

# Cumbria Recorders' Conference 2025

A welcome from the conference chair, Tracey Griffiths, who is independent chair of the CBDC Advisory Group, started the day. The first talk was from Martin Harris, CBDC Recording Officer. It is the first time that Martin had attended a Cumbria Recorders' Conference so this was an opportunity to introduce himself to delegates before outlining the 2025 recording aims for CBDC. These are to put in place new processes to simplify record verification (the examination of submitted records to ensure they are of sufficient quality to include in the database for the county), promote high quality recording through support with species identification and accurate location records, provide training and support for the use of recording apps, identifying data gaps to identify under-recorded taxon groups, and organising recording days to bring different recorders together for a 'deep dive' of species recording at a particular site.

The first keynote was from Pete Jones, the Cumbria Wildlife Trust's (CWT) Skiddaw Forest Project Manager, who has only been in role a month. Supported by an amazing slide deck, Pete provided a rapid but well-detailed look at the site, the highest nature reserve in England. With upland habitats including deep peat and old heather, the intention is to plant 270 ha of species-poor acid grassland with trees (from a total area of 1200 ha) with around 300,000 trees to be established over the coming years. The project will start with a detailed baseline survey and there will be lots of opportunities going forward for volunteers to provide regular monitoring and recording across the site. Particularly as the site is being designed as a 100-year project! Trees will be sourced locally from CWT grown trees and local community tree nurseries. Restoration of montane habitats will also be undertaken.

Rhian Ebrey, Access to Eden Project Manager at Eden Rivers Trust, introduced this new project which includes the River Eden corridor from Carlisle to Kirkby Stephen and across to the River Irthing. Access to Eden includes eight doorstep sites (two each in Kirkby Stephen, Penrith, Armathwaite and Carlisle) and seven programmes aimed at habitat restoration, upskilling of volunteers, young people and teachers, outreach, and improved digital accessibility for marginalised groups. Rhian showcased a number of sites, including Engine Lanning and Pettril Vale, both in Carlisle, and the work that has started to make the sites more accessible, as well as the Penrith tree nursery which will be expanded to create more growing space (with trees possibly heading to Skiddaw!). There are lots of opportunities for volunteers to get engaged including surveying of species and environmental parameters.

Questions for the session included queries regarding grazing pressures, natural tree regeneration and the tree species (to include alder and willow where wet; rowan and birch on slopes; possibly oak and Scots pine; juniper at higher altitudes for montane scrub) that will be planted at Skiddaw Forest; the use of recording apps and how to use to record

large populations of a species; accessibility of sites for volunteers; and managing antisocial behaviour at urban sites (including co-creation, graffiti art projects and materials that don't burn easily).

The second session of the conference started with three recording 'highlights' talks. Chris Hind, County Recorder for birds, described the Cumbria Bird Club's 2024 Yellowhammer Survey which found an overall decline in the bird across the county. Hen Harriers, however, had their most successful breeding year this century with two nests each fledging four young but only two fledglings were satellite tagged due to poor weather conditions. Rarities for the year, which will be listed in the Cumbria Birds and Wildlife 2024 publication, included Todd's Canada Goose (seen on the Solway for the last six winters), two Red-footed Falcons and a Siberian Lesser Whitethroat which was trapped and ringed at Walney Bird Observatory with feather genome sequencing carried out by Aberdeen University – providing irrefutable evidence of its identification!

David Clarke, British Dragonfly Society Recorder, provided an overview of Odonata seen in Cumbria in 2024, noting that the weather was incredibly poor throughout the observation period. 250 recorders provided 2,079 records which included a Black-tailed Skimmer which was recorded late in the season and a possible arrival from the east?; Broad-bodied Chaser which had numbers down in 2024, Common Hawker moving to higher altitudes, Variable Damselfly still recorded at the one site, Brown Hawker seen further north, White-faced Darter introduction has gone very well and will expand to Campfield Marsh, and Downy Emerald recorded for the third year at Keswick leading to a plan to survey Bassenthwaite Lake in 2025 to see if it has spread further north. David promoted the CNHS dragonfly meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2025.

Botanical highlights provided by Botanical Vice County Recorder, Mike Porter, included the New Year Plant Hunt 2025 which saw more people recording than in previous years and despite the disappointing weather, resulted in 78 species recorded, and an update on the annual Snowdrop Survey. One species, *Crepis praemorsa* (Leafless Hawk's-beard), which has been found at only one site in the UK since it was first identified in Cumbria in 1988, was found at a second site in 2024. Other notable records were for *Trocdaris verticillata* (Whorled Caraway) which has not been recorded in Cumbria this century, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (Bearberry) found at a new site (the fourth in Cumbria), *Carex atrata* (Black Alpine-sedge) reported again on Helvellyn, *Spiranthes spiralis* (Autumn Lady's-tresses) is doing well but is contracting to the south of the county, and *Anacamptis morio* (Green-winged Orchid) was recorded in very high numbers at one site but a change in management has resulted in loss from this site.

