

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025 - relevance to The Wildlife Trusts

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Leigh Morris, Director – International (Oct 2025)



Summary

The 2025 WCC in Abu Dhabi brought together global leaders to advance nature conservation. The Wildlife Trusts' six-person delegation focused on learning, networking, raising our profile, and influencing decisions. Key achievements included promoting peatlands conservation (Motion #003), hosting a GIS technology session, and supporting motions on biomass energy and ecocide. Craig Bennett's Council candidacy, though unsuccessful, significantly boosted our visibility. WCC highlighted emerging trends like biodiversity credits and reinforced that our IUCN membership is strategically important. Strengthening engagement with IUCN at UK, European, and global levels is now the focus for our Director - International

Introduction

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress (WCC) takes place every 4 years and is a gathering of civil society, governments, businesses and funders, who want to contribute to global nature conservation and restoration. WCC is a hub for the latest thinking in biodiversity conservation and recovery, climate adaptation, and indigenous knowledge, with direct applicability to The Wildlife Trusts own strategy and delivery.

The timing of this year's [WCC in Abu Dhabi \(8-15 October 2025\)](#) was synchronous with the appointment of a Director of International for The Wildlife Trusts in June 2025, and the planned development of our international strategic framework.

A delegation of six from The Wildlife Trusts attended this year's WCC:

- Craig Bennett, CEO
- Dr Jess Fior-Berry, Policy Lead, IUCN UK Peatland Programme
- Dr Emma Hinchliffe, Director, IUCN UK Peatland Programme
- Leigh Morris, Director – International
- David Oakes, Wildlife Trusts Ambassador
- Dr Rob Stoneman, Director of Landscape Recover

NB: funding was provided by UNEP to cover the full costs the IUCN UK Peatland team attending, including a contribution for Rob Stoneman. David Oakes fully funded himself.

Our Aims for Attending WCC

- **Learn:** Gain a deeper understanding of IUCN (and WCC), how it operates and where The Wildlife Trusts best align, connect, benefit and/or support, in order to best deliver global goals locally, and ensure our local delivery is contributing to the global challenges.
- **Network:** Foster and build connections, relationships and strategic alliances, including with potential funders (foundations, corporates and conservation donors).
- **Raise our Profile:** All our team participated in sessions to showcase The Wildlife Trusts and our profile was raised significantly by [Craig standing for IUCN Council](#).
- **Participate in the Members Assembly:** The business part of WCC, where our team were involved in debate and voting on motions and elections.
- **Communications:** To our Federation and our members and supporters. To share lessons learned and the relevance of IUCN and the WCC to The Wildlife Trusts.

WCC Forum and Exhibition

The first four days of the WCC were the [WCC Forum](#), an expansive selection of talks, seminars and workshops, alongside an extensive [WCC Exhibition](#), with stands from member states, conservation NGOs, and funding organisations. Within the Forum there were three parallel summits for the first time this year on [Business](#), [Indigenous Peoples & Nature](#) and [Youth](#).

At the business summit there was much talk on biodiversity credits and the need to learn lessons from the Voluntary Carbon Market. The current biodiversity credit market is tiny, but indications

are this is set to expand greatly and could become an excellent tool for corporate funding to support biodiversity conservation. The need for high integrity came up repeatedly.

Emma and Jess showcased the work of the IUCN UK Peatland Programme by:

- Proposing [Motion #003 Developing a unified global definition of 'peatland and peat'](#), which was voted on and accepted electronically before WCC.
- Presenting an e-poster to support motion #003 with a meet the author session.
- Showcasing the [Virtual Peatland Pavilion - World Tour](#).
- Participating in two sessions: [Accelerating N-bS Globally: IUCN-Chery Partnership for People and Planet](#) and [Paludiculture: Scaling Sustainable Solutions for Peatlands](#).

Leigh hosted a session entitled [Pixels with Purpose](#), in partnership with Tanya Birch, Google Earth and Osgur McDermott-Long, UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC). The session (originally planned in conjunction with Alice Kershaw, Head of Digital Transformation, RSWT) showcased some of the latest technology developments in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to benefit ecosystems and biodiversity monitoring.



WCC Members Assembly

The last three days of WCC were the Members Assembly, where IUCN members (Governments and civil society) engaged in the business of IUCN. There were presentations on the various strands of IUCN, including the chairs of the [seven commissions](#), debate and voting on the motions being tabled at conference, election of chairs and committee members, and the adoption of the new IUCN [20 year vision and 4 year strategy document](#), which is showcased in a short film ([here](#)).

There were [148 motions](#) in total, of which 99 were voted on and approved electronically prior to WCC. There are three motions that The Wildlife Trusts had officially linked to:

- We proposed [Motion #3 Developing a unified global definition of peatland and peat](#) and officially supported [Motion #45 Reducing the impacts of forest biomass energy on climate and biodiversity](#). Both of these were voted on and adopted electronically.
- We officially supported [Motion #61 Recognising the crime of ecocide to protect nature](#), which. This was debated, voted on and adopted during the Members Assembly.



IUCN Elections

Craig stood for one of three places on [IUCN World Council for West Europe](#), but was disappointingly unsuccessful against fierce competition from six other candidates, including two incumbent Council members who were re-elected. It was certainly great learning for us and helped raise the profile of The Wildlife Trusts significantly, with far more people now aware of us, what we do, view us in a positive light, and are keen to potentially collaborate with us as a result of Craig standing.

Communications from WCC

All our team at WCC contributed digital content to showcase the relevance WCC. Content was posted through a [WCC webpage](#), social media and a new [WhatsApp channel](#) launched for WCC that will be used to post content on all major conferences going forward. Rob wrote blogs from the WCC ([available here](#)), Emma posted [film footage](#) from the WCC, Leigh produced a [post-WCC blog](#) and Jess posted her own reflections on her own LinkedIn page ([here](#)). David interviewed Dr Syliva Earle, 'Her Deepness', the eminent marine biologist, at WCC for his Trees A Crowd podcast, which can be listened to [here](#).

Highlights and Takeaways from WCC

The WCC was a huge event, with c.10,000 people engaging in person and online. The WCC emphasised how the work of The Wildlife Trusts is contributing to the global challenges locally, and just how relevant the IUCN is to the UK. A full IUCN summary of the WCC will follow later, however, their immediate headlines from the WCC are available [here](#).

Attending the WCC was extremely worthwhile, particularly taking place so early in the tenure of the new Director – International. The sheer volume of people, talks, enthusiasm, ideas, creativity and energy from thousands of conservation minded people at WCC was inspiring and somewhat overwhelming. All our team returned with new insights and connections, including new conservation allies/partners and potential funders.

IUCN is the organisation that brings together governments, civil society, funders, indigenous peoples, and environmentally conscious businesses globally. We were a founding member of IUCN, our membership is hugely important, and The Wildlife Trusts must aim to become far more active with IUCN, both to learn and gain, and to share and give. Examples of where The Wildlife Trusts could quickly engage more with IUCN include:

- Alignment between our federation strategy and the [IUCN 20-year strategic vision](#).
- Individuals joining one of the [seven IUCN commissions](#).
- Utilising the [IUCN Learning Academy](#), and the developing [Nature-Based Education Geoportal](#), funded by ESRI, which was launched at WCC.
- Adding our conservation land and projects onto the [Contributions for Nature Platform](#).

A key task for the Director – International is to now find the most appropriate places for The Wildlife Trusts to connect to IUCN, on a UK, European and global level.

