



The
Wildlife
Trusts

Report for the National Estate for Nature

April 2026



Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

About us

The Wildlife Trusts is a federation made up of 46 Wildlife Trusts and a central charity (the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts). We work together across the UK, Alderney and the Isle of Man to:

- Bring wildlife back
- Help everyone to take meaningful action for nature
- Create an inclusive society where nature matters

There are 37 English Wildlife Trusts, whose geography makes their work relevant to this report.

About this report

The National Estate for Nature (NEN) Terms of Reference ask for members to “*have a published estate management plan(s) by April 2026*”. We address that question below, within the constraints of our federated structure, and we also give an overview of how our work helps to meet other aspects of the NEN’s terms of reference and “key delivery action” areas.

Our strategy and our “estate management plan(s)”

Across the federation, we manage over 2,600 nature reserves and around 112,000 hectares of land, spread across our 47 Wildlife Trusts.

Local Wildlife Trusts are independent charities, so we do not have a single “estate management plan” that covers all their sites, and which we could publish to meet point 2 of the NEN’s “Minimum Standard”.

Management of our sites, though these are not in a single “estate”, does help significantly to achieve our single, common, [federation-wide strategy](#).

The strategy’s three goals are: nature in recovery; people taking meaningful action for nature and climate, and nature-based solutions.

