

WORKING FOR NATURE

Jackie Charlton*Woodland management, Brecon Beacons*

All over the world devoted individuals are doing their bit by volunteering to be involved with wildlife. Sue Wingrove meets the founder of a community woodland project in South Wales.



Jackie's group is involved in tree felling, tree planting, coppicing and even beekeeping.

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olunteers at Llangatock Community Woodlands watched in amazement as a grass snake shot out from among their legs and swam across the canal. It was a proud moment, explains Jackie Charlton: "We felt we had contributed to the right habitat for this wonderful sight."

The volunteers work on environmental conservation within two woodlands that border the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. "We meet every Tuesday come rain, shine, snow – or heatwave," says Jackie, who set the group up in 2009 and is now the chairperson. "We regularly have 10 to 15 volunteers." These include retirees, part-time workers, the self-employed or people between jobs.

The group is committed to delivering sustainable, small-scale woodland management that supports biodiversity. "This is a wet woodland; a combination of woodland and bog," she explains. "We work to preserve its special nature by clearing non-native laurel, brambles and bracken." A huge variety of species have benefited, including rowan, common bluebell, European otter and slow-worm.

Jackie has also joined forces with the Canal and River Trust as part of their 'canal adoption scheme'. This has involved coppicing hazel along a 24km stretch of towpath to open up views and improve the habitat for dormice and other species. "We have put up more than 100 bird boxes over the years as well as around 50 bat boxes," she says.

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Raising awareness of small woodland management, in an area with a lot of large conifer plantations, is important, as is the fact that the project is a 'community' woodland. "We have set up partnerships with other charitable organisations and met some amazing people," she says. "We work regularly with the local primary school's 'eco club', a local dementia project, and an arts organisation based in the Black Mountains called Peak."

And Jackie has further plans. "I would like to expand on the work we do with dementia groups," she explains. "Spending time in our woodlands has a spiritual perspective that would be of value, and I'm working to find a way of achieving this."

When asked why she devotes her spare time and energy to the woodlands, Jackie simply says it feels right. "What I do is not extraordinary but what we do as a group is," she insists. "Working together shows what can be done with a collective objective." 🐿️

FIND OUT MORE For more information or to get involved, visit llangatockwoods.org.uk

How you can help...

Three projects you can get involved in:

Community Woodland

Get advice and inspiration on creating your own community woodland for wildlife. communitywoodland.org

Woodland Trust

Help conserve and increase the UK's trees and woods by taking part in tree planting and woodland management projects and events. woodlandtrust.org.uk

Canal and River Trust

Help maintain our waterways. Groups or clubs can 'adopt a waterway' and there are a myriad of ways for individuals to volunteer. canalrivertrust.org.uk