

OUR YEAR FOR WILDLIFE

THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS' IMPACT REPORT 2020/21



Bringing nature back

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we do so with renewed vigour and passion for the UK's wildlife and wild places, and an even clearer sense of the job that's to be done to bring our natural world back from the brink.

The importance of local greenspaces – and of community – to our health and wellbeing was celebrated during the dark days of lockdown and it's vital that this isn't now forgotten as we search for a new normal. With the climate crisis looming over us, we're championing nature's role in helping us to mitigate and adapt to its impacts, whilst embarking on bold and ambitious plans for nature's recovery at landscape-scale and across towns, cities and the countryside. At the centre of this is you, for without you and people like you supporting us and taking action in their own right, we would not be seeing the return of beavers to our countryside, or vast swathes of peatland and saltmarsh restored.

So, whilst normal service was disrupted at times during the pandemic, we're making up for it now, as we work towards at least 30% of land and seas protected and connected for nature's recovery by 2030, with communities empowered to play their part in a thriving, wilder future.



Craig Bennett,
Chief Executive



Peta Foxall,
Chair

“It’s a very exciting time to be joining The Wildlife Trusts, and I am incredibly honoured to have been invited to take on this role. It is a critical time for the natural world, and I hope that through lending my voice and support, and by working together, we can help to enforce the changes that must take place in order to secure a brighter future for our wild places.”

Liz Bonnin



One movement

46 Wildlife Trusts and one UK charity

The Wildlife Trusts are on a mission to restore a third of the UK's land and seas for nature by 2030. We believe that everyone, everywhere, should have access to nature and the joy and health benefits it brings.

No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about nature and standing up for wildlife and wild places. Each Wildlife Trust is an independent charity formed by people getting together to make a positive difference for wildlife, climate and future generations. We are united in our work towards three common goals:

- Nature in recovery, creating wilder land and seascapes where people and nature thrive.
- People taking action for nature and the climate, resulting in better decision making for the environment.
- Nature playing a central and valued role in helping to address local and global problems.

More than **2,300** nature reserves

32,500 active volunteers in 2020-21

More than **870,000** members



© Charles Thody Photography

2,500 staff

Over **120** visitor centres



© Eleanor Church

A year for wildlife

Highlights from across The Wildlife Trusts



Bringing nature back

One movement



Nature in recovery

People taking action

Nature helping address local & global issues

In partnership

Biodiversity benchmark

Funders

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Key people & supporters

A year for wildlife

Highlights from across The Wildlife Trusts



© Mike Waite



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© Thornton Primary



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© Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

Nearly **104,000** hectares of land cared for as Wildlife Trust nature reserves

6,360 planning applications responded to by Wildlife Trusts

...of which **3,078** applications were either refused or improved for wildlife across an area of **20,800** hectares



Nature in recovery Spotlight on... Hero hedgerows

The sight of a yellowhammer singing atop of a hedgerow on the edge of a field is a welcome, yet increasingly rare, moment in our countryside.

Hedgerows provide essential nesting and foraging spots for wildlife – be it yellowhammers, whitethroats, dormice or badgers – and often serve as the only link between habitats fragmented from one another. Yet, they have been declining for many decades, putting wildlife at risk and further disconnecting wild places from one another. Wildlife Trusts, like Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), are working hard to reverse this decline with 2021 marking the conclusion of their Hedgerow Havens project.

The Hedgerow Havens project spanned three years and aimed to conserve farmland wildlife around Aylesbury. Involving over 100 volunteers, the project created new hedgerow across a five kilometre stretch and twelve new ponds, as well as improving a further eight hectares of land for wildlife, providing homes and hunting grounds for many species. The Trust also worked with local councils, wildlife groups and members of the public in Whitchurch and Weedon to establish wildflower road verges, offering vital feeding grounds for pollinating insects.

Thanks to the involvement of local communities and landowners, this project will have a lasting legacy and play an important part in restoring nature at a landscape-scale across the region in line with the ambition set out in BBOWT's new strategy, *Wilder – More Nature Everywhere*.

Nature in recovery
Spotlight on...

Beavers making a comeback

Beavers were once abundant in the UK, playing a crucial role in creating new wetlands, managing flooding and improving water quality, until they were hunted to extinction in the 16th century. The disappearance of these fantastic ecosystem engineers contributed to the loss of the lakes and boggy places that they so brilliantly helped maintain.