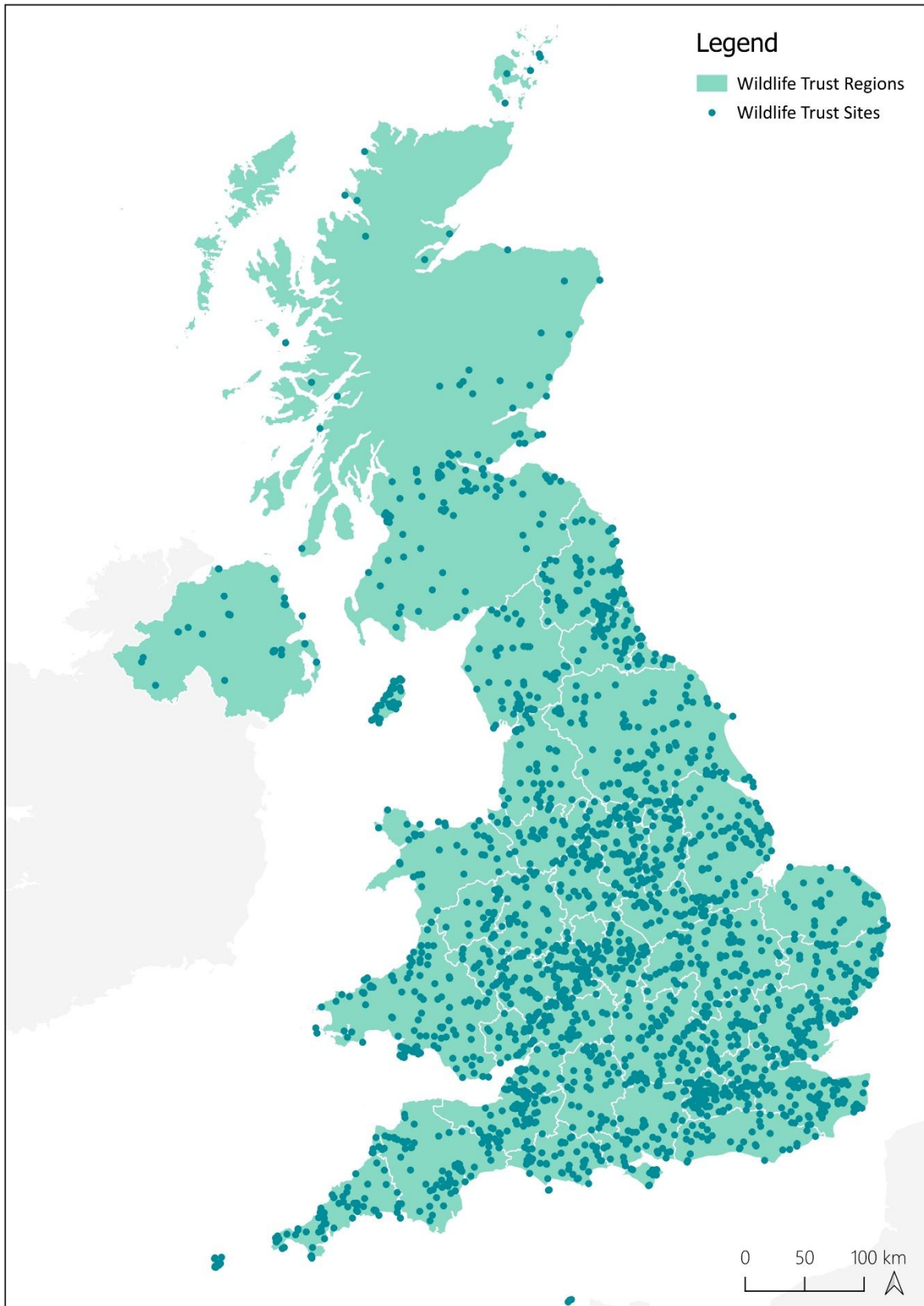
Mapping and assessing our sites

We are developing consistent spatial datasets across the Wildlife Trust estate.

We have plans to develop a comprehensive, standardised land cover dataset across our sites, and to aggregate data on habitat condition, when available.

We are also working on a federation-wide, and indeed sector-wide, approach to recording data on nature recovery actions undertaken (such as woodland planting and wetland creation). This will help to improve the evidencing of actions to deliver against Environment Act targets, such as the habitat creation target.

As of April 2026, this is a work in progress. Please see below a dot map of our reserves.



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Site management plans

The vast majority of Wildlife Trust sites have management plans, setting out how the site will be managed. Across the 37 English Wildlife Trusts, given that each Trust is an independent organisation, methods for management planning, the plans produced and the format they come in, vary. We have begun to review collectively how we go about the management planning process, and the evidence and data that can be brought to bear for management planning.

This may be an area where useful insights could be exchanged with other members of the National Estate for Nature.

Application of the Land Use Framework Principles on estates

We note that the [final version](#) of the Land Use Framework principles was published in March 2026.



Below we briefly address how we are using these principles in our work.

Multifunctionality

Wildlife Trust sites are mainly nature reserves, and many are protected sites such as SSSIs. These already have a very specific and nature-focused purpose, which may mean a narrower scope for multifunctionality. However, we make our sites as multifunctional as possible.

Wildlife Trust reserves are mostly open access and are also important for education, recreation and tourism.

Over 200 reserves include visitor and education centres.

Many of our wetland nature reserves are included in managed flood storage areas for flood defence (e.g. [Potteric Carr](#) nature reserve near Doncaster).

We have a suite of urban nature reserves that provide multiple services and are particularly important to improve health outcomes for people and help to reduce urban heat island impacts, improve urban water quality and mitigate surface water flooding. See for example [London Wildlife Trust's Camley Street Natural Park](#), right in the urban heart of London.

A good number of sites are used to provide and demonstrate nature-based solutions, such as the [Great Fen](#) in Cambridgeshire, which is rewetting peat and showcasing paludiculture.



Image above: Reedbed and fen at Woodwalton Fen NNR in Cambridgeshire. (C) Chris Gomersall/2020VISION

Right use, right place

Our sites are often among the best remaining strongholds for habitats and species in the country and as such, we would argue that the focus of their use as nature reserves is inherently the best land use in the right place.

When we acquire new sites, such as for nature recovery of degraded land, we consider strategic location. We usually avoid acquiring sites with, for example, high grade agricultural land.

We ensure that a new acquisition would be a strategically important part of the Nature Recovery Network or relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Indeed, LNRS are now helping to inform Wildlife Trust acquisition strategies. We also assess whether a new site would be beneficial to people and communities locally.

Many new sites we acquire deliver both more nature and also nutrient mitigation or offsite Biodiversity Net Gain, for instance. See, for instance, [Wilder Little Duxmore](#) on the Isle of Wight.

