

Bring Nature Back

Ulster Wildlife Strategy to 2030



“It may sound frightening, but the scientific evidence is that if we have not taken dramatic action within the next decade, we could face irreversible damage to the natural world and the collapse of our societies.”

**Sir David Attenborough
2019, President Emeritus
of the Wildlife Trusts.**



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Foreword

We are facing 'a climate and ecological emergency' – we cannot solve one crisis without tackling the other – nature's recovery is vital for tackling climate change. It is also essential in building a green recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic, providing a platform for the Northern Ireland economy as it seeks a sustainable and ethical 'net zero' future.

To achieve nature's recovery, it is no longer enough to think about slowing the loss of the natural world and protecting what remains of our wildlife. Nature reserves are invaluable, but to keep these protected areas from becoming wild oases in an otherwise impoverished landscape, we need to use every single space to help wildlife. Our gardens, road verges, parks and even houses and offices can become part of a wild network, creating vital green corridors and stepping stones that connect to larger wilder spaces such as farmland, where we need to find ways to support farmers to deliver improved biodiversity outcomes through appropriate funding and training.

We need to stop and reverse the declines, and put nature into recovery, at scale and at pace. Ultimately, our economy is dependent on nature and not the other way around. It is time we started behaving as such if we are going to avoid eroding the very fundamentals of human progress.

We need to restore nature at a local and global scale, on land and at sea and it needs to start now.

Local people will be the key to success when supported and empowered to become agents of change. The recovery of nature must not be something that is done to people; it must be done by people - inclusive, welcoming, diverse, growing communities of people.



Ulster Wildlife is firmly rooted in our local communities, supported by and accountable to our members. We work in partnership with landowners, farmers, fishermen, businesses, schools, local authorities, and other stakeholders to deliver real change on the ground.

This is our unique contribution as a local environmental charity: delivering local action, building a collective impact that contributes to a global solution.

This Strategy to 2030 provides the high-level framework of how we intend to go about this. Over the last 40 years, Ulster Wildlife has worked to deliver impactful change for nature by protecting and enhancing habitats and species on land and sea. With our new strategy, we plan to accelerate progress and build on this foundation. We want to make an even greater difference and recognise that this needs to happen quickly.

Ken Brundle
Chairman

The Challenge Ahead

Grey Seals at the Maidens © Ronald Surgenor



Introduction

Our challenge over the next ten years is significant. Our land and seas are in high demand - there is huge pressure for housing, food production and infrastructure with almost all our land and much of our seas now managed and modified in some way, which has led to an incredible loss of wildlife and habitats.

Alongside the well-documented climate emergency, we are also facing a global ecological emergency. A UN Report¹ published in May 2019 spelled out that “*nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history – and the rate of species extinction is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely.*”

However this report also concluded “*...it is not too late to make a difference, but only if we start now at every level from local to global. Through ‘transformative change’, nature can still be conserved, restored and used sustainably. By transformative change, we mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic and social factors.*”

Northern Ireland currently ranks as one of the worst performing countries for biodiversity loss.²

On land, only 54% of the biological features of designated Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) are currently in favourable condition. In our seas, only 4.8% of marine protected areas (MPAs) are presently under favourable management within the Northern Ireland inshore region (within 12 nautical miles of the coast).

With the triple challenge of the interconnected ecological, climate and health emergencies at the start of this decade, we understand that creating a positive change in people’s relationships with nature is critical. We will build partnerships with local communities, landowners, farmers and businesses to help ensure **at least 30% of land and at least 30% of sea is protected, connected and managed for nature** by 2030. We will support land managers and local councils to connect and create wild places in both rural and urban environments and work with organisations, community groups, individuals and partners to ensure that nature thrives in their locality.

Collectively with our fellow Wildlife Trusts across the UK and Ireland, and with our colleagues across the environmental sector, we will work to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise to accelerate change. We’ll deliver an outcome that is that is ‘bigger, better, more and joined up’ to enable nature’s recovery.

¹ <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

² <https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf>

Our Vision

A wilder future where people and nature are thriving together.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to **protect and restore nature** on land and at sea. We will play our part in ending the climate and ecological emergencies, creating a society where **nature is valued** and is part of our daily lives.

