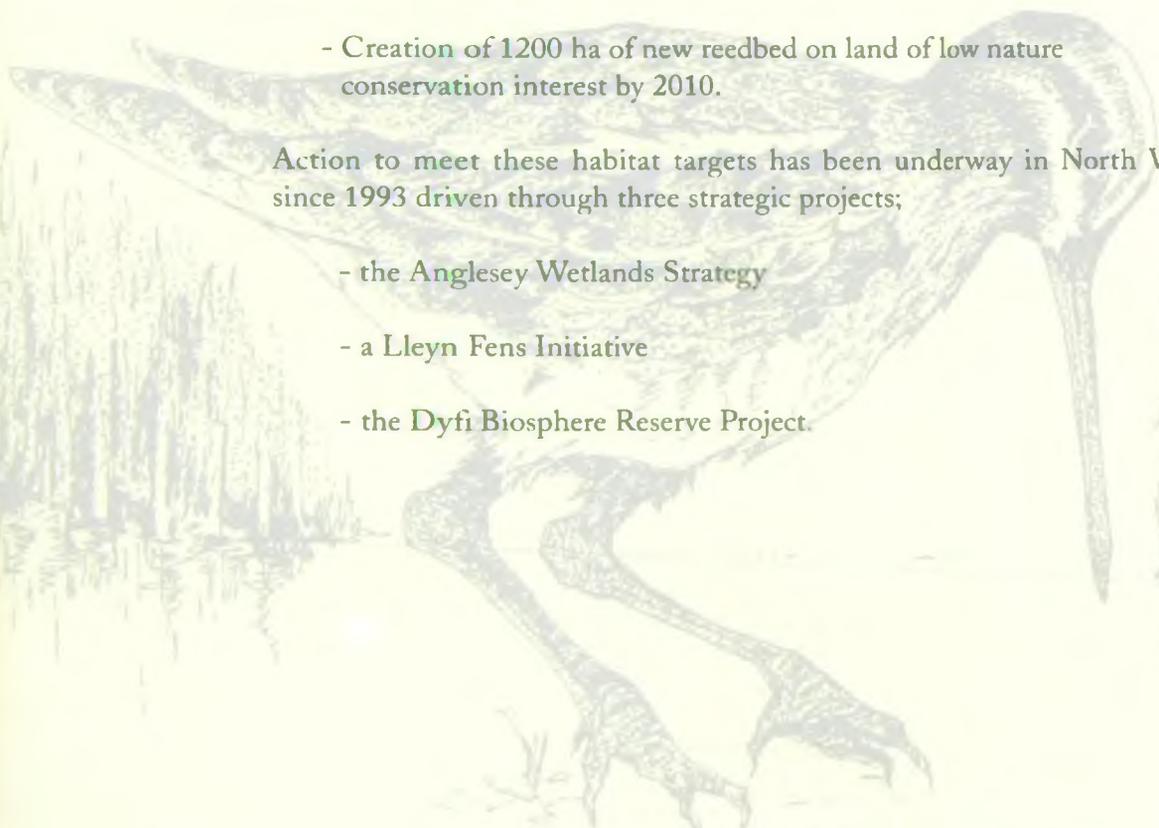
Through its Flood Defence activities, NRA is able to manage wetland systems, particularly as it is the principle operating authority required to deliver Water Level Management Plans on all sensitive sites by 1997.

NRA, in conjunction with others, are finalising Habitat Action Plans to meet the objectives of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. National objectives and proposed targets include:

- Rehabilitation of 5000 ha of grazing marsh by the year 2000.
- Creation of 2500 ha of grazing marsh by the year 2000 from arable land in targeted areas.
- Creation of 1200 ha of new reedbed on land of low nature conservation interest by 2010.

Action to meet these habitat targets has been underway in North Wales since 1993 driven through three strategic projects;

- the Anglesey Wetlands Strategy
- a Lleyn Fens Initiative
- the Dyfi Biosphere Reserve Project.



Snipe - a wet grassland species.



Wetland creation
 at Malltraeth
 Marsh, SSSI

The Anglesey Wetlands Strategy

Recognition of the continuing damage and losses to wetland sites on Anglesey initiated a collaborative approach to wetland conservation between environmental organisations.

