Alderney Wildlife

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL LIFE CYCLE STRATEGIES OF ALDERNEY'S EELS

Learn about the European conger eel and the silver eel

HOW RARE IS A PEACOCK'S TAIL ON ALDERNEY?

Get to know a rare brown seaweed on Alderney

Spring 2025 | Discovery

Protecting Alderney's wildlife for the future

Welcome

As I write these words, Alderney is coming alive with spring's magic: gannets have returned; ponds shimmer with clusters of frogspawn; and our commons and hedgerows are dotted with daffodils, primroses, lesser celandines, and daisies. The air hums with birdsong and buzzing bumblebees while rabbits hop across the grass.

On social media, people are counting down the days until our evenings stay light past 6:30 PM—something to look forward to until October! More sunshine, more warmth, and more happiness. Nothing beats that springtime lift in spirits when temperatures warm up.

This issue is all about *discovery*. Following this theme, we'll explore different species of Alderney. We're kicking off a new citizen science project on slow worms to collect more data about the island's only reptile. These harmless, legless lizards love sunbathing in warm spots, and you might encounter them on your walks. Next, we dive into the mysterious world of Conger and silver eels (pages 12–14), whose secretive migrations and life cycles still baffle scientists. Their story perfectly embodies our theme of Discovery. Another featured species is the peacock's tail, a brown seaweed found in our rockpools and rocky shores but seldom recorded.

In this issue, we will update you of the plans for reserves and sites management regarding signage, volunteers, woodland project, sour fig removal and sand dunes. We will also give you an overview of the work that young people of the island have been volunteering with us for the Volunteering Section of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Don't miss page 20's feature about a former AWT volunteer from 2020 who returned last winter to complete her university placement with us.

SLOW WORM | JOSHUA COPPING

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CONSERVATION VOLUTEERS SESSION | POPPY EMMENS

For our "Visit a UK Nature Reserve" article, turn to pages 22-23 to learn about Totternhoe Nature Reserve's innovative E-shaped butterfly banks—a clever way to create perfect microclimates for butterflies!

I hope you enjoy this issue and upcoming beautiful spring days!

Thanh Doan
Outreach and Education Officer

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Manager's Report

Roland Gauvain
CEO

As the days begin to extend in front of us after a wet and stormy winter, hopefully coming towards a close, the team here at the AWT has a really positive feel looking forward to 2025.

2025 is an important year for Alderney and the AWT; it marks 20 years of Alderney's Wetland of International Importance being recognized by both the UK and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). In those 20 years there have been an almost endless series of discoveries, trials and successes, from the longest ever recorded foraging trip of a gannet (Cosmo) who went all the way to Norway for lunch, to the struggles of avian influenza, and the success of a recovering puffin population. If you want to learn more about this States of Alderney designated site, I would recommend a visit to the government website (https://alderney.gov.gg/article/203350/Ramsar-Site), where there is lots of information about the

CLONQUE CAUSEWAY | SANDY ROBERTSON

work of all the stakeholders over the last 20 years.

Yet it's not all about Ramsar! As the AWT enters its 23rd year we are still very much on a voyage of discovery into our natural world. All the data collected by the volunteers and staff over nearly a quarter of a century are coming together in our Alderney State of Nature (ASoN) Project. Before the end of the year we will have identified the key habitats and species most under threat and in need of immediate protection!

Our Action for Wildlife programme, through which we manage our nature reserves, is also coming of age. The new 5-year strategy should be ready to go out to the general public with the arrival of spring. Our focus will be very much on restoring Alderney's biodiversity, especially Alderney's historic woodland and saving the sand dunes which provide vital protection for Braye and Saye. These two huge projects are dependant on community support and will help us ensure we are truly protecting Alderney's wildlife for future generations.

It is those future generations which perhaps demand the greatest amount of attention. Over the last two years, our Team Wilder Project has enabled us to listen to all age groups within our community. From the responses we have received we now better understand how much concern there is within our community for the future. We can also see how many parts of our community are struggling to make the community truly sustainable for all ages. Crucially for Alderney to succeed in the future, the island's children and their families must be able to thrive and grow. Without them no part of our society can flourish.

To this end we are working with multiple stakeholders to create a "pathway to learning", a conduit for both formal education, as well as creating more intrinsic educational opportunities for all sections of our community.

So from all of us at the AWT, here is to 2025, a year for discovery and setting ourselves on a pathway towards a future where a thriving natural world helps support a thriving island.

WILD NEWS

All the latest news from Alderney Wildlife Trust

Showcasing Alderney's marine environment at the Jersey Marine Mission event

For World Wetlands Day (2nd February), our team joined the Jersey Marine Mission event to support Jersey Marine Conservation and showcase Alderney's marine environment. The event featured talks from 11 organisations on topics such as seahorses and seabirds, underwater photography, and storytelling, delivered to an audience of over 200 people. Alex Purdie, AWT's Senior Consultant Ecologist, gave a captivating talk about Alderney's seabirds and the cutting-edge technologies used to monitor them. The AWT team also led ocean-themed activities for students from primary schools and Jersey's home school association, inspiring the next generation of marine conservationists.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Jersey Marine Conservation for their efforts in organising the event and providing a space for collaboration and idea exchange.