Our Values

Ulster Wildlife's core values are central in how we operate as an organisation and how our staff and volunteers act in everything they do.

We act with **passion**, are **hard-working**, and with a **love of nature**. We operate with **integrity** and with a **respectful** and **inclusive** attitude to all our partners and supporters.

How We Work

We are a **dedicated team** who pride ourselves in continuously developing our **knowledge, skills and networks** to support nature's recovery on both land and sea.

We **demonstrate what is possible**, and inspire, empower, and enable **people from all backgrounds, identities and abilities** to contribute to our vision.

Knowledge is central to ensuring good decision making. We make **evidence-based** decisions and plan our actions using the best available science and information.

We are **positive and solution-focused**, seeking **innovative** solutions to maximise our contribution and impact for nature.

We see the value in **partnerships** and work **collaboratively, co-designing** our activities to deliver the greatest impact for nature. We are proud to be part of a

federated movement of Wildlife Trusts and this increases our **shared learning and resources**.

We believe nature is intrinsically valuable in its own right but also brings benefits for society. The natural environment is **fundamental to human well-being** and **underpins a sustainable economy**.

We all have a **responsibility to make sure that future generations can live prosperous and healthy lives** within a natural environment that provides for the needs of our population.

Ulster Wildlife is proud of our achievements over the last ten years. Our work has slowed, halted or reversed the decline in nature through our action on the ground and through influencing others – see Annex 1 to read more about our work over the last ten years.

Our Strategic Outcomes for 2030

Nature

Outcome 1: Nature is in recovery and wildlife is thriving across Northern Ireland.



People

Outcome 2: More people are taking positive action for nature and climate and are benefitting from time spent in nature.



Climate

Outcome 3: Nature-based solutions are playing a central role in addressing climate change.



Outcome 1:

Nature is in recovery and wildlife is thriving across Northern Ireland

In the midst of a global biodiversity crisis, with increasingly isolated and fragmented remnants of wild habitat across Northern Ireland's land and seas, it is not enough to simply protect and conserve the wildlife that remains. We need to reverse the declines in nature, and bring wildlife back.



Ragged Robin at Lough Navar, Co. Fermanagh

Bring Nature Back

Our aim is to ensure that Northern Ireland's ecosystems are healthy, functioning, and support abundant and diverse wildlife and that the natural resources we rely on for our economy and our health are managed sustainably. Fundamental to achieving this outcome will be the development and establishment of a national 'Nature Recovery Network' for Northern Ireland - a strategic approach to targeted creation, restoration and enhancement of habitats.

The adoption of a 'biodiversity net gain' principle in local planning decisions will also play a key part in achieving our aims (Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before).

This approach will also be considered in terms of our marine environment to ensure that a similar functioning ecological network is achieved in our local seas.

We will advocate for at least 30% of land and 30% of sea to be protected, connected and managed for nature. This nature recovery network would consist of:

- Core areas in which the conservation of biodiversity is the prime purpose (e.g. nature reserves, SACs, MPAs and ASSIs)
- The recovery and enhancement areas where habitats are restored and new habitat created, at a range of scales, designed to bring nature back and improve resilience.
- Set in a wildlife friendly landscape (both

rural and urban) containing corridors and stepping stones of habitat providing essential ecological or environmental connections.

- Marine Protected Areas in which damaging operations are prevented or mitigated so that marine ecosystems can successfully recover.

With farmed land comprising over 70% of Northern Ireland's land area, we are strong advocates of working closely with the farming community and land use sectors to help achieve a viable sustainable future for Northern Ireland. We will explore new relationships with the fishing and aquaculture industry, as only with their support can the marine environment be sustainably managed for both biodiversity and climate action.

We recognise that some species will require specific targeted action due to their threatened status or a lack of data or research. Alongside this nature recovery network approach for habitats, we will deliver specific conservation actions for a range of key species over the next ten years.

We plan to improve the integration of our nature reserves within the wider landscape, where they can play a strategic role in linking together habitats and species. Where possible we will restore, expand, and connect nature reserves which are small and isolated, so that they become platforms for nature's recovery rather than the last bastions of declining species.