Since 1993, NRA, RSPB, Countryside Council for Wales, ADAS and the North Wales Wildlife Trust have initiated habitat restoration projects at 12 sites, including:

- Survey, acquisition (RSPB), engineering works and reedbed restoration on 50 ha of Malltraeth Marsh SSSI.
- Civil engineering works to restore water levels at Cors Erddreiniog fen, National Nature Reserve.
- Survey and part restoration of reedbed at Cors y Bol mire.
- Survey, acquisition (RSPB), engineering works, and reedbed restoration on Plas Bog former SSSI (50 ha).
- Restoration of 2.5 km of former river channel, Malltraeth Marsh SSSI.
- Restoration of Garreg Llwyd reedbed SSSI by willow removal and ditch cutting.
- Acquisition of EC Leader II funding to promote community projects on wetlands.



Major sluice construction at Cors Erddreiniog, NNR.

Raised water tables - Dyfi Biosphere Reserve.



Reedbed restoration at Ystymlyn, SSSI.

The Dyfi Biosphere Reserve Project

Cors Fochno and Dyfi National Nature Reserve are probably one of the most important wetland complexes in the U.K. The mosaic of reedbed, wet grassland, raised bog, dune, saltmarsh and estuary is protected under UK and EC legislation and is the only site in Wales designated a Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO 1971).

In order to better protect the reserve, restore degraded areas, promote its identity and improve access and interpretation, NRA, CCW and RSPB have put together a Biosphere Project, building a successful partnership.

Land acquisition, engineering works and land management initiated in 1993 have increased the area of wet grassland by 84 ha, greatly adding to its diversity in terms of plants and birds. The addition of a bird hide and 700m boardwalk close by has also increased visitor interest to the site.

NRA manage all the lowland drainage areas within the Dyfi and considerable potential exists for reserve acquisition, habitat management, access and education at this globally recognised site.

The Lleyn Fens Initiative

In North Wales, the range and extent of wetlands on Lleyn are second only to those found in Anglesey, but if anything, have suffered even more from drainage or neglect.

One such site, Llyn Ystymlyn was probably one of the most important sites in Wales for breeding and wintering water birds up to the late 1940's. A major drainage scheme in 1952 drained the lake completely and by 1993 much of the reedbed had disappeared under a forest of willow.

NRA funded a major scheme to successfully restore reedbed and raise water levels in 1994. By 1995, large areas of vigorous reedgrowth had established and it is likely that bittern and marsh harrier as well as otter will return to breed at the site.

Elsewhere on Lleyn, NRA are working with the local council to notify and extend a wetland local nature reserve that is intended to extend to 75 ha, starting almost at the town centre.

Wetlands in the Third Millennium

NRA and its partners propose to consolidate work initiated over the last three years in North Wales into a new umbrella project - the Wetlands for Wales Strategy. We intend to achieve catchment targets for species and habitats, underpinned by government policy and commitment to biodiversity.

We will adopt a strategic approach to conservation covering;

- priority protected sites (e.g. National Nature Reserves)
- degraded sites with potential for restoration
- community acquisition sites.

We propose to undertake vegetation management, survey and engineering works to optimise wetland biodiversity and landscapes.

We will acquire special "Community Wetlands", managed by local people with professional guidance.

We intend to finance future management by income derived from these sites in the form of tenancies and government grant aid. (ESA, Habitats scheme etc.)

We propose a five year project, costed at £4 million, directed by a consortium of NRA, CCW, RSPB, NWWT and others with an appointed project manager.

Our vision for the future is the restoration of a mosaic of wilderness areas throughout North Wales, protecting our wildlife resource for future generations. Participation, education and access for local people are essential components of this vision.



*.....protecting our wildlife resource
for future generations”*



Cors Geirch on the Llyn Peninsula.

Cors Goch, NNR - a pristine wetland wilderness on Anglesey.



Clearing the way for a new reedbed on the Lleyn Peninsula.

NRA team putting the finishing touches to the new sluice at Ystymlynn.



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