Future-ready decisions and adaptive by design

We are considering, across our estate, how to ensure that our sites are as resilient as possible given the pressures that they face, including from development nearby, invasive species, pollution and climate change.

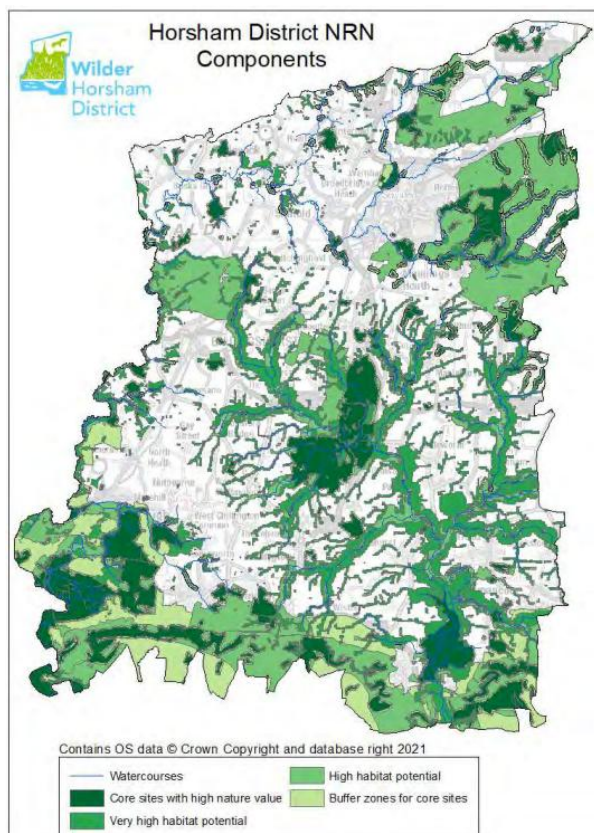
For example, last year we shared with local Wildlife Trusts a climate adaptation toolkit, drawing from data gathered by Natural England. This is designed to help Trusts to understand the possible impact of climate change on their sites, so that they can adapt in the most effective way.

We are also carrying out a review of our approach to site management more broadly, as part of delivery of our collective strategy. We are identifying and sharing best practice insights across the federation, on a range of issues as diverse as the future financial sustainability of our sites, through to how we can better connect them into the growing nature recovery network. We are keen to learn more from partners in the National Estate for Nature that could help inform further improvements to our site management.

Participation in and contribution to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)

All English Wildlife Trusts have been actively and extensively engaged in the development of the LNRS in their respective areas. Indeed, The Wildlife Trusts campaigned for a legal requirement for spatially planned, locally devised nature recovery network, integrated into local plans, that resulted in the Environment Act 2021 including LNRS.

Well before the LNRS process started, Trusts were mapping and modelling possible local ecological networks and working with local authorities to deliver these. For example, Sussex Wildlife Trust with the Horsham District NRN (see below).



All English Wildlife Trusts are involved in planning and delivering nature recovery actions on the ground through the LNRS. They have provided expertise and helped to drive forward the process. For instance, Surrey Wildlife Trust led on species lists for their county’s LNRS.

We expect our sites to be part of the core of the local nature recovery network that is being created through the LNRS process, and Trusts are working through their local nature partnerships and with Responsible Authorities and others to identify the “delivery pipeline” for nature creation and restoration in line with LNRS priority opportunities.

Wildlife Trusts are also central to the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) Landscape Recovery projects – leading on ten of these and in all, involved in 27 of 50 projects. The delivery of these landscape scale projects can do much to simultaneously deliver against LNRS priorities, 30by30 and the government’s Environment Act and Environmental Improvement Plan.

NEN Key Delivery Actions

Due to our charitable objectives and therefore the type of land holdings we have, some of the NEN’s key delivery actions are more relevant to Wildlife Trusts than others.

Creation and management of wildlife-rich habitat is at the core of our work and is the mainstay of our sites. Since most of our sites have been managed mainly or wholly for nature since we acquired them (in some cases over many decades), our scope for increasing wildlife-rich habitat on our many of sites may be limited compared to estates which are not primarily

managed for nature. On our nature reserves, the main aim is to maintain and improve the condition of the wildlife we already have.

