



Experts call for urgent action to save Welsh nature as new report reveals devastating decline in species

Ten years after its first publication, report shows nature continues to decline across Wales. The new State of Nature Wales 2023 reveals the devastating scale of nature loss across the country and the risk of extinction for many species.

- 18% (one in six) of our species is at risk of extinction from Wales, including plants and animals such as fen orchid, water vole and sand lizard.
- The abundance of land and freshwater species has on average fallen by 20% across Wales since 1994.
- Of almost 3,900 species assessed, more than 2% are already extinct in Wales.
- Continued pressures on wildlife mean that Wales is now one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth [1].
- Wales has committed to ambitious targets to turn around the loss of nature. While there is some progress, the response is still far from what is needed to deal with the scale and pace of the crisis.
- But action for nature can make a difference with success stories for some bat species, terns and some butterflies.

The new State of Nature 2023 report [2], published today, reveals the devastating scale of nature loss across Wales and provides a detailed picture of how nature is faring and what is needed to fix it.

Now, conservationists, scientists, and experts from more than 60 organisations [3][4] are calling for urgent action across Wales.

Some of the wildlife that has suffered the biggest population losses are the insects, flora and mammals that people may be less familiar with. Well-known species like the Atlantic salmon and curlew have also suffered critical declines in Wales. These species are disappearing from our seas and countryside. The evidence from the last 50 years shows that on land and in freshwater, significant and ongoing changes in the way we manage our land for agriculture, and the ongoing effects of climate change are having the biggest impacts on our wildlife.

At sea and around our coasts, the main pressures are pollution, climate change and historic over exploitation with fewer than half of marine protected areas found to be in favourable condition.

One in six species are at risk of being lost from Wales; more than 2% of almost 3,900 species assessed using IUCN Red List criteria [5] are already extinct. In addition, 11 bird species have been declared extinct in Wales. Moths, which are important pollinators, are far less abundant than 50 years ago, having declined by an average of 43% since 1970.

The report also details how the loss of nature is affecting people. Nature plays a critical role in all aspects of people's lives; it provides the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. There is substantial evidence of the negative consequences of living in a nature-depleted country. It is shown to be far more cost-effective to avoid such damage in the first place or, where damage has already occurred, to restore nature rather than bear the costs of continued degradation. Wales' peatlands are a prime example of this. They have the potential to be an enormous carbon store and an important tool in the fight against the climate crisis, yet 90% of Wales' peatlands are damaged or degraded.

Rachel Sharp, Director of Wildlife Trusts Wales said: "The latest State of Nature report shows that despite some successes, the alarming ongoing decline of wildlife in Wales has not stopped. It is shocking that extinctions continue, with 1 in 6 species in Wales continuing to be threatened. We know what actions are needed, but the scale and pace of the restoration of the natural world is missing to address the nature crisis. Nature is threatened by poor management, development, pollution and the use of pesticides. With 90% of the land in Wales farmed, farmers have a unique role to play in nature's recovery and must be recognised and enabled to implement further measures for nature through the new sustainable farming scheme that will be introduced by the Welsh Government in 2025. We also need to remember that Wales has more sea than land and is experiencing the same decline from development and the lack of effective management. With a Team Wales approach involving both the public, farming and private sectors, we believe that nature's recovery can happen, but business as usual is not an option; we need urgent action."

Alun Prichard, Director of RSPB Cymru, said: "This report shows how we're facing a critical tipping point in the nature crisis across Wales. A national problem, which needs national action. But we know what we need to do; we know what works. Governments, businesses, communities and the public must now work together and more urgently across the board if we are to put nature back where it belongs. We need to be ambitious and inspiring for future generations. Nature can't wait and neither should we."

Clare Pillman, Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales, said: "Despite some progress, Wales still faces challenges in biodiversity conservation. Climate

change, habitat loss, changes in land use, invasive species, and pollution continue to impact our ecosystems”.

“NRW is pleased to work with partners to provide the best available evidence that can be used by all to better understand how nature is changing across the UK, and to use that evidence to spur on action. Ensuring that nature thrives must be a shared endeavour across government, business and society. It is only together that we can put Wales on a solid footing on the path to nature’s recovery.”

As highlighted in the report, action for nature can make a real difference. Bats show an average increase of 76% since 1998, from seriously depleted numbers in the 1990s thanks to increased protection of the places they live. Butterflies relying on specialist habitat management have started to recover over the last decade, although numbers remain less than half that in 1993.