However, we've reached a turning point. The Wildlife Trusts have been at the forefront of calling for the reintroduction of beavers to the UK for the last few decades and many Wildlife Trusts, starting with Kent in 2002, have released beavers into enclosed areas, signaling a brighter future for this charismatic mammal.

Additionally, Scottish Wildlife Trust reintroduced the first wild beavers into Scotland in 2009, and Devon Wildlife Trust has monitored the impact of wild beavers living on the River Otter since 2014, recently celebrating a huge win, with a landmark decision from the Government that allowed them to stay in what is the first legally sanctioned reintroduction of an extinct native mammal to England.

In what has been a flurry of beaver activity during 2020 and 2021, we've also celebrated the successful release of two beavers at Hatchmere Nature Reserve by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and welcomed a family of beavers to Cors Dyfi thanks to Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust.

4,600 kilometres of rivers and streams improved for wildlife after receiving advice from the Wildlife Trusts

11 Wildlife Trusts have released beavers



© Niall Benvie

© Nick Upton/ Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Over **100,000 people** joined our call on the Government to ban the use of a harmful bee-killing pesticide



More than **32,500 volunteers** gave **590,000 hours** of their time, despite the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in less opportunities

Over **2,400 butterfly borders** created in people's gardens as a result of the Wild About Gardens initiative with RHS

Nearly **8,000 people** gained new skills by taking part in the **718 training programmes** run by Wildlife Trusts

People taking action for nature & climate

Spotlight on...

Team Wilder

Research has shown that our connection to nature has sharply declined over recent decades, and yet we know that being in nature can improve our health and wellbeing. A connection to nature is also central to our ability to care for it and make better decisions for the future of our natural world. The solution to our climate and nature crises lies in our communities – and the actions they take.

Take the streets of Portsmouth for example. It is the most densely populated city in the UK, houses are crammed together and front porches are a luxury. Life has been hard for bees, butterflies and beetles. However, thanks to the efforts of small groups of people coming together to bring wildlife back, the streets are getting wilder. One such resident, Mathilde, has led the way in her neighbourhood, with support and encouragement from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, who have spearheaded a new community organising initiative, Team Wilder.

In spring 2021, Mathilde asked a neighbour whether she could make use of his empty front yard. With his permission, she set about planting flowers, fruit and vegetables for wildlife and the community to share. Her little oasis is coming on nicely, thanks to donations of gardening materials, seeds and time, from friends, family and neighbours. The buzz generated by this one act is rippling through the community, with locals, including refuse collectors and delivery drivers, all showing interest – especially when it comes to harvest time! Over time The Wildlife Trusts hopes to engage and empower more people, of all identities, cultures, backgrounds and abilities to speak up and take action for wildlife where they live, work and play.



People taking action for nature & climate

Spotlight on...

Farmers unite for nature

In the UK, 70% of our land is farmed, so to achieve nature's recovery it's essential we work with those who manage that land.

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust has established an innovative network, the Arden Farm Network, that does just that. Working with 46 farmers who collectively manage 10,000 hectares across the county, the network invites in specialist speakers to run training events that gives the farmers the skills and knowledge to implement nature-friendly farming practices on their land. Additional grant funding helps support the installation of barn owl boxes, the creation of tree sparrow villages, planting of trees and sowing of wildflower meadows across the network too.

The core principle of the network is that it is 'farmer led' – farmers make suggestions for the guidance, support and training they need. By bringing them together, this project has also played an important role in reducing social isolation and creating a sense of community.

Through the network, the farmers and Wildlife Trust have improved land for nature, reducing flood risk and increasing the potential for carbon capture. In fact, the project has been so successful that it has inspired the creation of two new farmer networks elsewhere in Warwickshire! As a result, this time next year, every farmer in Warwickshire will be able to join and support nature's recovery.

4,438 land managers

received advice by the Wildlife Trusts

242,000 hectares

of private land improved for wildlife after receiving advice from the Wildlife Trusts

6,651 views

of our Wild LIVE panel debate about the future of British farming, a virtual series that has seen nearly **77,000 views** in total



© Bertie Gregory/2020VISION



© Chris Gomersall/2020VISION

Nature helping to address local & global issues

Spotlight on...

Sending kelp!

Kelp forests are a hugely diverse habitat – worms and crustaceans burrow into its network of nooks and crannies, anemones and sea squirts cling to its surface, and the fronds support sponges and sea mats. This thick, floating forest shelters and feeds young fish, which in turn attract larger fish and other predators.