ALEX'S TALK ON SEABIRDS | ABIGAIL DE CASTELLA

OCEAN-THEMED ACTIVITIES FOR VISITORS | ALEX PURDIE

445 oak trees for Alderney from the Woodland Trust

BABY OAK TREES | THANH DOAN

TREE PLANTING | THANH DOAN

Thanks to the Woodland Trust, Alderney received 445 baby oak trees in late February. Over 300 of these were planted in the Community Woodland on March 8th with the help of more than 20 volunteers. The remaining trees were planted by participants of the Conservation Volunteers Session following the tree planting event.

In 10-20 years, imagine Alderney covered in oak trees!

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us in creating a greener future for our island.

Free wildflower seeds for Alderney's residents

As spring approached, dozens of free wildflower seed packets were handed out to Alderney residents as part of the AWT's Pollinator Project to provide more food and shelter for pollinators. Each wildflower seed packet contains at least five species of flowers, including Common Poppy, Corn Cockle, Corn Marigold, Cornflower, and Corn Chamomile—perfect for creating a wildlife-friendly garden. The wildflower seed packets are still available at the Wildlife Information Centre, so feel free to pick some up when you visit the shop. Let's keep Alderney wildlife-friendly!

In late February, with the support of Alderney Roots, we sowed seeds from over 27 species of wildflowers across two raised beds and a large flat area. We're keeping our fingers crossed for a vibrant display of wildflowers in just a few weeks!

WILDFLOWER SEED PACKETS | THANH DOAN


PREPARE THE RAISED BEDS AT ALDERNEY ROOTS | THANH DOAN

Shark Eggcase Workshop & Walk


SHARK EGGCASE WORKSHOP | ABIGAIL DE CASTELLA

On 22nd March, we organised a family-friendly event on how to find, identify and record shark and ray eggcases for 18 participants with the support of the Shark Trust. Another similar event will take place on 24th April as a part of the **Step into Spring programme.** Full programme available at the Wildlife Information Centre and online at **www.alderneywildlife.org/blog/step-spring-2025**

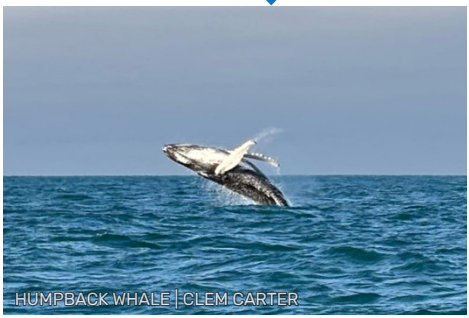
Welcome George!

Earlier this year, we welcomed George Tindall to the team as the new Conservation Officer. George has a BSc in Environmental Sciences from Plymouth University and he has volunteered with varied conservation projects.

At the AWT, George will support our Reserves Officer in managing and monitoring sites; implementing the AWT's Carbon Strategy and developing a robust strategy for their long-term management.

Top Sightings

Humpback Whale



HUMPBACK WHALE | CLEM CARTER

HUMPBACK WHALE | CLEM CARTER

On 16th January, a Humpback Whale *(Megaptera novaeangliae)* was spotted breaching 5 miles northwest of the Casquets by Clem Carter, a member of the public. Humpback Whales have large knobs on their heads, jaws, and bodies, as well as a small dorsal fin located far back on their bodies. They feed on krill and small fish using a technique called bubble-netting. They create a curtain of bubbles to corral their prey into a small area, then surface with their mouths open to scoop up the food.

While Humpback Whales are a rare sight in Alderney's waters, their appearances seem to become more frequent. Prior to this sighting, Mark Harding, a local fisherman, recorded a Humpback Whale in Alderney's waters during the summer of 2023. Another sighting was also reported between Jersey and Guernsey in 2024.

Red Kite

A Red Kite *(Milvus milvus)* was spotted hunting over Kiln Farm on 4th January. This sighting was recorded by James Brenton, a local wildlife photographer. On 7th January, another sighting of the bird was recorded at Longis Pond.

A Red Kite is a bird of prey that has a rusty reddish-brown body with a deeply forked tail. From underneath these birds can be recognised by characteristic patches of white before darker, fingered wing tips.

Red kites are scavengers and feed on mainly carrion, roadkill and worms. If necessary, these birds will sometimes catch small, live prey such as mice and smaller birds.

RED KITE (UNDERNEATH) | JAMES BRENTON

RED KITE (ABOVE) | JAMES BRENTON

Common Pochard

A Common Pochard *(Aythya ferina)* was observed at Longis Pond on 19th January and it remained in the area for approximately two weeks. Common Pochards are diving ducks that primarily feed on aquatic plants, seeds, and small invertebrates.

According to the British Trust for Ornithology, there are approximately 720 breeding pairs of Common Pochards in the UK. These ducks breed in northern and eastern Europe during the summer months and migrate to western, central, and southern Europe, as well as North Africa, for the winter.

COMMON POCHARD | ALEX PURDIE

Common Pochards rely heavily on healthy wetland ecosystems for breeding, feeding, and overwintering.

COMMON SCOTER | MATT LEWIS

COMMON SCOTER (FEMALE) | TARA COX

Common Scoter

During a Wetland Bird Survey on 12th January, AWT ecologists recorded two Common Scoters *(Melanitta nigra)* at Braye Bay. Common Scoters are seaducks that are often seen as large bobbing rafts offshore, or long straggling lines flying along the coast. The males are totally black while the females are lighter with a pale face.

There are small breeding populations in Scotland and Ireland. These ducks are listed as Red species in the UK. They are vulnerable to oil spills in winter.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Over 20 Bottlenose Dolphins were spotted feeding all day in the southeast of Longis on 16th January. The sighting was made by Lewis Main, a local fisherman.