We do also acquire new, nature-depleted sites, focusing on low-grade agricultural land, and recover these for wildlife. Such sites of course are relevant to “earlier stages” of the various NEN delivery actions. For example, our new 150 acre site at [West Muchlarnick](#) in Cornwall, where we are adding to remaining fragments of temperate rainforest.



Image above – tree planting at West Muchlarnick, Cornwall © Lewis Jefferies

Beyond our own sites, we have a growing number of land management advisors who advise third party landowners- our land advice service. (See [here](#)). This helps us to have a tangible and beneficial impact on the management of land for nature beyond our estate, and we would be happy to share expertise, wherever possible, on nature recovery and the management of land for nature, with NEN partners.

Despite the passion, hard work and knowledge of our staff, not all of our sites will be in optimal condition, not least due to offsite issues and the range of pressures the climate and nature crisis brings.

We are conducting a significant piece of work internally to help us ensure that our sites function optimally as the “foundation for nature’s recovery”, looking at a variety of challenges, from funding to resilience in the face of pressures, to how sites can play their part in the Nature Recovery Network and be welcoming places for the public.

As mentioned at the start of this report, we are working on gathering common data across all our sites. However, given the complexity, cost and timescales for that task, we cannot yet give full statistics on our delivery under these areas. Below, therefore, we instead give a short overview of our work under the NEN’s five “key delivery actions”.

1. Areas of wildlife-rich habitat

Given our charitable purpose, our sites are mainly nature reserves, whereupon the purpose of the vast majority of our land is already nature conservation. This means that our sites are protected for the long term (“long term protections”, stage 3 of this delivery action) but of course the scope for us to create **more** wildlife rich habitat on such sites is inherently limited.

We do acquire more land when opportunities arise, and whilst some of that acquisition will be to protect land that is already nature rich, most of our new acquisitions are of nature-depleted sites, where we do have significant opportunities for the creation of new wildlife-rich habitat. For example, in 2024, Cumbria Wildlife Trust acquired 3000 acres of land at [Skiddaw Forest](#). Although the site is a SSSI and SAC, its peat bog habitat is degraded and is lacking many of the species that ought to live there. As part of our temperate rainforest programme, the Trust will create rainforest on about 20% of the site, and restore the peat bog, which is perhaps the largest upland bog in the Lake District.

Stage 3 of this “delivery action” says “All wildlife-rich habitats reach and are maintained in ‘good condition’”.

As well as working on our sites to understand and improve their condition, we are working with statutory bodies, local authorities, LNRS responsible authorities and many others to address the impact on sites of offsite pressures.

2. Areas of farmed land

Depending on the definition of a farm, Wildlife Trusts own 29 working farms. An overview of our work on our farms can be found [here](#).

Whilst we adopt nature-friendly practices on these sites- their main purpose is as a showcase to help inspire others.

For example, [Lower Smite Farm](#) in Worcestershire is a site that the Trust uses to showcase soil restoration, organic food production, wildlife-friendly field margins and more. The site has an education centre to show children how to support their learning about nature.

In Wiltshire, at [Great Chalfield](#), working with the National Trust, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is turning the farm into a thriving hub for nature’s recovery and regenerative farming.

Wildlife Trusts are working on / leading 27 ELMS Landscape Recovery schemes: many involving farms. For example the [Waveney and Little Ouse](#) and [Penwith](#) projects.

Wildlife Trusts have growing number of [land management advisors](#) (over 100 full time equivalent posts), who advise farmers and other land managers on the best ways to bring back nature on their farms.

We are growing this service and the skills of its people, to better advise farmers in this fast-changing world. We would be happy to put NEN members in touch with their local Wildlife Trust land advisor.

3. Areas of productive forestry

We do not manage woodland sites for the specific purpose of producing a timber crop, so consider that this action category is not directly applicable to our sites.

We are managing significant areas of woodland for nature, and creating more, not least through our [Atlantic Rainforest partnership](#) with Aviva.