Headline Indicator of Success:

At least 30% of land and 30% of sea in Northern Ireland is protected, connected and managed for nature by 2030

Why 30%?

The 30% threshold of habitat cover in a landscape has been determined as the point at which the spatial distribution and area of habitat is generally sufficient to provide connectivity for a range of species populations³. At less than 30% land cover, habitat patches become small and isolated and species richness, abundance and survival declines.

At sea, habitat connectivity works differently, however 30% minimum for nature's recovery is equally relevant for marine habitats. The guidance on creation of an Ecological Network of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) recommends that a marine network needs between 10% and 40% of a list of broad-scale habitats to be protected and managed so that a wide range of wildlife can survive and thrive⁴. Sites also need to be within certain distances of each other to promote connectivity.

³ https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Nature_Recovery_Network_Handbook_LO_SINGLES.pdf

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/global-ocean-alliance-30by30-initiative/about>

Outcome 2:

More people are taking positive action for nature and climate and are benefitting from time spent in nature.

As a society, we have unknowingly accepted a creeping decline of our natural world. Wildlife is actually in freefall and yet, for many, the present dearth of nature is seen as normal. We have also seen our modern lives shift dramatically indoors, particularly children and young people. Research shows that those who have the least access to nature also have the worst levels of physical health and mental wellbeing⁵.



Bring Nature Back

Through our work, we want to present a message of hope and a vision that is positive and vibrant. We want to see a Northern Ireland where nature and people are thriving together. We want wildlife returning and natural systems restored, enriching and sustaining the lives of people as a result.

We will engage, empower and amplify the voice of people across Northern Ireland to speak up for and take action for nature. All our work in engaging local people with nature will aim to move people through a continuum from inspiring to empowering to taking action.

Maintaining and strengthening our membership and supporter network will also be key to delivering on the ambition of this Strategy. There is a growing awareness of Ulster Wildlife and the work we do. We also plan to improve the coordination of our volunteer network so that committed supporters can better contribute to Ulster Wildlife's Strategic Outcomes. We will also provide a platform for wildlife enthusiasts to have their voice heard on a range of policy issues to ensure better protection for nature.

It is vital that we engage younger generations in issues that will impact

their future. We have the opportunity to support the next generation to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to combat the dual climate and ecological emergencies and reconnect with nature for their health and wellbeing.

We will work with young people to offer opportunities to learn about nature and experience the multiple benefits it can provide. We will work in partnership to prepare young people with the skills required to support a growing green economy. We will work to ensure that nature and wildlife forms a key component of the formal and informal education systems, from primary through to higher education, so that young people are enthused and empowered to engage and take action for wildlife.

A wildlife-rich natural world contributes to the health and wellbeing of our society. We plan to play our part enabling local people to value and enjoy wildlife as part of daily life, by exercising, playing, socialising, volunteering and simply being in wild places close to where they live. We will provide spaces for people to reconnect with nature in an experiential way and develop pilot programmes that show how engaging with nature through 'eco-therapy' can support those most in need.

Headline Indicator of Success:

1 in 4 people in Northern Ireland are taking positive action for Nature

Why 1 in 4?

Research suggests that 25% of the population need to be behind any large-scale social change to ensure success.⁶ We already know that around a third of our population are 'wildlife enthusiasts'⁷ and share our love and concern for nature, so this level of support is not beyond our reach. Locally, we will need 1 in 4 people to join us in creating a wilder future. Nature doesn't have a voice, but we do. We need people to be talking about the importance of wildlife, our natural world and wider environmental issues and clearly demonstrate that there is an appetite and urgency to create a better future.

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to Greenspace_2020_review.pdf

⁶ Centola, D et al Experimental evidence for tipping points in social convention, 2018

⁷ Wildlife Trusts' market research.

Outcome 3:

Nature-based solutions are playing a central role in addressing the impacts of climate change in Northern Ireland.

We will promote the value of nature-based solutions and work to influence government and public policy to ensure their adoption as key tools in both mitigating the effects of, and helping with adaptation to climate change.