A pod of 12, of which there were at least three calves, was also spotted at Frying Pan Bay, Alderney Race on 17th Jan. The

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS | NIAMH MCDEVITT

sighting was made by Niamh McDevitt and George Tindall during a Seawatch survey.

The Secret Life of Slow Worms

SLOW WORMS LOVE BASKING IN SUNNY SPOTS | SANDY ROBERTSON

If you've ever lifted a rock or an old piece of wood and found a smooth, shiny creature slithering away, you might have thought you'd disturbed a small snake. But if you take a closer look, you'll see you've just found a slow worm! These secretive reptiles may lack legs, but they're actually lizards, not snakes or worms. Unlike snakes, they can blink and even shed their tails to escape predators—a useful trick if a hungry pheasant or hedgehog comes too close.

Slow worms prefer to stay out of sight, warming up under logs, stones, or thick vegetation, although if you're lucky, you might spot one soaking up the sun on a warm day. Their activity follows a seasonal rhythm: in spring (April–May), males become territorial and will fight over females, while courtship itself is surprisingly rough, with males gripping the females by the neck before mating.

SLOW WORMS HAVE EYELIDS | JIM HIGHAM

SLOW WORM | SANDY ROBERTSON

Unlike most reptiles, which lay eggs, slow worms give birth to live young in late summer, usually between August and September, with litter size ranging from 6 to 12. As autumn approaches, they seek out hibernation spots in compost heaps, rocky crevices, or under log piles, remaining dormant until spring. Amazingly, slow worms can live for up to 30 years!

SLOW WORMS ON ALDERNEY

Slow worms are Alderney's only reptile, first recorded on island in 1907 by Jersey naturalist, Joseph Sinel. Over the years, the AWT has carried out three censuses to understand slow worm habitat preference and distribution on the southern and eastern ends of the island. The results suggest slow worms are most abundant along the south coast, particularly in the Vau du Saou, which offers both dense vegetation for shelter, and suitable basking spots, such as rocks and logs.

HELP MONITOR SLOW WORMS ON ALDERNEY

Whilst we know where slow worms are most commonly found on Alderney, we still don't know how stable their population is, and therefore whether any conservation actions are required to help improve populations. To bridge this knowledge gap, the AWT is launching an annual slow worm survey, focusing on one of their most important habitats — Vau du Saou.

In recent weeks, we've placed reptile refuges (corrugated roofing felt that absorbs heat, creating a perfect hiding spot) across the site. Starting in May, we'll be checking these refuges monthly for slow worm activity, and we're inviting anyone interested to get involved with helping to check them. No experience with slow worms is required! Survey dates will be announced on our social media the week before each session (since warm weather is essential for spotting slow worms), so keep an eye out for updates.

SLOW WORM | CHRIS REES

ENCOURAGE SLOW WORMS IN YOUR GARDEN

If you can't join our surveys but would still love to see a slow worm, you can encourage them to visit your garden by **leaving piles of sticks, prunings and logs undisturbed in a quiet corner of the garden**. These will slowly break down and attract insects, providing food and shelter for slow worms. Compost heaps are another favourite hiding place, but if you find one living there, try to avoid disturbing it in winter (when they hibernate) and late summer (when females are giving birth). At other times, just be gentle when turning your compost—you might have a slow worm lurking beneath the surface!

By *Tara Cox*
Senior Ecologist

SLOW WORM | AMY LEWIS

The weird and wonderful life cyc of Alderney's eels

CONGER EEL IN GUERNSEY WATERS | FRASER COLEMAN

Eels are ray-finned fish within the taxonomic order *Anguilliformes*, which surprisingly comprises of over 1,000 eel species. This does not include other eel-like fish such as electric eels, swamp eels or deep-sea spiny eels. In general, eels have an elongated cylindrical body shape. Most have small or non-visible pelvic, dorsal or anal fins, with the tail fin fused forming a single ribbon the full length of the animal. Eels swim by generating waves that travel along the length of their body. As such, they have gained cultural references such as 'snake' or 'sea snake-like creature'. Most eels live hidden in the shallows of the marine environment except for the *Anguilla* genus which live within freshwater streams and lakes. They are predominately nocturnal, preferring to live in small holes and crevices, usually seen with their head poking out. Eels are predators or opportunistic scavengers, feeding on a wide range of fish, molluscs and crustaceans. They have a fascinating complex life cycle, comprising several different life stages, including: leptocephalus (flat and transparent oceanic larval stage of eels), juvenile and adult stages.

There are two eel species found within Alderney's waters, the European conger eel (*Conger conger*, Linnaeus 1758) and the silver/European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*, Linnaeus 1758). Records of these species are mainly from recreational or commercial fishers, with a small number of records also held by the AWT from field-based surveys.

CONGER EEL | MARK THOMAS

The European conger eel (also known as the sea eel) is a very large eel species, reaching up to 3 m long and weighing over 90 kgs. They have long dark-grey scaleless bodies, with large bulging eyes, mouth and prominent lips. Their dorsal, anal and caudal fins are fused together forming a complete fringe with a pointed tail. European conger eels are strictly marine benthic species, found in sublittoral rocky reef environments, particularly within wrecks and artificial structures. They are powerful predators, known to ambush prey such as cephalopods, at night. This eel species is widely distributed across the western coastlines of the North-East Atlantic, extending from Norway to the Mediterranean. Their conservation status

EUROPEAN EEL (GLASS EEL) | VAUGHN MATTHEWS

has been categorised as 'least concern' within the global red list of threatened species by the IUCN.