4. Areas of water



Image above: River Itchen, Ovington, Hampshire © Guy Edwardes/2020VISION

Given that Wildlife Trusts work across all parts of the landscape and in all habitats, and given the vital importance of water to nature, watercourses and water bodies are a significant element of our work.

We manage over 10,120km of watercourses across the Wildlife Trust federation (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Isles of Scilly and Alderney).

We work on all the elements listed in this delivery action.

A few examples of our work in this area can be found below.

Cheshire and Lancashire Wildlife Trusts have together created a new [529 hectare peatland site](#) between Liverpool and Manchester that will provide homes for lapwing, curlew and sundew as part of the King's Series of National Nature Reserves.

We are working with partners at catchment scale to deliver nature-based solutions to flooding, drought, pollution, water quality, food production and at the same time nature recovery. See for example [the Nature for Water Warwickshire Avon](#) project, in which Warwickshire Wildlife Trust is playing a leading role.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust are doing amazing things to restore chalk streams; one of the world's most precious and rarest habitats. See here: [HMWT Living Rivers project](#)

Several Trusts are working to deliver nature recovery schemes that also provide “nutrient neutrality”, to ensure that housing development does not add to the adverse impacts of nutrients on protected sites, such as Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's pioneering [nutrient reduction programme](#) to reduce pollution into the Solent.

On many sites we are restoring natural processes including local hydrology, such as at [Wild Woodbury](#) in Dorset, which, since its acquisition in 2021, has seen a remarkable increase in wildlife, from glow worms to nightingales and nightjars.

We are increasingly working at catchment and landscape scale – and across Wildlife Trust boundaries -, in the water environment and elsewhere. We are currently working with Trent Rivers Trust and Intact Insurance to map and analyse the economic, environmental and societal benefits of restoring nature along England's longest river from source to sea - the [River Trent](#).

The analysis will mean partners can create:

1. a transformational vision for the future of the River Trent
2. a blueprint for restoring all rivers in England for the first time

As one of the largest marine conservation charities, we work in the coastal and marine environment, and endeavour to “join the dots” between what happens in our catchments and the marine environment.

We are working hard to connect better with communities; to meet people where they are, geographically and in terms of their local situation and aspirations. [The south coast marine recovery project](#) is one example of a project with communities at its heart, that is looking to bring our seas back to life.

5. Urban Areas

All Wildlife Trusts in England manage at least some sites in urban areas, and some Trusts are predominantly urban, such as Birmingham and Black Country, London and Tees Valley.

Wildlife Trust reserves in such cities already, in effect, serve as “green (and blue) infrastructure”.

We work with partners to connect urban corridors, so vital for wellbeing and to ensure that urban areas play their part in the Nature Recovery Network.

A great example is Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's work in Derby [Derby's Green Corridors | Derbyshire Wildlife Trust](#)

Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust has done extensive work with and for the local authority, mapping hotspots for urban nature recovery. It has also been creating green and blue

corridors, such as this project: [Natural Rivers and Green Corridors | Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust](#)

In terms of access to nature, our [Nextdoor Nature](#) initiative has brought local and often nature-deprived urban communities closer to nature. Nextdoor Nature ran from 2022-2024, but its legacy lives on and will continue to support communities to help nature flourish where they live and work.

The project was made possible thanks to £5 million funding from [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#), which provided people with the advice and support they needed to help nature on their doorstep, and it left a lasting natural legacy.

Thousands of groups across the UK have been supported by Nextdoor Nature, and hundreds more are continuing the work in Wildlife Trusts up and down the country.

30by30

“The ambition to secure 30% of our land and sea for nature’s recovery by 2030 offers us the bold vision needed to reverse wildlife decline and improve all our lives”

– Sir David Attenborough

30by30 is both an international commitment via the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), 2022 of which the UK is a signatory and a national target via the Environment Improvement Plan, 2023.

30by30 is a guiding principle of our current work and should be seen by society as a minimum target for nature to have a chance of recovery.

Local Wildlife Trusts in England have been identifying how their areas (typically counties) can achieve 30by30 and have been working with a range of partners and communities to drive delivery against the target.

