



Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight  
Wildlife Trust

# WILDER

**Creating a wilder Hampshire and Isle of Wight**  
Discussion Paper, Autumn 2018

This document forms part of the development of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's strategy up to 2030.

It sets out the scale of the challenge ahead.

It builds on our 60 years' experience.

Its purpose is to provoke debate and discussion.

So that, together, we can shape a plan to create a wilder Hampshire and Isle of Wight.



## here did all the wild things go?

**Wildlife is in freefall. Every day we are losing what is precious and essential.**

In the past 50 years, 56% of all species have declined across the UK – that means our birds, insects, plants, mammals, amphibians, fungi and fish are getting harder to find across our land and sea. A quarter of birds are at risk and one in five mammals are threatened with extinction. Up to three quarters of all flying insects have been wiped out since World War II and we have lost 97% of our wild flower meadows in the same period.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 15% of all species are now at risk of disappearing completely and Britain is ranked as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

The diminishment can be hard to spot at a distance. In this apparently green and pleasant land, surrounded by countryside, it can be hard to reconcile the view with tales of decline. Yet the common is becoming scarce, the scarce rare and the rare is disappearing altogether.

Once familiar wild friends are no longer seen or heard. Whether it's the demise of the iconic nightingale, the drop in water vole numbers or the shrinking of our seagrass meadows, at Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust we are witness to this loss close up.

It's not just wildlife that is in trouble; humanity is too. Runaway climate change is dangerously close. Our waters are polluted and full of plastic. Our soils are washing away and our air isn't clean. Mental health problems, obesity and loneliness are on the rise. The social and economic cost of our failure to deal with these issues is huge and growing.

Nature is being lost at an alarming rate, driven by climate change, development, intensive agriculture and unsustainable resource consumption.<sup>2</sup> We know, however, that **restoring nature** and our connection to it can help solve many of our most pressing environmental, economic and social problems.

## What does nature do for us?

We know from research across the globe that a healthy, wildlife-rich natural world is essential for our wellbeing and prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

Every third mouthful of our food is the result of pollination by bees,<sup>4</sup> and yet we are seeing these industrious insects threatened by the loss of their own habitat and food sources.

Healthy soil is an essential foundation of all life, but is currently being lost ten times faster than it is being created. Soil erosion and pollution is also killing the rivers that we rely on for our water, with 86% now classed as unhealthy.<sup>5</sup>

As we reach the sea, we know that our marine environment is vital in providing half of the world's oxygen – every second breath we take.<sup>6</sup> The Solent's magnificent seagrass beds absorb carbon and help protect our coasts from sea level rise, and yet they are too often damaged by man and machine.

Links in the delicate chain are being bent and broken.

A large and growing body of evidence shows that nature not only keeps us alive and gives us a home, but can also help us stay mentally and physically well.

Individuals with easy access to nature are 40% less likely to become overweight or obese<sup>7</sup> and national research, as well as our own experience, shows the huge impact nature can have in combatting mental illness<sup>8</sup>.

It is undeniable that time spent in natural spaces can, and does, significantly improve people's lives.

**In the name of 'progress' we have somehow lost sight of the very things that underpin our quality of life.**



## We need to tip the balance in favour of nature's recovery

We want Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to be vibrant, varied and teeming with life.

We want a deafening din, a cacophony of **chirping, chirring and buzzing**.

We want nature to be normal.

We want children to grow up with wild and green spaces to explore.

We want great places to live that are good for people and good for wildlife.

We want housing development to give back more than it takes away from nature.

We want farming to be at the forefront of protecting and restoring our soils, water and wildlife.

We need our public bodies, parks and forests to create spaces for wildlife as well as places for people.

We are sure that our busy seas can support thriving wildlife as well as thriving industry.

We know that investing in nature makes economic sense.

We know that people care.

We believe that many small actions, together, can make a huge difference.

We also know that, despite the decline, our counties are still blessed with remarkable habitats and wonderful wildlife.

From internationally important chalk rivers to incredible heathlands, grasslands, wetlands and underwater rocky sponge gardens - these are the wildlife riches that we must invest in and enhance.

**We know that it can be done.**

## We're ready, if you are.

Over the past six decades, the Wildlife Trust has worked hard to protect our wildlife and wild places. We have nurtured and guarded our incredible nature reserves, ensuring that they provide vital safe havens for our precious or threatened species. We have sought opportunities to increase these spaces and link them together. In this way we have slowed down the rate of wildlife loss and secured the **first foundations of our nature recovery network**.