The life cycle strategy of the European conger eel comprises several different stages. Adults become sexually mature between the ages of 5 and 15 years. Once sexually mature, adults migrate from their coastal habitats to much deeper waters in the mid-Atlantic (areas between Gibraltar and the Azores in depths of 3,000–4,000 m) during the summer to spawn. The females' ovaries grow exponentially, filling their entire abdominal cavity helping them to produce approximately 3–8 million eggs for just one spawning event. Due to the extreme changes in their physiology and subsequent inability to feed or swim, the females die shortly after, only spawning once in their lifetime. It is thought that males do not experience such organ deterioration after fertilising the eggs and may therefore reproduce annually in multiple spawning seasons. The newly hatched larvae (the *leptocephalus* stage) drift along in the water column (in a northeast direction) until they reach shallower, coastal waters. After six to nine months, the larvae develop into a second *metamorphic conger eel larvae* stage and subsequently change into juvenile *elvers* (resembling smaller versions of adults) after a year. The elver stage lasts for a further two years until finally growing into an adult.

The silver/European eel is a much smaller, slimmer and slimier eel species compared to the European conger eel, reaching only 100 cm in length and 1-2 kg in weight. This eel species has small round eyes with its lower jaw protruding slightly from the upper jaw. Its dorsal fin starts much further down its back which then runs along the whole length of its body. At the tail, the dorsal fin merges with the ventral fin, that runs along the underside of the body. It has variable colours, based on its life cycle phase, ranging from transparent to green, brown and silver colouration. The principal diet for this eel species is invertebrates, particularly molluscs and crustaceans. The distribution of the silver/European eel ranges from Europe to northern Africa, covering the entire Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea. Their conservation status has been categorised as 'critically endangered' within the global red list of threatened species by the IUCN. This is due to physical barriers of their migration from hydro-electric dam development, over-fishing and parasites.

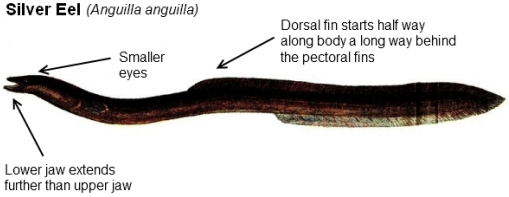
The silver/European eel is a *catadromous* species, whereby it migrates between freshwater and marine habitats. The term "catadromous" comes from Greek, meaning "running downward," referring to species

that live in freshwater but go down to the sea to spawn. As such, the life cycle of the silver/European eel is particularly different to that of the European conger eel. All silver/European eel individuals first hatch out of eggs in the Sargasso Sea (Atlantic Ocean) as *small larvae* (i.e. the leptocephali stage). The larvae then drift away towards Europe in a 300-day migration via sea currents. Upon reaching European coastlines (including Alderney's coasts) they metamorphose into small transparent *glass eels* and migrate up coastal freshwater inlets and streams. The glass eels then develop into *elvers*, resembling miniature versions of the adult eels. As the elvers grow, they change colour to a brownish-yellow and develop into *yellow eels*. Depending on the availability and condition of the freshwater habitat present, yellow eels spend on average 8–15 years living there. After reaching adulthood, the yellow eels transform into their final stage, the *silver eel* adult phase, where their eyes grow larger, their flanks become silver, and their bellies a white colouration. Adults then migrate downstream during autumn, typically associated with rainfall. They then migrate from their Europe coastlines all the way back to the Sargasso Sea, where they spawn once and subsequently die.

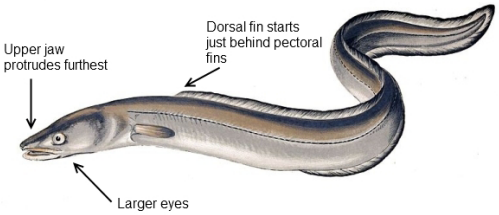
Eel biology and ecology information (especially their life cycle strategies) are still considered a mystery within the scientific community. This is mainly due to their natural cryptic behaviour and unusual migration patterns, hindering scientists' efforts to study them accurately. The AWT undertake a small number of surveys to assess specific life stages of the silver/European eel (such as the glass eel/elver and adult stages) on the island where possible. To summarise, Alderney's eels have the most weird and wonderful life cycle strategies!

How to distinguish between a Silver Eel and a Conger Eel

Silver Eel *(Anguilla anguilla)*



Conger Eel *(Conger conger)*



In addition:

1. While both eels are covered in a layer of slime the silver eel is genrally considered more slimy than the conger eel.
2. Colour is not an accurate way of differentiating between these two species, as both conger and silver eels can be greyish, greenish or very dark in colour, almost looking black. The undersides are usually a paler grey, white or silver.
3. Size is an indicator of species. Over 10lb and the eel is likely to be a conger (since the UK record for silver eel is 11lb 2oz, whereas conger eels have a shore caught record of 68lb 8oz and are thought to grow to 200lbs.

If you come across an eel on Alderney, please do let us know (email: marine@alderneywildlife.org). Alternatively, record your sighting via the online recording app: iRecord (website: irecord.org.uk/). Our records of eels on Alderney are quite poor, so every sighting is valuable!

By Mel Broadhurst-Allen
Living Seas Coordinator

How rare is a peacock's tail on Alderney?

PEACOCK'S TAIL | ANNE BUNKER

The peacock's tail is the English name for the brown seaweed, *Padina pavonica* ((Linnaeus) Thivy, 1960 (Phaeophyceae, Dictyotales)), not the (particularly loud) bonny blue bird with the iridescent tail feathers you may be thinking of.