The third keynote and final talk of the morning session was a look at Swifts in Cumbria by Tanya Hoare, founder of Sedbergh Community Swifts. Tanya's talk highlighted how unique this bird is – from a life spent on the wing (only landing to nest from the second year onwards), single and small broods and how faithful they are to their nest sites which are exclusively associated with buildings – usually on the wall plate or similar but rarely

actually in the building. Over the last 25 years, Swifts across the UK have declined by 60% and are now a Red List species. Loss of nest sites is seen as an important factor in their decline and so it is crucial that nest sites are better recorded to feed back to planners and developers. It can be difficult to record nest sites – they are not frequent visitors, are quiet nesters and enter the site very quickly so it takes time to observe sites. The Swift Local Network was established in 2014 and is entirely volunteer led. The Network aims to retain existing nest sites, survey/record nest sites and create new sites using Swift bricks and boxes as well as raise awareness and engagement with this ancient species. All are encouraged to record nest sites this year!

After a networking lunch which allowed time to explore the exhibition stands and book sales, Cumbria Woodlands and Plantlife introduced the Cumbria Rainforest Project. Carrie Hedges, from Cumbria Woodlands, spoke about this #Species Survival Fund project, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund with Defra, which looks at rainforest restoration in Cumbria and South West England. Plantlife is the lead in Cumbria with different delivery partners contributing different elements to the project: Cumbria Woodlands is providing engagement and training across the region. Angus Walsh, from Cumbria Woodlands, provided an overview of temperate rainforests in Cumbria, showing images of lichen, bryophytes and epiphytes in Borrowdale and other woodlands. Georgie Stephens, Plantlife Rainforest Adviser, spoke about Important Plant Areas (IPAs) which are the best sites for wild plants based on three criteria: threatened species, botanical richness and threatened habitats. While not a legal designation, IPAs do underpin the implementation of many biodiversity initiatives. Cumbria has a number of IPAs designated for their lichen species richness, and these were reviewed and updated through the LOST project which sought to improve lichen and bryophyte knowledge and awareness in Cumbria. The new #Species Survival Fund- Rainforest Restoration Project project builds on LOST across two IPA core areas (more than 35 lichen species of conservation importance) as well as across Zones of Opportunity (described as having up to 34 unique lichens species present): records for lichen and bryophytes have been key to identifying these sites. The sites funded through the project, that overlap with IPAs, will be the focus of more intensive lichen and bryophyte surveys, woodland management, lichen translocation and Rapid Rainforest Assessment training to expand to other areas. More and better records will lead to more areas being identified for their botanical importance, leading to new restoration potential.

Sylvia Woodhead built on the information available from the Cumbria GeoConservation exhibition stand by providing an overview of the work undertaken by the group over the last year including the designation of four new Local Geological Sites (Stanley Force in Eskdale, Birkrigg Common, Aldingham Shore & Gleaston Dyke near Ulverston), as part of their regular annual survey of sites to gather information on the best sites for geology in Cumbria. Cumbria GeoConservation also aims to educate about geology so responds to planning applications, provides advice on management of geological sites (such as avoiding tree planting that obscures geological features), informs information boards at

key sites, and also organises events as part of existing festivals or events: for instance, a session exploring pebbles at Walney has been repeated across the county such was its success!

Bothel Community Wildlife Group is a new wildlife group which launched last year. Founder, Aimee Campbell, provided a talk which outlined why the group started: born from frustration after the pandemic, Aimee was keen to engage more people in wildlife-friendly activities, from tree planting to so much more. Encouraging the local council, landowners and the wider community to make changes to improve Bothel and surrounding area has led Aimee to make significant improvements to the area and galvanised the formation of Bothel Community Wildlife Group (BCWG). Having arranged a programme of talks over winter, Aimee has worked with local farmers, Mark and Jenny Lee, and other members of BCWG to create the Torpenhow Bioblitz which takes place this May, 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, and is open to all Cumbrian recorders to come along and help record a regenerative farm and inspire others to start wildlife recording. A pre-Bioblitz farm visit is arranged for 15<sup>th</sup> March for anyone who would like to see the farm to help develop walks, tours or other aspects to engage bioblitz participants.

Another new group celebrating its first anniversary is Cumbria Invertebrate Group (CIG). Founder member, David Scott-Langley, provided an overview of the first year, growing membership from around 30 in early 2024 to 45 by the end of 2024, having organised five field visits in 2024 which led to the recording of 568 species across 27 orders/classes. This year will see eight field visits as well as participation in the Bothel Community Wildlife Group's Bioblitz. David also highlighted the aims of CIG which are to increase invertebrate recording at sites across Cumbria; educate/develop expertise; provide a newsletter; and create reports for landowners based on the field visits.

The conference ended with an 'open mic' session. Peter Macqueen provided a short presentation on his mothing adventures in Cumbria and Carrie Hedges highlighted an upcoming NW Rainforest Alliance workshop.

*Thank you to the conference chair, Tracey Griffiths, speakers, exhibitors and delegates!*

*Prepared by:*

*CBDC, February 2025*