Historically, the area around the near-shore waters of the Sussex coastline was covered in kelp forests. But boats with bottom-towed fishing gear have caused devastation along the seabed and led to the loss of kelp. This spurred Sussex Wildlife Trust into action, launching the Sussex Kelp Restoration Project with partners to campaign for a ban on bottom-towed trawlers in the area. Since then, the project has gained huge support and is receiving international recognition!

Sir David Attenborough was among the supporters of *Help our Kelp*, alongside a number of MPs and over 2,500 members of the public, leading to the ban being formally announced in March 2021. This has opened up the possibility for restoration – alleviating the pressure on the seabed. As the seabed recovers, it is hoped the restored kelp forest will support local fisheries by once more providing important breeding grounds and also help to reduce storm damage and coastal flooding by dissipating some of the energy from these events – thus helping us to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Sussex Wildlife Trust will continue to monitor this restoring habitat, so that we can learn what the true benefits to wildlife and people are into the future.



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1,010 days
spent on marine monitoring and surveying

Over **10,000 people** supported the Wildlife Trusts call for Highly Protected Marine Areas to be designated



© Dan Bolt www.underwaterpics.co.uk

© www.unsplash.com

Nature helping to address local & global issues

Spotlight on...

For peat's sake

Damaged and degraded peatland releases carbon into the atmosphere, but in a healthy state can be a fantastic carbon store. As we try to address the climate and nature crises we're living through, it's never been more important to keep this millennia of carbon stored away in the ground.

North Yorkshire is home to over a quarter of England's total blanket bog (a type of peatland) which stores around 47 million tonnes of carbon! Since 2009, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust-led Yorkshire Peat Partnership has been doing fantastic work to protect it – and to date have restored over 36,000 hectares. Not only is this vital for climate change mitigation, restored peat also holds back water to reduce flooding downstream, and is home for amazing wildlife, like dunlin, large heath butterflies and short-eared owls.

This past year has been the busiest yet for the project, as they worked on 5,000 hectares of blanket bog, from carrying out surveys of the land and creating restoration plans, to planting 173,000 cotton grass plugs and 76,000 sphagnum plugs in bare peat! They also restored 22 hectares of bare peat, reducing the risk of micro-erosion and protecting the peat from further damage.

This project is a fantastic example of different organisations and individuals coming together and collaborating to protect and restore very special wild places.

To date the Wildlife Trusts have restored a total of **43,169 hectares** of peatland



© Peter Cairns / 2020VISION

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has **restored 33%** of Yorkshire's total area of blanket bog (31,526 hectares) through the Yorkshire Peat Partnership



© Peter Cairns / 2020VISION



© Mark Hamblin / 2020VISION

We are proud to work with thousands of businesses across the UK

We know that working with others is crucial to tackling the nature and climate crises, and to bring nature closer to where people live, work and play. Through these partnerships, more space for nature is created in housing and infrastructure developments, farmland is improved for nature, employees get involved with habitat restoration, and more opportunities are created for people to engage with nature. Some of our partners include:



Jordans Farm Partnership

The Wildlife Trusts have been doing pioneering work with Jordans Cereals since 2016 to help farmers to grow food in harmony with nature.

In 2020 our industry-leading partnership renewed for a further five years, with over 30 farms in the partnership working in a way that benefits the natural world, and collectively dedicating more than 4,200 hectares of land for wildlife. Every farmer works with an advisor from their local Wildlife Trust and together they develop a bespoke plan that enables them to grow food whilst helping countryside species, such as barn owls, bats and pollinators, by creating hedgerows, field margins and ponds.

Nearly **1,000 businesses** took part in 2020's 30 Days Wild, helping colleagues to connect to nature during lockdown

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, **350 corporate volunteers** managed to give over **2,200 hours**

© Jordans Cereals



© Jordans Cereals

Biodiversity Benchmark



Everyone has a role to play in reversing the nature crisis. By managing the land they own in a wildlife-friendly way, businesses can take a key step in helping nature's recovery.

The Wildlife Trusts believe that the efforts of organisations leading by example should be celebrated, so we developed the Biodiversity Benchmark in 2007 and this certification has recognised the contribution of business landowners ever since. Accreditation has been achieved across 52 sites covering 8,500 hectares of land managed by 12 organisations. These organisations span across sectors including leisure, transport, energy and construction.