It is a small, distinctive seaweed growing up to 10 cm in diameter with fan-shaped fronds that are thin, flat and feel quite leafy. The inner (or upper) surface is covered with a thin coating of slime and the outer (or lower) surface showing brown/olive green bands. Small, fine hairs form concentric lines from the outer margin, continuing down the outer surface of the fronds. During the winter months its fronds undergo annual dieback and regrow from rhizoids in the summertime. The peacock's tail has a 'haplodiplontic isomorphic life cycle'. This means that its life cycle includes sexual reproduction via male and female plants (known as gametophytes) that produce gametes, and spore producing asexual stages (known as tetrasporophytes). Interestingly, it is only one of two genera of calcified brown marine algae and therefore could be considered a potential indicator of ocean acidification.

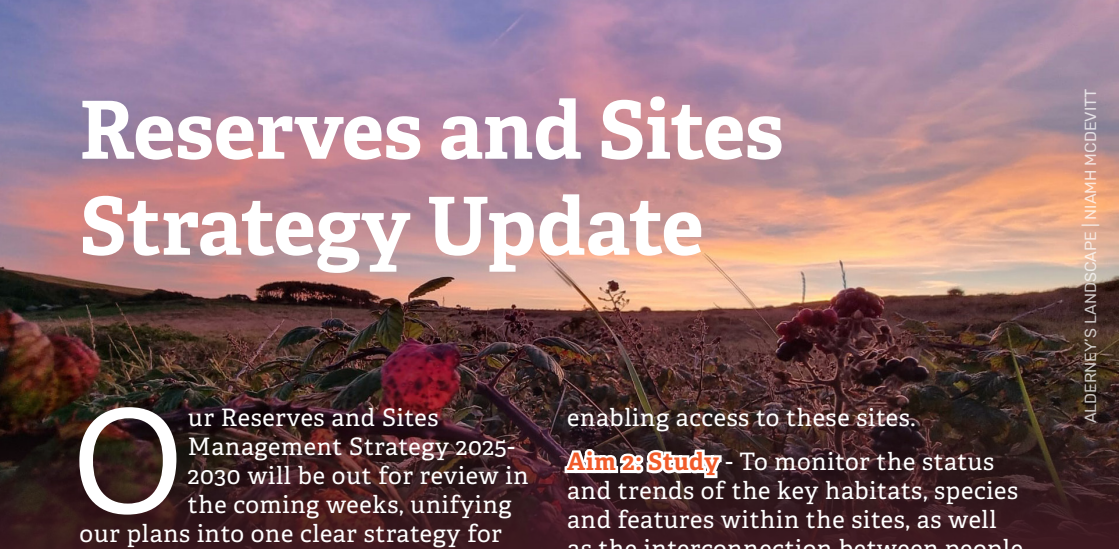
In general, it is found in sheltered sediment-induced rockpools along rocky shores and occasionally in the shallow infralittoral zone, often near clay, silt or sandy sediments. The geographic distribution of this species ranges from the coastal rocky shores of the Northeast Atlantic, South Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans and, the Mediterranean. At a regional scale, it is currently limited to the south of the British Isles and Channel Islands, including Alderney. In the UK, it is considered 'nationally scarce' and designated as a priority UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) species and, a feature of conservation importance. At a local level, the peacock's tail has recently been recognised as a priority species through the AWT's Alderney State of Nature Project (ASoN).

Local records of this seaweed's presence, density and distribution across Alderney are quite poor, comprised of only several verified sightings. These include historical records of its presence on Alderney (no specific location) from the mid-1800s, with two more recent observations in 2007 and 2024 at Longis Bay, by visiting members of Seasearch and the Porcupine Marine Natural History Society. Our set of AWT marine-based citizen science surveys (such as Shoresearch, green ormer and crab surveys) have not yet identified this species in the field. As such, we are genuinely unsure if this species is naturally rare on Alderney or just 'under-recorded', like so many other cryptic species on the island.

To address the current gaps of our knowledge on this priority species, a new field-based survey for 2025 will be implemented by the AWT. The aim is to record the presence and density of the peacock's tail at selected sites (including previously recorded sites, such as Longis Bay) on Alderney. This will be coordinated through AWT's ASoN project and Alderney Living Seas Programme. Hopefully over the coming years, we may be able to solve the mystery surrounding the rarity of the peacock's tail on Alderney.

By *Mel Broadhurst-Allen*
Living Seas Coordinator

Reserves and Sites Strategy Update



ALDERNEY'S LANDSCAPE | NIAMH MCDEVITT

Our Reserves and Sites Management Strategy 2025-2030 will be out for review in the coming weeks, unifying our plans into one clear strategy for the next five years. This will set out integrated approaches to habitat restoration, species conservation, visitor access and engagement, to ensure Alderney's natural spaces continue to thrive throughout this period and beyond.

This strategy aligns with The Wildlife Trust's 2030 strategy goals, in which we aim to achieve 1 in 4 people taking action for nature and climate. We hope to inspire individuals and the community to take meaningful actions to drive nature's recovery and actively participate in the preservation and enhancement of Alderney's natural sites.

Our commitment to Putting Nature into Recovery sees us working with key landowners, including the States of Alderney, and islanders, to ensure that at least 30% of our island's environment is actively thriving for nature by 2030.

