

Thankyou Chair

My name is Naomi Johns and I am the Director of West of England Falconry, bird of prey conservation centre and registered Charity.

We moved to Newton St Loe in 2017, subsequently becoming Bath's first licensed zoo, and now manage local conservation projects, support international species protection, have collected 13 tourism awards in 5 years, and continue to grow our online presence on social media and with YouTube micro-documentaries.

I am Pleased to see the Ecological Emergency Action Plan on your agenda today, for what we do aligns closely with it.

Enhancing biodiversity and improving access to nature is core to what we do.

Firstly, we are striving to lead the way for green tourism, with awards for international tourism we are immensely passionate about celebrating the natural environment as heritage.

To conserve a species, or to conserve our environment, we must first be inspired. Our education programme is dedicated to inspiring a passion for conservation – and this inspiration should be available to all of BANES varied community.

Through the close experience of free-flying a bird of prey, or building a wildlife habitat, we are providing nature-based activities for children or those facing daily challenges.

After piloting this work through children's workshops and seeing the valuable impact it brings, we are looking for funding and opportunity to expand our capacity to offer these experiences to disadvantaged groups in the BANES community.

I was pleased to see the improvement of evidence-based monitoring stated as an action priority in the plan.

As predators at the head of their food chains, birds of prey are often keystone species providing vital information about wider ecosystem health.

Working on the Biomagnification Project, we are looking to share research and raise awareness for the chemical health of the environment that is exposed by wild raptors.

Wild bird of prey rehabilitation also enables us to monitor raptor injury cases.

And finally, a collaborative approach is key to our work. For example, with our Nest box breeding programme we are forming working relationships with farmers, landowners, falconers, scientists and conservationists – and without each of these groups working together, the results would not be viable.

We would love to align and collaborate with the Council, local businesses, charities and community organisations to deliver the action plan, and look forward to supporting positive environmental change in the bath and north east somerset area.

With the national outbreak of Avian Influenza and the cost of living crisis affecting the nature of our income, the centre is facing challenging times. But we are looking ahead to the future – to inspire a positive change. Sharing our passion for British wildlife, protecting raptor habitats in the BANES area and inspiring young minds for a future focussed on wider environmental sustainability.