We've inspired and educated tens of thousands of people and have provided advice and assistance to countless others to help them take action for wildlife.

We have achieved a great deal but alone this is not enough.

Today, we have to look beyond the boundaries of our land and the limits of our delivery and set in motion a plan. A plan that is shaped, shared and owned by everyone.

**We need more people on nature's side and more space for nature to thrive.**



Across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight there are thousands of committed members and volunteers dedicating their time and effort to protecting our wildlife and wild places. Every day we work with farmers, landowners and business people who share our passion, our values, and our determination to save the natural world.

However, while 89% of the population say they are concerned about damage to the environment,<sup>9</sup> the issue fares badly up against the NHS, immigration or crime, with just 7% of the population putting the environment amongst the most important issues facing Britain. It appears that this only rises up the agenda in response to events such as severe flooding close to home.<sup>10</sup>

We must find a way of breaking through into the public consciousness and ensuring that the state of nature is seen to be as important to our survival as the state of the National Health Service.

Of course we want everyone to be on board but, as with any pivotal social movement, we know that it's a matter of momentum. Those that are already with us will be essential in tipping the balance. History has proven that a committed minority can change wider public attitudes and behaviour and be the catalyst for change.

In the wake of Blue Planet 2, we have seen the ripple effect across Britain and beyond. It has led to a tangible shift in public discourse about plastics, a swell in individual action and pressure on Government to tackle this problem. Of course, reaching this positive tipping point is more complex and multi-faceted than the 'Blue Planet effect' alone (as is the challenge of achieving a solution). It is, however, undeniable that this issue has gained traction with the public and policy makers alike and this momentum looks set to create a path to real change in our future relationship with plastics.

Research suggests that 25% of the population need to be behind any large-scale social change.<sup>11</sup> We already know that around a third of the population are 'wildlife enthusiasts'<sup>12</sup> and share our love and concern for nature, so this level of support is not beyond our reach. Locally, we will need 1 in 4 people to join us in creating a wilder future.

### **Nature doesn't have a voice, but we do.**

We need people to be talking about the importance of wildlife and our natural world. We need people to be demonstrating to those in power that there is an appetite and urgency to create a better deal for nature. We also need people to be taking whatever action they can, on their own or collectively, to help create a wilder Hampshire and Isle of Wight.



Over the past 60 years, the Wildlife Trust has slowly increased the land in our care, safeguarding more space for nature and joining up habitats. Today we look after around 4,500 hectares – equivalent to over 6,000 football pitches. We are proud of this achievement. We are confident that these are some of the most wildlife-rich places in our area, and much of the counties' best biodiversity exists on these sites.

But we must put this into perspective. The land we manage equates to little more than 1% of the surface area of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

As well as our land, there are nature reserves managed by other bodies and special sites protected by legislation. But all of these existing wild patches miss both the scale and the connections to support population growth for many species. Many of them are simply too small and too fragmented to aid nature's recovery and their isolation makes them vulnerable to external impacts. Indeed, less than half of Hampshire and the Island's special wildlife sites are in favourable condition.<sup>13</sup>

The landscapes of our two counties look green and pleasant but large areas are intensively farmed, confining nature to the margins. Our parks and green spaces are so popular for recreation<sup>14</sup> that wildlife struggles to cope with the disturbance. The scale and pace of development compounds the pressure.

Our really wild places are few and far between.

It is not feasible to simply man the barricades and hope that nature can survive in a few fragments of wild. It has long been recognised that nature needs more spaces which are bigger, better and joined up across a network in order to recover.<sup>15</sup>

But how much space is enough and how wild is wild?

In the course of the next few months we will be examining the evidence and setting out a clear and robust target that we can all work towards. We want this to be ambitious but realistic and, importantly, we want it to be enough to tip the balance.

**What if we had a nature network across 30% of our land and sea to truly support wildlife's recovery?**

Whatever the target, we cannot possibly achieve this alone. We need more than a patchwork of nature reserves – we need a supportive, interconnected mesh of different spaces and habitats – from landscape-scale areas of wilderness, through to areas of wildlife-friendly farmland, more nature reserves, wild urban spaces, gardens and window boxes, along with really wild coastal and marine areas. All, together, creating a vital, buzzing, thriving, nature recovery network.





## plan for nature's recovery

We want to work with people across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to shape a plan that everyone can play a part in. There are a number of important elements that we will need to get right.

### A new Environment Act

At the centre of the plan is an ambitious Environment Act that moves the law beyond protection and enables, or requires, people and organisations to do what is needed for nature's recovery.

