



IT'S OUR NATURE

You can help protect Europe's laws for wildlife

**SHOW
YOUR
SUPPORT**

[wildlifetrusts.org/
defendnature](http://wildlifetrusts.org/defendnature)

#defendnature



For 30 years international efforts have saved
our best wild spaces. Join the campaign

#defendnature

A special report by The Wildlife Trusts

WHY WE NEED YOUR HELP

Europe's nature laws and funding have saved some of our most precious wild places and species. Please help it to stay that way

ACROSS EUROPE, including here in the UK, vital laws protect our most precious wildlife and wild places. At the moment the European Commission (EC) is reviewing these laws – the ‘Nature Directives’ – with the aim of making them ‘lighter, simpler and less costly’. We are concerned that there is a mistaken belief these laws are a hindrance to economic growth, when in fact they underpin it – and much more.

All EC member countries share two main nature laws – the Habitats Directive, adopted in 1992 which protects a range of important habitats and species, and the Birds Directive, which aims to protect all European wild birds and important wildlife habitats. Sites designated under these laws make up a network of protected wild places – called Natura2000 – stretching across Europe.

In the UK more than 800 places are part of this network including the New Forest, the Isles of Scilly, the the North Antrim Coast and the Severn Estuary.

It's not just wildlife that needs these laws. We do too, for cleaner rivers, habitat for pollinating insects and natural places we can enjoy and spend time in. Without them our world would be poorer.

In autumn 2012, the chancellor George Osborne claimed EC rules on habitats were, “placing ridiculous costs on British businesses.” The view that nature impedes progress is echoed elsewhere in Europe. Stephanie Hilborne, CEO of The Wildlife Trusts, disagrees. “Rather than being an obstacle to economic growth, nature is the basis of it. Instead of undoing the laws that have slowed the destruction of our environment, governments should be restoring our ecosystems and putting stewardship of the natural environment at the heart of policy”.

This report looks at four examples where EU laws and funding are protecting and restoring special places here in the UK. Please join the Defend Nature campaign and stand up for and celebrate Europe's nature laws.

“Our wealth
as a nation
depends critically
upon the health
of our
ecosystems”

What you can do

In one minute:

Show your support and respond to the EU e-consultation at wildlifetrusts.org/defendnature

In two minutes:

Share this via wtru.st/defendnature
#defendnature
#naturealert
#itsmynature

In five minutes:

Join your Wildlife Trust via wildlifetrusts.org and help us create a better world for nature and all of us – from European wildlife campaigns to your local woods and meadows.

A brown trout in a Hampshire chalk stream, one of the rarest aquatic environments on earth. EU directives have driven dramatic improvements to the UK's rivers since 1990

1 BRINGING BACK THE BITTERN

An EU LIFE-Nature project rescued the bittern from extinction in the UK – and created huge knock-on benefits for people too

JAMIE HALL



The bittern might have become extinct in the UK without international support

“Areas like Amwell nature reserve are vitally important for our ecosystem. I will continue to fight for our environment and wildlife in Europe.” **Richard Howitt, MEP**

THE BOOM OF A MALE bittern is one of the furthest-carrying sounds of any UK bird. But by 1997 there were just 11 booming males left, down from 80 in 1954. The cause of the decline was simple: a loss of the reedbed habitat which this small heron calls home.

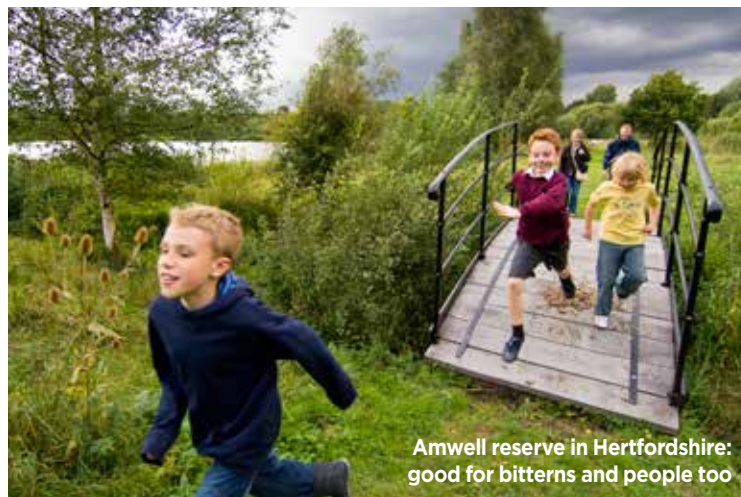
In 1996, as part of international efforts to restore wetlands, an EU LIFE-Nature project was set up to rescue the bittern from extinction, involving The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and others. Funds were made available for a strategic approach across Britain: to optimise habitat in eight EU-designated Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which already harboured the birds, and to prepare 11 more sites for recolonisation.