Examples of successful species projects in the report include protection of Little Terns in Denbighshire that has enabled the main Welsh breeding colony to become one of the most important in Britain, and peatland restoration in Ceredigion that has maintained the population of Large Heath butterflies.

There is a strong public appetite for nature protection and restoration in Wales, as evidenced by the recently launched Natur a Ni people’s [6] assembly recommendations, consultation from the Natur am Byth [7] species recovery partnership and the UK People’s Plan for Nature [8].

To download a full copy of the State of Nature 2023 report and to find out what you can do to help, visit www.stateofnature.org.uk.

ENDS

For further information and to arrange an interview, please contact:

Deio Gruffydd, RSPB Cymru Head of Communications and Marketing:
deio.gruffydd@rspb.org.uk, 07734 985975

Sioned Jones, RSPB Cymru Communications Manager:
sioned.jones@rspb.org.uk, 07971 501 093

Photographs:

A selection of photographs for use available here: [Wetransfer](#)

Additional quotes

Action for Conservation

Hendrikus van Hensbergen, Founder and CEO, Action for Conservation said: "We work closely with young people across the nation and see their determination

and drive to tackle issues like sewage pollution and biodiversity decline. They know these issues will affect their future and, when given the opportunity, they are taking action to reverse these worrying declines and inspire others to action. The State of Nature report shows the extent to which our elected leaders are failing future generations. Young people's message is clear. We must do more to restore ecosystems to tackle the climate crisis. We must do it now."

Khadijah Haq, Young Trustee, Action for Conservation said: "Young people want to see our Government taking environmental issues seriously, we expect them to put proper legislation in place to protect habitats, species and people. Young people are passionate about fighting for equality and working alongside nature to create a better future for everyone, it's time the adults in power step up and join us."

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation

Jim Foster, Conservation Director at Amphibian and Reptile Conservation said: "The state of Wales' nature should be of vital importance to all of us. Animals such as frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards are a fundamental part of our natural and cultural heritage, but like many of the other species and habitats covered in this report, they are increasingly under pressure from factors such as land-use and climate change. This report shows that it is possible for conservation projects to recover species populations, and how important it is that we scale up our efforts to reverse nature declines."

Mammal Society

Matt Larsen-Daw, CEO, Mammal Society said: "Due to the long history of our declining nature, no one alive today has ever actually seen our landscapes as they could be - fulfilling their potential as havens for nature as well as people. Much of our cultural ties to the landscape are linked to the very practices that have contributed to denuding it of wildlife. We need a mind shift to normalise gardens, roads, parks and ground in our landscapes that are frayed around the edges. When people see long grass, scrubland and bulging hedgerows as signs of nature being allowed a place in the landscape, rather than as evidence of neglect and wasted space, we move a step closer to a society that will see the missed opportunities when nature is suppressed or excluded, and demand better."

National Trust

Lhosa Daly, Director of National Trust Cymru said: "This year's State of Nature Wales report shows that our precious wildlife continues to decline and makes clear that we need to take urgent, collective action. Nature needs our help now, more than ever before, and we must all work together to halt further loss of nature, to restore habitats, and help species recover."

Plantlife

Lizzie Wilberforce, Plantlife Cymru Lead, said: "This landmark report shows devastating declines in the state of nature and wild plants and fungi are on the

frontline. The decline in distribution of 42% of flowering plant species and 44% of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) in Wales since just 1970 is staggering and brings into sharp focus the need to act, and act fast, to arrest the loss and create more space for nature. Healthy plant communities must be better safeguarded as they are the bedrock of functioning ecosystems and their wellbeing is crucial to the fate of other wildlife. That persistently high levels of atmospheric ammonia, primarily from the agriculture industry, are above the critical threshold for bryophytes and lichens across 69% of Wales is of great concern given we still have so much to learn about how these groups contribute to combatting the unfolding climate and biodiversity emergencies. From temperate rainforests to wildflower meadows and other species rich grassland habitats Plantlife is committed to working with partners across Wales to arrest these losses and improving the state of nature for generations to come."

