



UK UPDATE

Leading the change

I was delighted to start in the role of Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trusts this spring (even if it was in rather odd circumstances given the Covid-19 lockdown).

I've long seen The Wildlife Trusts as the most powerful movement for nature in UK. Made up of 46 individual Wildlife Trusts, ranging from those covering urban areas, to county Wildlife Trusts, groups of counties, the devolved nations and finally island Trusts — we are embedded into the heart of our communities.

Together, we care for over 2,300 nature reserves ranging from Camley Street Natural Park right by London's Kings Cross station, to the spectacular Skomer and Skokholm islands off the coast of Pembrokeshire. In total, we directly manage or provide management advice on 332,697 hectares (822,112 acres) of land for nature. We all play our part — but it's worth mentioning that this collective effort amounts to even more land cared for than by the National Trust!

But what matters to me most is that our federated structure means that the majority of this is close to where people live; over 60 per cent of the UK population live within three miles of a Wildlife Trust nature reserve. And it's clear that, during the Covid-19 lockdown, millions of people have come to a new realisation of just how important local nature is to them.

I sometimes wonder if, over the last 100 years or so, the nature conservation movement in the UK has focussed a

little too much on the identification, categorisation and conservation of rare species and habitats, and not enough on the abundance of nature everywhere, and the preservation and restoration of ecosystem processes.

Don't get me wrong; we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the conservation pioneers that identified the first nature reserves and protected these sites for future generations. But we all know that nature conservation is no longer enough; we now need to put nature into recovery.

Much as we like to imagine we live in a green and pleasant land, the truth is that the UK is currently one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

I'm 48 years old and the science is clear; in my lifetime 41 per cent of wildlife species in UK have suffered strong or moderate decreases in abundance. Species that were once common have become rare and with that the role or function they are performing in our ecosystems has also declined.

We've all experienced it. As a five year old, if I left my bedroom light on at night with the window open it would be swarming with moths 30 minutes later. Now, I'd be lucky to see one. Similarly, when we went on family holidays and drove up the A1 for five hours, the windscreen would be covered in squashed insects by the time we arrived at our holiday destination. Now, there might be one or two.

At The Wildlife Trusts, we want to see 30 per cent of our land and sea being managed for nature's recovery by 2030. That's the bare minimum needed to restore nature in abundance to the UK and to start getting our ecosystems working properly again; capturing carbon, pollinating crops, storing water, rejuvenating soils and cleaning our rivers.

We want to work with farmers and other land managers to create a Nature Recovery Network, using field margins, river valleys, hedgerows, roadside verges, railway cuttings and back gardens to protect, connect and restore nature across our countryside, and into our towns and cities.

And we want a comprehensive package of policy measures put in place to help this happen. That includes improvements to existing and new legislation but also better use of planning policy to make sure new developments help nature's recovery, rather than speed its decline.

Our vision is one where nature is in full, healthy abundance all around us; skies filled with birds, snowstorms of butterflies and moths, armies of invertebrates, vast expanses of wetland and wild landscapes, and seas teeming with life.

And our vision is also one where there's a positive relationship between humanity and nature, rather than constantly behaving as if we are almost enemies.

This won't happen overnight, but it could happen over the next decade if all of us, people, politicians and business leaders put our minds to it.

And if it does happen, it will be thanks — in a very large part — to your support as one of The Wildlife Trusts' 850,000 members.

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UK UPDATE

Tuning into wildlife during tough times

The Wildlife Trusts created a range of online nature activities to encourage everyone to tune in to wildlife at home throughout the coronavirus lockdown — and to help people find solace in nature during tough times.

Wildlife Trusts across the UK provided new ways of helping us feel more connected to the wider world and each other, via their online and social channels. Wildlife experts who are usually found leading school visits, events or talking to visitors on reserves turned to leading wildlife-spotting tours through their gardens, blogging about the life cycle of oil beetles or sharing

heart-warming sounds of a dawn chorus on a sunny April morning.

There was a clear demand for new ways to experience nature from home, with more people than ever tuning into our wildlife webcams — a 2,000 percent increase on this time last year.

From the reactions and messages received on social media, it was apparent that people were treasuring the wildlife they found close to home. For example, hundreds of people got in touch to tell us when they spotted their first butterflies, or to share new visitors to their gardens. These are joyful moments that people hold dear during difficult times.



Natural solutions to the climate crisis

The climate crisis continues to be one of the most pressing concerns in modern times, linked inextricably with the ecological crisis faced by our wildlife. The Wildlife Trusts are working to emphasise natural solutions, which are essential to fighting the climate crisis, as

well as allowing our wildlife to recover. By restoring precious habitats like seagrass meadows, saltmarshes, wetlands, woodlands and peatlands, we can repair the natural processes that store carbon and create more space for nature. wildlifetrusts.org/climate-emergency

UK HIGHLIGHTS

Discover how The Wildlife Trusts brought wildlife to homes across the UK



1 Birdsong bonanza

Cheshire Wildlife Trust shared daily recordings of birdsong in the run up to International Dawn Chorus Day on the 3rd of May. In total they introduced the songs and calls of 30 different species, helping people enjoy this fantastic spring spectacle wherever they were.



2 Skomer Live

With Skomer island closed to visitors, The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales brought all the action and excitement of island life to us. Live webcams filled our days with puffins, whilst the island team joined up with presenters Iolo Williams and Lizzie Daly to provide weekly round-ups of the seabird season so far.

wildlifetrusts.org/wtsww-videos

3 Wildlife TV

Essex Wildlife Trust introduced a packed schedule of digital content, bringing Essex's wonderful wildlife and wild activities straight to people's homes. Videos included wildlife safaris, top tips for wildlife gardening, and even some mystery and drama with the Mammal Detective.

essexwt.org.uk/news/WildlifeTV