Clearly, local circumstances vary considerably and will impact on the methods chosen and partners who can contribute to achieving the target, as well as the percentage that can be achieved in each timescale.

Trusts are working along the Lawtonian principles of “more, bigger, better and joined”, and working through Local Nature Recovery Strategies, to try to ensure that sites that make up 30by30 are functioning components of a growing Nature Recovery Network.

Among the approaches taken, Trusts are working with partners to:

- Improve protected areas- many of which are not in favourable condition
- Secure protection/designation for more nature-rich areas
- Work with national landscapes to secure much greater areas that meet 30by30 criteria
- Create new nature-rich areas, such as through ELMS Landscape Recovery and by working with large estates and land holdings (with an aim to these becoming areas that could qualify as “Other Effective area-based conservation measures” / “OECMs”)
- Work with large landowners such as public bodies- this of course intersects with the role and membership of the National Estate for Nature
- Ensure the mapping, protection and maintenance of Local Wildlife Sites, which represent some 5% of England and which are under resourced and under threat

Contributing to the Environment Act Targets for Biodiversity and Nature

We do not have a set of “SMART” targets with figures attached, for delivering against the Environment Act targets. However, English Wildlife Trusts are contributing significantly, both on their own and with partners, to the targets.

As independent (though federated) charities, each Wildlife Trust has its own strengths and capacities for this task.

Below are some illustrations of the work Trusts are doing that relate to delivery of these targets.

Species Abundance: Halt the decline in species populations by 2030, then increase populations by at least 10% above 2022 levels by 2042.

Much of our work described earlier in this report, working at landscape scale to create, connect and manage habitat, contributes to this target.

We also lend our expertise to partnership initiatives, such as, in Surrey, helping to devise the priority species list for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy there.

Habitat Restoration: Restore or create >500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat by 31 December 2042.

Wildlife Trusts are adding to their estate through land purchases, with the aim of creating new habitat, especially in target landscapes. For example, Durham Wildlife Trust has been securing sites to make a reality of its vision for the “[Great North Fen](#)”

At the other end of the country, Avon Wildlife Trust acquired a [former dairy farm](#) and is now in the process of transforming it into a new climate-resilient nature reserve.

Species Extinction: Reduce the risk of species extinction by 2042.

Wildlife Trusts have a particular focus on species that are threatened or at risk of extinction, and we are doing the hard work of bringing back species such as pine marten, beaver and water vole in many locations. See [here](#).

We work with a range of partners, some of which are National Estate for Nature colleagues, on the recovery of species such as turtle dove (Kent Wildlife Trust, RSPB and Natural England) and red-billed chough (Wildwood Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust, and Paradise Park) through to our rarest orchid, the lady’s slipper (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust with Natural England, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Plantlife)



Image above: Lady's slipper orchid © Will Atkins

Marine Protection: Restore 70% of designated features in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to a favourable condition by 2042.

We are a leading NGO for marine conservation in the UK, working to protect and restore marine ecosystems through a "Living Seas" approach. With over 100 dedicated marine ecologists and thousands of volunteers, we work on the ground to monitor wildlife, restore habitats, and campaign for stronger protection of UK seas.

Marine protection and restoration cannot work without the right policy and legal framework in place. We campaign tirelessly for a fully connected network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to allow nature to recover, and for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) to ban all damaging activities, including fishing and construction.



Image above: Seagrass bed © Paul Naylor

We are active in the delivery of marine and coastal restoration, such as [seagrass restoration](#) in Hampshire, [Essex](#), and [Cornwall](#), [kelp forest](#) in Sussex, [saltmarsh in Essex](#) and oyster reefs in [Yorkshire](#).

Conclusion

Like all NEN members, we have a big task ahead of us to contribute to 30 by 30, the Environment Act targets and more, to help to halt and reverse nature's decline in England. We hope this report gives a flavour of the work we are doing towards these goals. We can achieve more when we work together. To this end, we look forward to working with, learning from and supporting NEN members over this coming year.

Dan Pescod, Head of Landscape Recovery, The Wildlife Trusts. April 2026