

Preface

This book explores the wildlife of Wales and the ecosystems that support it. From mountain summits and ancient woodlands to rivers, wetlands, coastlines, and grasslands, every landscape in Cymru provides habitats for a remarkable variety of plants, animals, fungi, and other living organisms. Together, these form the living fabric of the Welsh environment.

Although the ecosystems of Wales may appear very different from one another, they are all shaped by the same fundamental relationships. The geology beneath them influences soils and drainage. Climate determines temperature and rainfall. Plants, animals, and microorganisms interact with one another in complex webs of competition, cooperation, and dependence. Every ecosystem is the product of countless connections working together over time.

The aim of this book is to explain those connections in a clear and accessible way. Ecology is sometimes presented as a highly technical subject, filled with scientific terminology and complex processes. While those details have their place, understanding ecosystems begins with understanding a much simpler idea: nothing exists in isolation. Every species depends upon other species, and every habitat depends upon the wider environment that sustains it.

This book also explores how the landscapes of Wales have changed through time. Natural processes such as weathering, erosion, flooding, ecological succession, and climatic change have continuously shaped the environments we see today. The legacy of the Ice Ages remains visible across much of the country, while more recent human activity has transformed habitats on a scale rarely seen before. Agriculture, forestry, mining, industry, and conservation have all left their mark upon the Welsh landscape,

sometimes damaging ecosystems and sometimes helping to preserve them.

A central idea runs throughout *The Cymru Cycles*: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. That principle applies not only to people, but also to the wildlife that shares the land with us. The mountains, rivers, coastlines, forests, and valleys of Cymru have shaped the distribution of species for thousands of years, creating distinctive ecosystems that continue to evolve today. Understanding Welsh wildlife therefore requires understanding the environments in which it lives.

Many of the places described in this book were not studied solely through research or observation from afar. They were experienced directly through years of walking, exploring, and revisiting landscapes across Wales. In this, I was rarely alone. My beagle, Lucy, accompanied me on countless journeys through forests, along rivers, across hillsides, and through the countryside that inspired so much of this series. Her curiosity, enthusiasm, and companionship transformed many ordinary walks into adventures and helped deepen my appreciation for the natural world around me.

This book is dedicated to her memory. While the subject of these pages is Welsh wildlife, many of the observations and experiences that helped shape them were shared with Lucy at my side. In many ways, this volume reflects not only an exploration of ecosystems, but also the landscapes we explored together.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Ecological knowledge continues to develop as new research improves our understanding of species, habitats, and environmental change. The aim here is not to provide an exhaustive account of every organism found in Wales, but to offer a coherent structure through which Welsh ecosystems can be understood as interconnected wholes.

As you move through the chapters, you will see how energy flows through ecosystems, how species depend upon one another, how habitats are formed, and how changes in one part of a system can influence everything else. More importantly, it is my hope that you will come to see the natural world not as a collection of separate plants and animals, but as a living network of relationships that surrounds us every day.

The goal of this book is not simply to provide information, but to encourage a deeper appreciation of the landscapes and wildlife of Cymru. By understanding how ecosystems function, we can better understand the importance of protecting them, ensuring that the rich natural heritage of Wales continues to survive and flourish for generations to come.

Nathan Williams

The Cymru Cycles