The management strategy is based upon three core aims:

Aim 1: Champion - To raise awareness of and connection to the ecological value and sustainable management of these sites through community engagement, education, and by enabling access to these sites.

Aim 2: Study - To monitor the status and trends of the key habitats, species and features within the sites, as well as the interconnection between people and these places, to inform how we champion and protect them.

Aim 3: Protect - To conserve and, where appropriate, restore habitats and species of high ecological and community value, taking into account important historical sites and the island's culture and heritage.

Local support is key to our work in the reserves and sites on Alderney, so at the outset of this plan we decided that collecting the views of the public about the management of these sites was crucial to developing a strategy that was fit for purpose. In spring 2024 we produced a survey for Alderney's residents in which they could detail aspects of management that was important to them. We had an excellent response and were able to use people's views and suggestions to contribute to our plan.

We have detailed a handful of objectives here which are key areas of our focus in the next 5 years:

Signage

76% of survey respondents stated that there are enough educational materials within the sites. However, comments received stated that they

looked in need of an update. We will be conducting an audit of all our signage, and signs will be updated and reviewed as necessary.

Events

The Alderney Community Woodland was the site that survey respondents stated they would most like to see events taking place in, therefore this will be a key focus area for our events in the next 5 years. We are also creating a sustainable site usage plan to ensure pressures on the site don't impact negatively on the habitats and species within the woodland.

Volunteers

Volunteering is vital to enable us to continue our work; some of the key tasks that volunteers are involved with include recording wildlife, engaging with the public and conducting practical management tasks across the island. Through feedback from our volunteers, we are making improvements which will be detailed in our Volunteer Strategy, that we hope to complete by the end of 2025.

Woodland Project

We aim to enhance areas of native woodland on Alderney and are committed to increasing the total area of planted native woodland by 2030, as well as enabling the natural spread of woodland in key sites. By the end of 2025 we aim to plant 2,000 trees, with 450 of these having already been planted during a community event in March 2025.

Sour Fig and Dunes

Alderney's sand dunes are threatened by Sour Fig, a highly invasive species that makes the dunes vulnerable by outcompeting the native Marram grass that is essential for a healthy dune system. Over the next five years we have set ourselves the challenge of stopping the spread of Sour Fig within Alderney's dunes and, where possible, its complete eradication within this vital habitat. We aim to achieve this by updating maps of areas of the dunes that are impacted by sour fig, as well as increasing the number of 'Big Sour Fig Pulls' each year.

The next steps for the management strategy will be the completion of the first draft, then public review and publishing, which we aim to have completed by summer 2025.

More information about the strategy is available on our website:

https://www.alderneywildlife.org/current-projects/nature-reserves

By Poppy Emmens and George Tindall
Reserves Officer and Conservation Officer


TREE PLANTING IN THE COMMUNITY WOODLAND) | GEORGE TINDALL


SAYE SAND DUNES | SOPHIE MOWBRAY

FRYINGPAN BAY | IAIN DIXON

Duke of Edinburgh's young volunteers helping Alderney's Oceans

What is the Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) programme?

Since 2023, AWT has supported students at St Anne's school in their volunteering sections for Bronze and now Silver awards. The DofE Award is a programme designed to help young people aged 14-24 develop essential skills for life and work. It offers three levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Participants must complete four sections at the Bronze and Silver levels: Volunteering, Physical, Skills, and Expedition.

Recognising the programme's benefits for young people, AWT aims to support participants as much as possible. We also hope that their volunteering can help us to better understand and protect Alderney's natural environment. The main project so far has centered around fishing.

Volunteering by collecting data about fishing

Many people recall changes in Alderney's fish, for example, the large shoals of mullet which used to visit Alderney are now all but gone, and new species, such as gilthead bream and horse mackerel, are moving into our waters.

Understanding these changes relies heavily on anecdotal evidence, which can be very useful. However, without quantitative recording of fish stocks it is very hard to understand the specifics of these changes and, importantly, what may be causing them. AWT's ecologists can use camera and snorkel surveys, but more intensive (e.g. beam trawling) methods are not available for us, and fisheries data is very broad for the Bailiwick of Guernsey. Therefore, other ways of recording Alderney's fish stocks are needed.

Many young (and old!) people who fish already record amazing data about the fish which they catch, and if data is collected in a quantitative way, it can be used to help understand changes in Alderney's fish stocks. The DofE volunteering in 2024-2025 aimed to help young people develop data collection and data entry skills, whilst also collecting useful information on the fish they catch.

If you have data you are willing to share about fish or other wildlife on Alderney, we would love to hear from you!

Increasing DofE volunteers 2024-2025

This year, five DofE participants chose to volunteer with the AWT.

Two Bronze-level participants collected and recorded data from their fishing trips. This year's work was built on a DofE Bronze project carried out by Lewis Collings in 2023. They recorded location, gear used, and fishing trip duration, and documented details about any fish caught, such as species, weight, length, and condition (e.g., injuries or presence of parasites). One Silver-level participant also collected fishing data as well as assisting the AWT in deploying Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) equipment, which is another method we use to monitor fish populations.

Another Silver-level participant used several methods to record crab species in Alderney. This included using a lobster pot, joining AWT ecologists on intertidal surveys, and even submerging a GoPro with bait near it to record crabs (and seagulls!) which come to feed. At the time of writing this article, their project is still ongoing, and they will be trialing different locations and baits to see what will attract crabs and other marine life.

Apart from fishing survey volunteers, another DofE participant recorded litter data during her beach cleans. Using the Marine Conservation Society's data recording sheet, she documented the types of litter collected. This activity not only enhances her understanding of the litter present on Alderney's beaches but also helps her develop a consistent habit of recording data.