Together with other organisations in the Greener UK coalition, we are calling for **new laws that don't just slow the decline of wildlife and the natural world, but reverse it.** The new Act must set out clear principles and targets. It should have the nature recovery network at its heart and establish an effective, independent watchdog to hold governments and public bodies to account.

This national legislation is essential for us locally and could create a radically different framework – driving changes to every area of public policy from education, planning, agriculture and business.

We must have our local voice heard and make sure that the Act delivers on this promise. This is a once in a generation opportunity.

**But it doesn't stop at legislation. Everyone has a part to play.**

### A nature recovery network on land and at sea

We need to start building the network of spaces that will support nature's recovery and allow access to nature for people regardless of where they live.

We will need individuals, communities, landowners, politicians and businesses to take part and take action. **The nature recovery network must be made up of hundreds or thousands of wild spaces and places on land and at sea, connected up to form the beating arteries running through our counties, sustaining life.**

As we create this network, we can help organisations to have the biggest impact by using evidence to show where nature is and where it should be. Nature recovery network maps should guide decisions on housing and development, for example, to ensure that it helps, rather than hinders, nature's recovery.

These maps can also inform the effective targeting of public funding for farming and land management, as well as other forms of private investment, to ensure that it delivers for wildlife and the wider environment.



## Better homes for wildlife and people

A conservative estimate suggests that 140,000 homes are planned for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight over the next twenty years. This is roughly equivalent to creating another Southampton. Of course people need homes but so too do our birds, mammals, wildflowers and invertebrates.

We must go beyond the current statutory requirements and ensure that every new development gives back more to nature than it takes away – securing real and measurable ‘net gain’ for wildlife and the environment. We have been working for years to push for developments to meet the highest bar - seizing opportunities to not just protect but restore areas and create new habitat for wildlife.

We have seen how this can work in places like Barton Meadows, near Winchester. Once arable fields, this new nature reserve is a fantastic wildflower meadow, offering valuable habitat to pollinators and species like skylark, locking carbon in the soil and providing a space for local people to walk with a fantastic view.

Housing development is a challenging issue and we must work in the best interests of our wildlife and local people. We want to collaborate with communities, planners, developers and local government to ensure that nature gains rather than loses from development - and Hampshire and the Island can grow wilder in the years and decades to come.

## (Re)wilding

We are excited by the possibility of finding places where wildlife might bounce back on a grand scale, taking the pressure off managing land and allowing nature to take control. We have seen how this can enable wildlife to flourish and find its own way.

The Knepp Estate in West Sussex shows what can be achieved by giving nature a chance. 3,500 acres of once intensively farmed land has been turned over to wildlife. Grazing animals help to create a mix of habitats and support the restoration of dynamic, natural processes. In the past decade or so, Knepp has seen an extraordinary explosion in life. Rare species like turtle doves, nightingales and purple emperor butterflies are now breeding there and, importantly, more common species are seen in vast numbers.

We have also seen a glimpse of what rewilding in Hampshire could look like. At Fishlake Meadows near Romsey, the flood waters of the River Test have reclaimed former arable land, creating an abundance of wildlife riches. Now ospreys are regularly seen fishing over the lakes and huge flocks of starlings create a brilliant wildlife spectacle with their murmurations. This new wildlife haven is proving that nature can recover if given the chance.

There is growing interest in rewilding across the country, as a response to the wildlife crisis,<sup>16</sup> and we want to explore and test this approach in Hampshire and on the Island. We are keen to see if we can create the conditions for missing species to return – bringing richness and diversity back to our depleted lands.





## Farming with nature

As we leave the European Union and reshape our agricultural policy, now could be the right time to change the way that we farm.

Farmers are critical to creating a countryside where wildlife can once again thrive.

Through targeted management, there are many opportunities to expand and connect important wildlife habitats, creating links in the nature recovery network that will allow wildlife to move and adapt to climate change. We believe there is a role for every

farmer and that creating and managing healthy, functioning ecosystems makes good business sense.

**We have worked with many farmers over the years who have, off their own backs and at their own expense, seen the wisdom and urgency of farming with nature rather than against it.**

We want to work with more farmers in the coming months and years to find new ways of creating sustainable, strong farming models with nature and wildlife at their heart.







## Investing in natural capital

Increasingly, industries like utilities and food production are waking up to the fact that investment in our natural resources is essential for sustainable business.

As consumers and corporations, we cannot keep taking without giving back to nature.