Wildlife Trusts Wales

Rachel Sharp, Director of Wildlife Trusts Wales said: "The latest State of Nature report shows that despite some successes, the alarming ongoing decline of wildlife in Wales has not stopped. It is shocking that extinctions continue, with 1 in 6 species in Wales continuing to be threatened. We know what actions are needed, but the scale and pace of the restoration of the natural world is missing to address the nature crisis. Nature is threatened by poor management, development, pollution and the use of pesticides. With 90% of the land in Wales farmed, farmers have a unique role to play in nature's recovery and must be recognised and enabled to implement further measures for nature through the new sustainable farming scheme that will be introduced by the Welsh Government in 2025. We also need to remember that Wales has more sea than land and is experiencing the same decline from development and the lack of effective management. With a Team Wales approach involving both the public, farming and private sectors, we believe that nature's recovery can happen, but business as usual is not an option; we need urgent action."

WWF Cymru

Gareth Clubb, WWF Cymru Director said: "The latest report is a devastating reminder that the clock is ticking for Welsh nature. But we have never had a better understanding of the state of nature in Wales and what is needed to fix it. From nature friendly farming to restoring seagrass off our coast the solutions exist across every sector.

"Nature is not only our biggest ally in the fight against climate change, but it is the foundation of our health, wildlife, food production and economy. The speed and scale of our response must match the crisis we face if we are to reverse the decline of nature. The nature crisis is not some faraway threat for future generations to deal with. It is here and now. And everyone in Wales has a responsibility to deal with it."

Editor's notes:

1. The Biodiversity Intactness Index is a measure of how altered and depleted species abundance and composition are. A new analysis shows that for Wales, the value is 37%, among the lowest in the world.
2. The report covers data going back up to 50 years, monitoring species populations and identifying large-scale population trends. It has brought together a unique partnership of organisations, including Non-Governmental Organisations and governments' nature conservation advisers and has collated data collected by thousands of people in Wales. It looks at the complex relationship between species and habitats and the factors that are driving change to biodiversity.
3. List of partners: A Rocha, Action for conservation, Alderney Wildlife Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC), Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC), Bat Conservation Ireland, Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), Biological Records Centre/CEH (BRC), Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, British Arachnological Society (BAS), British Bryological Society (BBS) (CEH), British Dragonfly Society (BDS), British Lichen Society, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Buglife, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, CEDAR Centre for Environmental Data and Recording, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH), Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM), Chester Zoo, Continuous Plankton Recorder, Earthwatch, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Friends of the Earth, iSpot (The Open University), James Hutton Institute, Jersey Government Department of the Environment, John Muir Trust, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Local Environmental Records Centre Wales, Mammal Society, Manx BirdLife, Marine Biological Association (MBA), Marine Conservation Society, MARINELife, National Biodiversity Network Trust (NBN Trust), National Forum for Biological Recording, National Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Natural England (NE), Natural History Museum, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), NatureScot, Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Northern Ireland Marine Task Force, ORCA, People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), Plantlife, Plymouth University, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Scottish Environment Link, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Shark Trust, States of Guernsey, Ulster Wildlife Trust, University of Sheffield, Vincent Wildlife Trust, Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, WWF, Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
4. The State of Nature (SoN) is a partnership of organisations that are directly involved with conservation evidence and/or conservation delivery, who work together on appropriate science and evidence-based products.

The principal role of the SoN Partnership is to improve the collection, collation and efficient use of data from biodiversity recording and monitoring relevant to nature conservation in the UK and its Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories: understanding the status and trends of species, habitats, sites and other environmental variables including those which drive changes in biodiversity, and the causes and consequences of changes in these.

5. Established in 1964, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species has evolved to become the world's most comprehensive information source on the global extinction risk status of animal, fungus and plant species. The IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.
6. Nature a Ni / Nature and Us, was a year-long project, led by Natural Resources Wales, that involved the people of Wales in a national conversation about the future of their natural environment. The project developed a shared vision for the year 2050 and considered the changes needed leading up to 2030 and 2050, as individuals and as a country.
7. The Natur am Byth partnership is Wales' flagship Green Recovery project. It unites nine environmental charities with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to deliver the country's largest natural heritage and outreach programme to save species from extinction and reconnect people to nature.
8. The People's Plan for Nature is powered by the WWF, the RSPB and National Trust. It is a unique collaboration with the UK public to protect and restore nature in the UK. With input from thousands of people from across the UK, the People's Plan for Nature calls for urgent, immediate action – from governments, businesses, charities, organisations, farmers and communities – to protect and fundamentally change how we value nature.