Consistent data recording, like the work that the volunteers have conducted, contributes to a better understanding of Alderney's fish populations and the factors that influence them. Furthermore, these young people can learn data collection and management skills, and hopefully it can encourage more people to collect quantitative information about the fish and other wildlife around Alderney, which can help to protect it for the future.

LEWIS COLLINGS AND THE BRUV CAMERA | ALEX PURDIE

A DUKE OF EDINBURGH VOLUNTEER AND THE FISH HE CAUGHT | MIMI HOUSE

Thanh Doan
Outreach & Education Officer
and Alex Purdie
Senior Consultant Ecologist

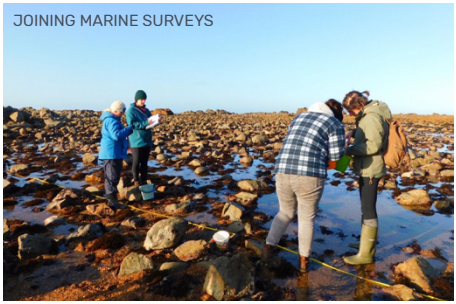
Discovering Alderney Again: A Journey in Conservation


JOINING CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS SESSIONS

Having volunteered with the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) in 2020 while living on the island for two years, I knew it would be the perfect place to return to when my university degree required practical experience in ecology, wildlife, and conservation. Familiar with Alderney's rich biodiversity, I looked forward to three weeks of hands-on learning in a setting I already loved.

However, I quickly remembered that Alderney is far more than just a home for puffins and blonde hedgehogs. The island is a dynamic and ever-changing ecosystem. One that has had to be rebuilt since the devastation of World War II, when Nazi occupation turned much of it into mud, concrete, and treeless wastelands. Thanks to the resilience of Alderney's community, the Wildlife Trust and their strong sense of camaraderie, the island's natural beauty is being restored. My time with AWT has opened my eyes to the scale and complexity of conservation work here.

From my very first day back in January, the team at AWT has been incredibly welcoming, giving me the opportunity to be involved in a variety of projects. I've participated in cliffside surveys, observing gannets as they return for the summer, and worked aboard Sula of Braye, helping to prepare her for a busy season of research and wildlife tours. These experiences have allowed me to develop my species identification and survey skills while also gaining practical experience in equipment maintenance and habitat management.


JOINING MARINE SURVEYS

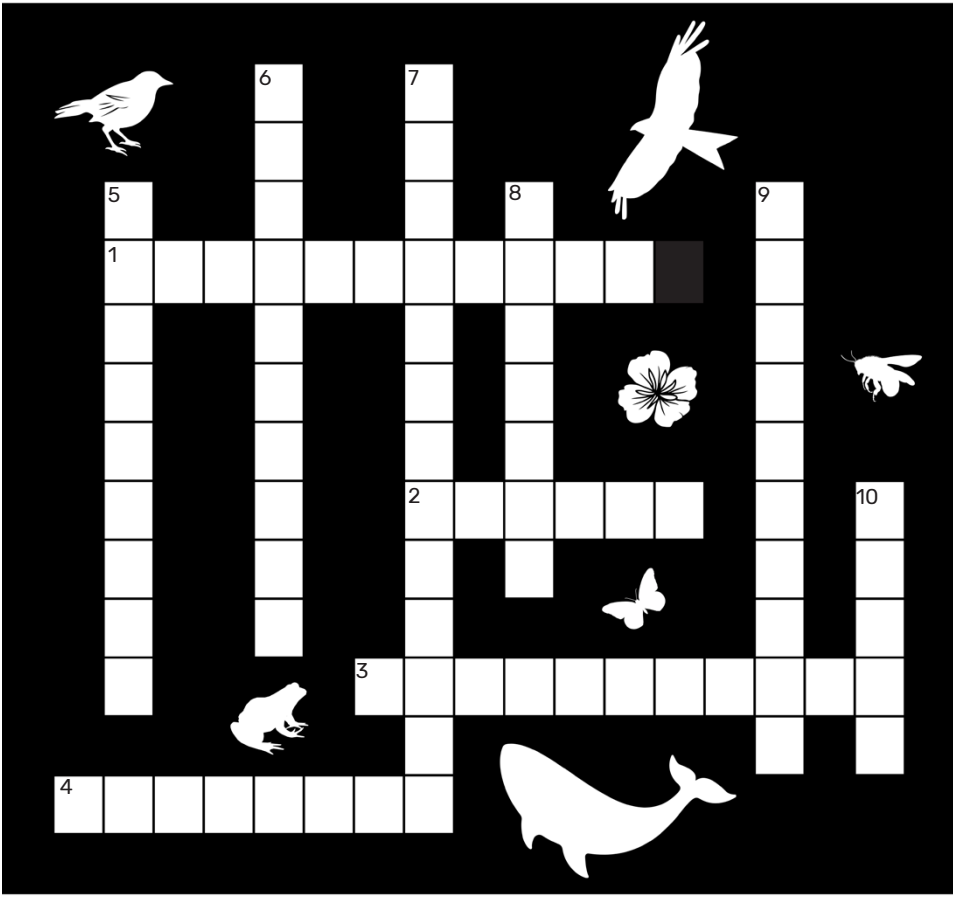
Beyond the fieldwork, one of the most valuable aspects of my placement has been learning from professionals across different roles in the conservation sector. Understanding their career pathways and daily challenges has given me invaluable insight as I navigate my own future in ecology.