We are in the midst of a dual climate and biodiversity emergency. Human activities have already warmed the world by an average of 1.2°C compared to a pre-industrial baseline, and this is having a marked impact on climate across the globe. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasised that 2°C or more of global warming could destroy ecosystems on around 13% of the world's land area, increasing the risk of extinction for many insects, plants and animals – in turn drastically altering the services these provide to society and their role in human health and well-being. Holding warming to 1.5 °C would reduce that risk by half, but this will require transformational changes to everyone's lives. The UK is a signatory to the Paris Agreement that aims to limit global warming to 1.5°C. This led to the revised UK emissions target of Net Zero by 2050, however experts now believe that this only gives a 50% chance to limiting warming to this level.

Biodiversity loss and climate change are both driven by human economic activities and mutually reinforce each other. Neither will be successfully resolved unless both are tackled together.

Over the next 10 years, we will work on solutions that tackle both the climate and biodiversity crises at a local level, recognising the vital role of nature in addressing the climate emergency. We will restore habitats that can provide long-term carbon sequestration and storage while also promoting diverse and resilient wildlife.

This will include a focus on protecting and restoring peatlands and coastal blue carbon habitats, and through adopting a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) approach. A sound evidence base will identify areas on which to focus efforts while being aware of the increasing pressures of climate change on our local ecosystems and the need for wildlife to adapt to their changing environment (e.g. through healthy, diverse habitats and wildlife corridors).

Blue Carbon

Blue carbon is the carbon dioxide removed from the atmosphere and locked away by coastal and marine ecosystems. Vegetated coastal habitats such as saltmarsh, seagrass and kelp capture carbon through photosynthesis and much of the biomass ends up being stored in the sediments - with additional sediment physically trapped by vegetation (e.g. seagrass) or algae (e.g. kelp). Shellfish reefs, such as native oyster reefs, also capture carbon through their growth and shells accumulate into the sediments locking further carbon away, as well as also trapping sediments between animals. These habitats play a wider role in healthy seas, through cleaning water and by reducing wave energy, protecting coastlines from erosion. Coastal habitats are under pressure from shoreline developments, dredging, poor water quality (e.g. agricultural or sewage run-off) and extraction, and require specific action to protect and restore them. We will work with partners to safeguard and restore coastal blue carbon habitats while ensuring their biodiversity and ecosystem services are promoted.

Headline Indicator of Success:

Ulster Wildlife is actively engaged in three blue carbon habitat restoration projects across Northern Ireland.

Peatland Restoration

Healthy peatlands in our landscape have a high natural capital value and can provide great benefits to society. Along with supporting high levels of biodiversity and being a vast store of locked-away carbon, they can prevent flooding by slowing the flow of rainwater from the uplands, hold large reserves of water to feed our drinking water supply and reduce the burden on the inputs needed to treat it.

For our peatlands, historic land use policy and legal rights have led to large areas drying out and being lost. Drainage was incentivised to boost agricultural production and to plant forestry which, along with peat digging for fuel, has resulted in the loss of large areas of peatland. Of the 242,623 hectares⁸ of peat soils; or 18% of the land area of Northern Ireland, around 88%, or 213,500 hectares, are in need of restoration and are actively emitting greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

Without urgent intervention to restore them, peatlands will be lost for good, as they will go beyond the point where they can be effectively restored. In June 2021, the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) made a UK-wide recommendation for peatland⁹: to be restoring 67,000 hectares per year by 2025, to help meet climate change targets.

The Committee advised that for the UK to achieve this target significant effort and financial support will be needed.

With approximately 8% of the UK's 3 million hectares of peatlands in Northern Ireland, to make a contribution to the UK target we will need to accelerate the rate of restoration. Moving from restoring just a few hundreds of hectares a year to several thousand a year will require much higher levels of ambition and commitment.

The Northern Ireland Executive is committed to introducing climate change legislation and DAERA has recently strengthened its commitment to protecting and restoring our peatlands through the Draft Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy. Once in place it will need the participation of a range of stakeholders to deliver its draft Strategy Vision¹⁰.

Ulster Wildlife is already a leader in actively supporting the development of delivery plans for peatland restoration and biodiversity protection and our work on peatlands will continue to be a key part of our Strategy to 2030.