There is an urgent need to tackle climate change, reduce pollution, manage flood risk and build stronger, more sustainable natural resources. The water industry has started to recognise the importance of preventing pollution at source, for example by working with farmers to minimise run-off, or restoring wetlands to 'slow the flow' and naturally treat water.<sup>17</sup>

We have seen the transformative effect that such partnerships can have in restoring habitats, repairing damage to the natural environment and finding new and better ways of doing business. We need ideas, innovation and investment from the business sector to improve and increase our essential natural capital and contribute towards nature's recovery.

## More, bigger, better and joined up nature reserves

The Wildlife Trust looks after more than 50 nature reserves across the two counties. These sites are vital stepping stones in our nature recovery network, offering safe havens for some of our most vulnerable species. Through careful and targeted habitat management we are able to create the conditions that help species like rare orchids or the Duke of Burgundy butterfly buck the national trend of decline. Indeed the Marsh Fritillary butterfly, locally extinct for twenty years, has recently been reintroduced to land that we manage in north Hampshire.<sup>18</sup>

It is important that we seek to further expand and connect our estate, linking the safe spaces where wildlife takes precedence.

## Wilder neighbourhoods, towns and cities

The benefits of greening towns and cities are far-reaching and even small actions, such as leaving verges uncut, can help turn towns into wildlife destinations. Wild urban patches are crucial – offering essential habitat and stepping stones within the nature network. Urban trees not only provide vital resources for wildlife, but also help to cool cities and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Parks, allotments, school grounds and community spaces can all offer something for nature and, in doing so, can bring people together – creating healthier and more socially connected communities. We want to develop collaborative approaches, working to create wilder neighbourhoods – not as a luxury but as an essential part of our health and wellbeing.

## Wilder lives

We are so interconnected with nature and wildlife and yet we could not seem more removed from it. Subsequent generations are being denied opportunities to experience and appreciate nature, with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds often the most excluded.<sup>19</sup>

Across the board, three quarters of parents are concerned that children don't spend enough time interacting with nature and wildlife.<sup>20</sup>

We know the power of people connecting with nature and the beneficial impacts that this can have on individual health and wellbeing.<sup>21</sup> This connection can create a virtuous circle, leading to greater willingness to act in support of wildlife and helping us to achieve our goal of nature's recovery – for everyone's sake.

We need to focus on embedding opportunities for more people to get closer to nature in their everyday lives.

## Small spaces and small actions

As individuals we can make a huge difference by both standing up for wildlife and taking action. We need you to add your voice in pressing for change, but we also want you to take small steps that will help create the wave of change we need.

This could be sharing your space with wildlife by growing plants for pollinators or leaving lawns uncut, or it could be taking the pressure off the natural environment through your choices as consumers and citizens. The challenge of tipping the balance in nature's favour can seem daunting, but each individual and every action counts and multiplies.

Nationally, our gardens account for around 3% of the land surface and around a quarter of the space in towns and cities.<sup>22</sup>

These gardens can be teeming with life. Garden birds, bees, hedgehogs, foxes, frogs and insects can all thrive, if given a helping hand.

So we want to encourage and enable everyone to get involved and turn their home into a wildlife rich space, adding to the network and helping people to get closer to nature.

We know that just a small but committed minority – the 1 in 4 – can help create real change by showing others that they care. So, whether it's feeding the birds, reducing your use of plastics or picking up other people's litter, your choices can help others to make the right decisions.



## End Notes

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In the coming months there are some important things we would like your help with.

## **1. Let Government know they must Act now.**

Most pressing is showing just how important these issues are to Government and those in power.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that nature's recovery is at the heart of public policy and law across Britain.

Help us to demonstrate to Government the swell of support for an ambitious Environment Act. Our individual calls will, together, create noise that can't be ignored.

Securing the legal grounding that nature and the environment deserve is an essential step, but as we have set out in this discussion paper, there is much more work that we all need to be getting on with.

## **2. Be part of nature's recovery.**

This paper is just the start.

Over the coming months we will be holding a series of debates and sharing our thinking as it develops. We will publish a more detailed plan in 2019.

But we want to start building the nature recovery network across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight now.

Whether you are a landowner, a planner, a gardener, a scientist or a teacher, we want to work with you to develop and deliver our shared plan.

We need at least 1 in 4 people to commit to creating a wilder world. We need advocates, ambassadors, activists and leaders to work with us to tip the balance. **Join us.**

**Join us**

[www.hiwwt.org.uk](http://www.hiwwt.org.uk)

**Talk to us**

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