What has struck me most is how deeply connected Alderney's wildlife is to the community. Conservation here isn't just about protecting nature—it's about maintaining a balance that benefits both the island's biodiversity and its people. AWT plays a crucial role in this, quietly working behind the scenes to ensure that Alderney remains a haven for its remarkable wildlife.

Each time I return to Alderney, I notice something new. The island feels greener, more vibrant, and full of discoveries waiting to be made. While there may be no untouched wilderness left in the UK, Alderney comes remarkably close—a place where nature and people coexist in a way that is increasingly rare.

By Samantha Ledger (25)
Wildlife conservation and ecology degree student at Sparsholt university

WILDLIFE QUIZ TIME



CLUES ACROSS

1. This order of insects is second in size only to Coleoptera, the beetles. Its name derived from the Greek, meaning “scaly winged.” (11)
2. This technique refers to the way kestrels stay stationary in the air with their wings beating rapidly and their tail spreading wide while they scan the ground for prey. (6)
3. This spiky grass grows on sand dunes and help to stabilise them. (11)
4. The Latin name of this flower means ‘first rose’, describing its early spring flowering. (8)

CLUES DOWN

5. The national bird of Sweden. (9)
6. One of the most ancient invertebrate animal groups. This group’s name in Greek means ‘spiny skin’. It includes marine life like starfish, sea urchins, and sea cucumbers. (10)
7. The scientific name of this marine animal means ‘big wing of New England.’ (13)
8. This bird of prey has a distinctive long, deeply forked tail. Angular wings, with white patches underneath and dark fingered wing tips. (7)
9. A native tree species of Alderney. We planted nearly 450 trees last winter. (10)
10. This plant is in flower all year round on Alderney. (5)

ANSWERS

ACROSS 1. Lepidoptera / 2. Kiting / 3.Marram grass / 4. Primrose / DOWN 5. Blackbird / 6. Echinoderm / 7. Humpback whale / 8. Redkite / 9. English oak / 10. Gorse

Visit a UK Reserve

Totternhoe Nature Reserve

TOTTERNHOE NATURE RESERVE | ANDREW BLADON

In a world with myriad pressures on our wildlife, protecting and managing land for nature is a proven way of conserving key species and habitats. With most of the UK dominated by agriculture or development, nature reserves are increasingly important as safe havens for wildlife. In isolation, this may nonetheless not be enough to safeguard important species: in completely natural landscapes, warmer temperatures would drive species to migrate northwards or upwards to cooler climates, but with so much of the UK covered by land that's hard to survive in, this can be impossible. Understanding how to make reserves survivable when extreme weather hits is a hot topic of research (pun largely unintended), and Totternhoe nature reserve in Bedfordshire is a shining example of testing and implementing management changes.

The reserve is a 31 ha ex-medieval chalk quarry that is criss-crossed with steep gullies that used to bring stone out from underground mines. These gullies support warm and sheltered pockets of air that spring-flying Duke of Burgundy butterflies thrive in, and if you visit in May, you may catch spectacular aerial dog fights between competing males. The populations here are carefully researched by the Insect Ecology group at the University of Cambridge alongside the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, but it's some of the other work from this collaboration that makes Totternhoe a truly special place for wildlife and discovery.

They have created a series of giant E shapes in the reserve by piling soil to create banks – butterfly banks. The idea, in essence, is that if you can create a

varied topography in your reserves with slopes facing in different directions, you create small differences in the climate at a very local scale – known as microclimates. Previous work had established that areas in the UK with more varied microclimates had lower risk of local extinction of both insects and plants, but no one had yet tested whether getting a digger out to build your own banks would help species cope with a changing climate.

In 2021, that's exactly what the Banking on Butterflies project sought to find out, they built four 15-m long and 2-m high E-shaped banks in the reserve and in 2022, the freak 40-degree weather gave an early test as to how effective the banks were. In the cool morning, butterflies were active and chose microclimates that were similar to the temperature in free air, but in the extreme heat of the afternoon almost all butterflies were found sheltering in the cool shade – including on the banks. These included spectacular favourites of mine including Chalkhill Blue and Dark Green Fritillary. These initial results are now being followed up with a PhD project assessing how different insects use the banks and how this changes with air temperature. It's hoped that the results can inform how we can better manage nature reserves across the country for insects in the face of climate change.

The butterfly banks are most effective in the summer, but the reserve is stunning to visit throughout the spring-summer season, with other highlights including Small Blue butterflies, Glow Worms and numerous orchid species like Common Twayblade and Common Fragrant-orchid. It's a beautiful place to spend a few hours, or months, and well worth a visit.

By Matt Lewis
Ecologist and Biodiversity Centre Manager

A NEWLY CREATED BUTTERFLY BANK IN 2021. THE BANKS ARE NOW COVERED IN VEGETATION. PHOTO TAKEN FROM A DRONE | JOSH HELLON

A NEWLY CREATED BUTTERFLY BANK IN 2021 | MATT HAYES

SMALL BLUE | ANDREW BLADON

Thank you

Your support is vital for protecting Alderney's wildlife!
alderneywildlife.org/support-us/donate

FRONT COVER: SMALL-SPOTTED CATSHARK EGGCASE | THANH DOAN
BACK COVER: GLANVILLE FRITILLARY CATERPILLAR | MATT LEWIS

Champion, Study, Protect

An Alderney Charity (Guernsey Charities Register No. CH261)
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