

Natural fixes

How nature can help solve our social, economic and environmental problems and put society back on the right track



A General Election briefing for
Prospective Parliamentary
Candidates
by The Wildlife Trusts

Will you support us?

We are The Wildlife Trusts, the UK's largest people-powered organisation dedicated to the protection and recovery of all nature. We have 800,000 members. We need every political

party's support for our call for a Nature and Wellbeing Act, and for the creation of a full network of Marine Protected Areas around the UK.

These proposals are necessary

because recent decades have seen steady declines in almost all UK species and natural habitats on land and sea, despite the fact that nature is our life support system.

This cannot continue without dire consequences for all of us. By contrast, research from the UK and across the world shows that restoring our degraded natural systems will help

rebuild our economy; tackle a wide range of health problems including obesity, heart disease and depression; reduce the severity of droughts and floods; improve our food security;

absorb carbon dioxide emissions; and make the UK a better, more inspiring place to live. It's time to act for nature's recovery. Our wildlife and wild places need it. And we need it, too.

1. Yes to a Nature and Wellbeing Act

What is it?

A piece of legislation to bring about the recovery of nature in a generation, for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Why is it needed?

Because our actions as a society over the past century have undermined nature's ability to support us – just as our need for that support has increased.

The habitats, plants and animals that sustain us have declined consistently across the vast majority of the country. This affects how our environment soaks up extreme rainfall, absorbs carbon, and provides clean water. It affects the health of our soils, fish stocks and pollinators. It affects how we can adapt to climate change, the liveability of our cities and the productivity of our countryside.

Nature has become more remote from us and less present in our daily lives. Over the same period, conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and depression have increased. We need to reverse both trends and bring nature back. We need to invest more time, energy, commitment and money into nature's recovery – because wildlife and wild places need it, and because our health, wellbeing and prosperity depend upon it.

What would the Act involve?

It would place nature at the heart of how decisions are made about health, housing and other development, education, economic growth, flood resilience and social cohesion.

The protection and creation of healthy woods, rivers, meadows, parks and wild land around us in local, regional and national networks would help achieve objectives in all these areas. Decisions by Government at all levels would place a greater value on nature, using a framework and targets similar to those of the Climate Change Act (which has enabled action to reduce CO2 emissions).

The Act would make sure we all have more nature where we live and work. And by learning about nature at school our next generations will build understanding from an early age.

Why do we need new legislation?

Our existing laws have been vital in protecting what nature we have left, but were not designed to help reverse its decline.

We need legislation that explicitly does this, and recognises the fundamental importance of the natural environment to our society and the economy, as well as its intrinsic worth

and popularity with the English population. The Act will make nature's recovery a public policy objective of central importance to everyone and give it the priority that it requires.

What will it cost?

A large and growing body of evidence shows that nature is a cost-effective contributor to good public health – both by helping to keep us mentally and physically well and by helping to cure us when we fall ill. Contact with nature helps to develop competent, confident, productive citizens. It increases the quality of the neighbourhoods in which we live.

Research shows that access to semi-natural green space could save the NHS £2.1bn annually due to the health benefits it provides.

The National Ecosystem Assessment calculates that the wrong kind of economic growth between now and 2060 would cost the UK £20.7bn per year because of the damage it would cause. By contrast, putting nature at the heart of development would save £33bn per year. Well managed and wild natural places provide lasting and substantial benefits to the economy and are ultimately the root of all our productivity.

It's time to act for nature's recovery – we can't afford not to.



Seahorse in recommended Marine Conservation Zone at Studland, Dorset

JULIE HATCHER

2. More Marine Protected Areas

What is a Marine Protected Area? (MPA)

A recognised area of sea in which damaging activities, such as scallop dredging, bottom trawling and inappropriate development are not allowed. Ordinary pursuits such as angling, yachting, diving and rockpooling are usually unaffected.

Why are MPAs needed?

To allow the UK's seas to recover from decades or in some cases centuries of unsustainable pressure. The main problems are: industrial fishing, which has driven many species to commercial extinction; dredging the seabed for scallops, which can destroy centuries-old communities of species; destruction of coastal habitats such as saltmarsh, which dramatically reduce the power of storm surges; pollution from

agricultural and industrial chemicals; and marine debris, especially plastic.

Protected areas in other parts of the world show that marine life can rebound spectacularly if given the chance.

How many MPAs are needed?

We want to achieve an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas around the UK.

Many years of research by a wide range of groups have identified well over 100 possible sites. Ecological coherence means that all UK species and habitats are represented; that there is replication in case a site is lost; and sites are close enough so that species can move from one MPA to another.

So far there are 27 MPAs in English waters, and 30 in Scottish waters.

What about the economy?

There is good evidence that the sea is worth more in the medium-to-long term if it is protected. A study by the University of Hull found that Northern Ireland's sea will deliver £52m more over 20 years than business as usual. The Natural Capital Committee considers that restoration of UK marine fisheries to 1930s levels (which MPAs would help to achieve) could be worth up to an extra 1.4bn a year.

What public support is there?

More than 350,000 people have signed a petition supporting an ecologically coherent MPA network. It was delivered to Downing Street in 2013. 40,000 responded to Defra's consultation over the first MPAs. 98% asked for more protection of our marine environment.



See how the Act would improve all our lives at wildlifetrusts.org/NWA

Our vision of the future: nature re-integrated into all our lives

NIK POLLARD

What you can do to help

Actions for Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

- Ask your party to support the Nature and Wellbeing Act
- Read more about the Act at wildlifetrusts.org/election
- Sign up to the Marine Charter for Marine Protected Areas at wtru.st/marinecharter
- Experience nature for yourself. We'll gladly suggest a place (contact details below)

Recreated saltmarsh habitat at Essex Wildlife Trust's Abbott's Hall Farm. Saltmarshes can provide a natural defence against coastal flooding. They are also beautiful wild places: great to visit, and home to special wildlife



TERRY WHITTAKER/20/VISION

Who are The Wildlife Trusts?

We are the UK's largest grassroots organisation working for nature's recovery on land and at sea. We are 47 individual Wildlife Trusts covering the UK, the Isle of Man and Alderney.

We are motivated by our connection to the natural world. We believe passionately that the richest wildlife sites must be protected as a starting point from which nature can spread back into

our wider landscapes. And at sea we must also protect areas now for a future when our marine wildlife can thrive more widely.

We know that a healthy natural environment is the source of our prosperity and our wellbeing. We want to inspire people about the natural world so that they value it, understand their relationship with it and take action to protect and restore it.

We manage 95,000ha of land, across 2,300 reserves which are visited by 7 million people each year. We run 11,000 events a year, work with 5,200 schools, and advise 5,300 landowners on how to manage land for wildlife.

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