By 2003 there were 40 booming males. Today there are around 80 once more, and 600 birds in total.

Reedbeds are great for wildlife but also help to clean drinking water and provide traditional roofing materials. Long-term management plans at all project sites, and careful monitoring, ensure a successful legacy for these special, and useful, habitats.

One of the restoration sites was the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust’s

Amwell Quarry nature reserve, a former quarry which is part of the EU –designated Lee Valley Special Protection Area. Its first bittern boomed in 2008, and numbers of wintering birds have increased too. More funding followed to improve access for people and today Amwell attracts 90,000 visitors each year.



Amwell reserve in Hertfordshire: good for bitterns and people too

MATTHEW ROBERTS

1996-2006

ACROSS ALL PROJECT SITES

144ha
of land purchased

11.8
miles of ditch and lake margin reprofiled

11
miles of new ditches dug

244ha
of new reedbed established

2 SAVING THE MARSH FRITILLARY

Once the Cornish Moors became a candidate EU Special Area of Conservation, restoration work could begin

A Cornish marsh fritillary. The butterflies rarely travel more than 100m, so joined-up habitat is essential

DAVID CHARPAIN



The marsh fritillary has declined by 66% in England since the 1970s. European funding is helping to restore and reconnect its fragmented habitats.

IT'S ONE OF OUR MOST beautiful butterflies. But the existence of the marsh fritillary depends on traditionally-grazed wet grasslands in western England and Scotland, and Northern Ireland. With this form of farming dying out, by the turn of the century the species was in real trouble. It was already extinct in Netherlands and Belgium.

In 2003, an EU LIFE project was set up in an EU-proposed Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in Cornwall: the Breney Common and Goss and Tregoss Moors candidate SAC. The goal was to join up and restore fragmented habitat in one of the butterfly's strongholds, and to do the same at seven satellite sites.

Creating a network like this improves the butterfly's long term survival chances. If a

local population is wiped out by bad weather or disease, nearby colonies can still spread to repopulate the area when conditions improve.

Funds were made available to clear encroaching scrub and willow, remove non native trees and re-route the A30, which passed through the middle of the site. To improve the quality of the

reclaimed habitat, and make the changes economically viable, farmers and landowners were leased cattle on long term contracts, and encouraged to enter agri-environment schemes. Around 130ha in the project area was restored, relinked or improved, making a real difference to the fritillary's chances.

The LIFE project created new pathways for visitors to see the butterflies



ROBERT PITTMAN

2003-2008

The project re-routed the A30 to improve access to the moors and re-link isolated heathland habitats

259ha

New total area of managed breeding habitat for butterflies - up from 38ha

The project helped Cornwall Wildlife Trust buy new land to create its largest nature reserve, Helman Tor

3 PROTECTING STRANGFORD LOUGH

Local and UK governments failed to protect the Lough's ancient seabed habitats from destruction – until the EU obliged them to



ULSTER WILDLIFE

Strangford Lough: not just a tourist heaven, but a biodiversity hotspot that needs EU protection

“By referring the matter to Europe Ulster Wildlife concentrated the minds of Government in a definitive way.” **Alex Attwood, Environment Minister.**

STRANGFORD LOUGH is the UK's largest sea lough. Its unusual range of habitats and outstanding beauty gives it huge economic, recreational and cultural value. But beneath the surface its natural features have been less appreciated.

The Lough's seabed is unusual for its living reefs, built by generations of horse mussels. Hundreds of other species live in these ancient reefs, forming the basis for the Lough's economically vital wildlife, from tiny invertebrates up the food chain to the birds and seals that visitors come to see. The hydroids that live on the mussels provide somewhere for tiny scallop larvae to settle, which in turn supported the Lough's scallop industry.