© James Adler



© Green Park Business Park



© Terry Whittaker/2020VISION

Green Park Business Park

Green Park Business Park in Reading has held the Biodiversity Benchmark since 2015 and continue to show dedication to providing space for wildlife. They are focussing on improving their site for hedgehogs, bats and breeding birds, and are meeting with great success! 2020 saw almost every bird box they had put up occupied and all of the mammal tunnels they had installed being used. The business park maintains a great variety of habitats from woodland, to a lake and wildflower meadow, benefitting those that live and work in the area as well as wildlife.

Thanks to our funders

Wildlife Trusts across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales received over £5 million of Emergency Funding from the **National Lottery Heritage Fund**. This enabled them to continue priority work such as caring for our conservation grazing cattle, which create habitat for wildlife, and make adaptations to comply with lockdown restrictions so that visitor centres and nature reserves could welcome visitors once more. Wildlife Trusts were also able to adapt their fundraising and events for online delivery to keep people everywhere connected to nature.

A collaborative project between all five Welsh Wildlife Trusts was awarded almost £2.5 million from the **National Lottery Community Fund's** Climate Action Fund. The project will empower young people to take the lead on tackling climate change with their communities, through actions like planting community orchards, digging ponds and creating green roofs.

Players of **People's Postcode Lottery** raised almost £2 million for The Wildlife Trusts' work to tackle the climate and nature emergency. By repairing peatlands, saltmarsh, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands and kelp forests, this will lock up carbon and provide much-needed habitat for our struggling wildlife. The twelve projects include planting new seagrass habitat in the Solent and creating new habitat to protect temperature-sensitive butterflies on chalk grassland in Bedfordshire. Players also continued to support our work to look after amazing wild places and bring people closer to nature through urban Forest Schools and wildlife events.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation supported nine Wildlife Trusts with unrestricted grants to enable them to respond quickly to the challenges of the pandemic and supported our UK-wide work to protect our precious marine environment. The foundation also helps Wildlife Trusts by providing loans to enable key land purchases whilst fundraising takes place. One such loan helped to secure Honeygar Farm which was an intensively grazed dairy farm in Somerset, situated within the Avalon Marshes – one of the largest and most important wetland areas in the UK. Neighbouring several Somerset Wildlife Trust nature reserves, the farm is perfectly situated to connect up important wild places in the area, creating more space for nature and act as a test-case for carbon farming and peat restoration.



We would like to give an extra special thanks this year to all our funders, from grant funders to individual donors, who offered funding, flexibility and moral support to help us step up to the extra challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. They enabled us to weather the storm, while beginning many fantastic, new projects to restore nature and connect communities with their local wild places.

Our collective finances

Central charity income from charitable trusts and foundations, grants, donations, society lottery, legacies and corporates.

Income for 2020-21 does not include £3.9m for Biffa Award, £4.4m for Our Bright Future and £1.5m for Nature Friendly Schools.

Figures exclude inter-Trust grants and contributions.

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© Ben Hall/2020VISION



© Ben Hall/2020VISION

Key people & supporters

“If given a chance, nature is capable of extraordinary recovery. The Wildlife Trusts’ campaign to secure 30 per cent of our land and sea for nature’s recovery by 2030 offers us the vision and level of ambition that is urgently needed to reverse the loss of nature, and so improve all our lives.”

Sir David Attenborough, President Emeritus, The Wildlife Trusts



Patron HRH The Prince of Wales

President Liz Bonnin (from November 2020)

President Emeritus Sir David Attenborough
Simon King
Tony Juniper (from November 2019)

Vice Presidents Prof Chris Baines
Nick Baker
Gillian Burke (from November 2020)
Ellie Harrison (until October 2020)
Prof David Macdonald
Bill Oddie
Julian Pettifer
Sir Robert Worcester

Ambassadors Dr Mya-Rose Craig (from November 2020)
Prof Dave Goulson (from November 2020)
Dr Amir Khan
Hannah Stiffall
David Oakes (from November 2020)
Sophie Pavelle
Cel Spellman (from November 2020)
Alison Steadman
Richard Walker

Chair Peta Foxall

Chief Executive Craig Bennett

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OUR YEAR FOR WILDLIFE

THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS' IMPACT REPORT 2020/21

The Wildlife Trusts is a movement made up of 46 Wildlife Trusts and a central charity (the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts). Each is an independent charity with a shared mission.

Help us achieve our vision of 30% of land and sea to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030...

- Join us as a member
- Remember us in your will
- Speak up for wildlife
- Volunteer your time
- Partner with us.

Get in touch...

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