What would it do?

Recovery of nature in a generation

The Nature and Wellbeing Act would set the first legal commitment to the recovery of nature in a generation. It would recognise that real improvements in the quality of life for people across England can be secured by working with, and increasing, nature. It would set targets for government to drive progress, such as a 25% increase in populations of key species, and for 80% of sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) to be in good condition by 2040. This would make sure that we can pass on the natural environment to our children in better condition.

Value

Better valuation and management of nature will help to protect it, while also securing economic and social benefits. The Act would formalise the natural capital approach to ensure that we put nature into the heart of decision-making, nationally and locally.

Connect

The Act would set out mechanisms to ensure that everyone can easily access nature – through increasing the extent, accessibility and quality of natural green space near every home. It would include an appreciation and understanding of the natural world as part of the purpose of schooling – so that children leave school with the knowledge, skills and motivation to care for how we affect and benefit from our environment.

How would it work?

The Act would build on, rather than replace, existing legislation for the natural environment, which will continue to play a vital part in the protection of nature. It would provide an opportunity to create a clear, logical and consistent legal framework for the recovery of nature, within which existing law and policy would work. Like the Climate Change Act 2008, it would use duties, mechanisms and reports to create the accountability and political pressure necessary to achieve the purposes of the Act.

Why do we need new legislation?

The Natural Environment White Paper sets out our ambitious intention for the recovery of nature, but on its own will not be sufficient to achieve it. A much stronger drive is needed, with the power to bring about fundamental change and the long-term commitment to keep all successive governments and all sectors of society committed to deliver what nature needs and what we need from nature.

*The RSPB

The RSPB is the country’s largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will beem with birdsong again. UK headquarters: The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Tel: 01767 680551. rspb.org.uk

*The Wildlife Trusts

There are 47 individual Wildlife Trusts covering the whole of the UK and the Isle of Man and Alderney. Together, The Wildlife Trusts are the UK’s largest people-powered environmental organisation, working for nature’s recovery on land and at sea. The Wildlife Trusts, The Hive, Mather Road, Newark NG24 1WT. Tel: 01636 677711. wildlifetrusts.org

Our environment is under more pressure than ever before. The State of Nature report found that 60% of UK species we know about are in decline. Habitats are becoming more fragmented and their condition is worsening to the extent that only 37% of our best sites are in good condition. Many of the ‘free’ but valuable services provided by nature are under threat, such as clean water supply, pollination, resilience to flooding and food production. Despite our existing legislation and policy, we continue to use many of our natural assets in an unsustainable way, putting our long-term economic prosperity at risk.

As a country, we are experiencing increasing levels of obesity and physical inactivity. Furthermore, one in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our lives. Improvements in overall health are skewed towards wealthier sections of society, causing health inequalities to increase. Yet there is considerable evidence to show that contact with nature can help to prevent and reverse poor health and wellbeing.

A thriving natural environment is part of the solution to many social, economic and environmental problems. This was recognised in the Natural Environment White Paper, which set out an ambition to improve our natural environment and our connection to it. But in order to achieve its aims, we need greater commitment to its recovery and fundamental changes in how we value, use and interact with nature.

Together, The Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB are calling for a Nature and Wellbeing Act for England that will go beyond existing policy and legislation to secure nature’s recovery in a generation, ensuring we value what it does for us and that we work with nature to achieve significant improvements in the health and wellbeing of people, society and the economy.