Unfortunately the mussel reefs were badly damaged by scallop dredging. This

involves dragging a weighted iron cage across the seabed and discarding everything except scallops, an effect similar to that of an underwater bulldozer.

Between 1980 and 2003 Ulster Wildlife lobbied the local and UK government to regulate the trawling (as they were required to do by EU law), with no success. In

2003 Ulster Wildlife complained to the European Commission, which threatened to fine the UK government. A recovery plan was devised but only partly carried out. A second complaint in 2011 has produced a more robust plan and a Total Protection Zone. It is unlikely the reefs will ever recover.



A horse mussel clump in Strangford Lough

BERNARD PICTON

1996-2003

1996

Lough designated as an SAC, largely for mussel reefs.

2003

Ulster Wildlife (UW) complains to the EU about damage

2005

Restoration plan published

2011

Plan not fully implemented. UW makes a second complaint

2012

NI Government agrees a revised restoration plan

4 RESTORING THE THAMES BASIN HEATHS

International protection for these heaths balances the needs of rare species with those of the people who live alongside them

BEN ROBINSON

The heaths are a vital natural space for local people to enjoy

The UK has more than 20% of Europe's remaining area of lowland heath. It is our responsibility to protect and restore these special places.

A GLORIOUS AREA of wild countryside stretching across Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire, the Thames Basin Heaths are one of the South East's key natural assets. Around five million visitors a year visit them to exercise and unwind.

But the Heaths, and the rare wildlife they support, are also under pressure from a rising population. More than 30,000 new homes are planned for nearby areas.

Fortunately the EU made the heaths a Special Protection Area (SPA) in 2005, thanks to their populations of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler. These ground-nesting birds are easily disturbed by people, especially dog walkers. If the pressure is too great, the birds cannot survive.

The challenge is therefore to balance the need for new

housing, and people's desire to enjoy the heaths, with the needs of vulnerable wildlife. The SPA ensures that when development could affect the Heaths, the government must decide how to avoid any likely impact. If an impact turns out to be unavoidable, permanent compensation must be put in place.

In the case of the Heaths,

this has led to the setting-up of extra spaces for people to get out into the countryside where there won't be any impact on the birds, and wardening of protected areas during the breeding season.

European protection means that future residents of the Heaths will be able to enjoy their amazing habitats and species for years to come.



Volunteers helped restore much of the heathland habitat

SURREY WILDLIFE TRUST

2005-2015

2000
hectares of heath
cleared of
invasive species

600
hectares back in
traditional grazing

500
hectares of
heathland bought

120
hectares of scrub
and gorse cleared
for Dartford
warbler and
southern
damselfly

NATURE NEEDS YOUR HELP

Please help ensure that the EU's protection of our natural environment will continue and expand

NATURE IS UNDER THREAT. Not only from climate change, pollution and habitat destruction – but also from political leaders who think it simply does not matter or do not understand its value.

Europe's nature laws, which are shared by all EC member states, are the counterbalance to that short-term way of thinking. They protect a network of wild places stretching from Estonia to Portugal including some of the UK's most iconic species and habitats. When Devon Wildlife Trust gathered evidence that Lyme Bay was being significantly damaged by scallop dredgers in the 1990s and 2000s, the Bay's candidate Special Area of Conservation status helped provide the protection it needed to recover.

Perhaps the most powerful contribution Europe's nature laws have made to nature conservation is

EU laws have protected some of the UK's most iconic species and habitats

stability. When a site becomes an SAC or SPA, it unlocks funding, commitment, enthusiasm and vision. As the examples in this report show, the result is good for nature, and good for local people.

International pressure can also spur governments into action. The 1992 Habitats Directive resulted in the designation of over 100 UK marine Natura 2000 sites – an area the size of Belgium. Before the Directive was introduced here there were just three protected marine areas in the UK.

More recently, the UK Government has been slow to designate Marine Protected Areas, despite huge public support, excellent science and a sustained campaign by The Wildlife Trusts and many other organisations. The EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive provides the UK Government with the external context it needs to make Marine Protected Areas happen.

JANET BAXTER

Common dolphins in Cardigan Bay SAC. They and the rarer bottlenose dolphin are benefiting from EU protection



What you can do to help secure our nature laws

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