Headline Indicators of Success:

Ulster Wildlife is actively contributing to peatland restoration in Northern Ireland through a significant funded multi-year programme of peatland restoration.

⁸ Evans, C., Artz, R., Moxley, J., Smyth, M.-A., Taylor, E., Archer, N., Burden, A., Williamson, J., Donnelly, D., Thomson, A., Buys, G., Malcolm, H., Wilson, D., Renou-Wilson, F., & Potts, J. (2017). Implementation of an Emissions Inventory for UK Peatlands. Report to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

⁹ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2021-progress-report-to-parliament/>

¹⁰ To ensure that all semi-natural peatlands are protected, managed and where possible, prioritised for restoration so that they can maintain their natural functions, biodiversity and ecosystem services.



Internal Transformations

Through our strategic planning process we have identified **three transformations** we need as a charity in order to build the organisational capabilities to achieve our outcomes.

Transformation 1: Financing the future

We know that our historical reliance on project funding has hindered Ulster Wildlife's ability to retain staff and skills beyond the lifespan of a specific project. To achieve our ambition of nature's recovery across Northern Ireland, we **will** require financing beyond our current levels.

We are committed to further exploring opportunities to secure additional unrestricted funding streams to support Ulster Wildlife, enabling the charity to respond to the challenges we will face over the coming years. We will seek to extend our reach and ensure that the charity is forward-looking, agile and able to respond to emerging issues.

Our transformative action will be to explore new business models, fundraising and financing mechanisms that will support our work to put nature into recovery. We will diversify our partnerships, working in collaboration with a wider range of stakeholders nationally and locally to better support our independence, scope, and depth of action.

Transformation 2: Building organisational capacity and capability for the future

We know that the challenges of the future will require new solutions and ways of working, and if we are to step up to the mark and effect real change then our staff and volunteers must be equipped with the very best tools, knowledge, skills and competences.

We will provide our staff with the knowledge and resources to enable a technological transformation in the platforms and approaches we use so that we can operate more efficiently and reach a greater and more diverse audience.

We will improve opportunities and support for our network of volunteers, ensuring that their time, knowledge, and experience is channelled into effective action and volunteering continues to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Our transformative action will be to empower our staff to tackle local and national problems by upskilling and providing technical expertise in key areas of ecosystem networks, nature-based solutions to climate change, education and health and wellbeing. Our staff will be confident in making full use of digital and technological systems to support the work of Ulster Wildlife.

Transformation 3: Reframing our policy, influencing and advocacy work

We know that the challenges of the future will require us to have clear policy positions on key environmental issues and be a strong voice for nature in the development of future policy in Northern Ireland. We also know that there is growing concern around climate change, biodiversity and other environmental issues amongst the public in Northern Ireland, particularly from our young people.

We will continue to build our capabilities around pro-active public campaigning for real world change, piloting innovative approaches and demonstrating best practice through our projects. Our approach will be to empower people to play a valuable part in influencing change for wildlife.

Our transformative action will be to build and significantly develop Ulster Wildlife's capacity to conduct pro-active policy and advocacy, critically engaging with government and key stakeholders to seek tangible and meaningful intergenerational change.

The time is now..

Now is the time to build on the current groundswell of interest and concern about the natural world, to highlight the transformational changes needed for nature and climate, addressing poor mental health and engaging people beyond our established relationships with supporters.

Many people find a great sense of peace, joy and wonder in the natural world and believe that wildlife and wild places are valuable for their own sake but we also know that a healthy, wildlife-rich, natural world is vital for our well-being and survival. Our connection to nature is much more important than we may think; nature is not a luxury but is in fact essential to our humanity and health. We need wildlife and wild places to thrive. By creating more space for nature, we are creating a better world for everyone.

However, time is running out for us to be able to avert an ecological and climate crisis and to prevent leaving a toxic legacy for our children and our children's children. Many of our current systems and laws have failed the natural world and it is now time to turn things around. We need to do

things differently, business as usual won't be good enough and the next ten years will be critical. The status quo and delays or inaction is not an option.



We can turn things around before it's too late - nature is capable of extraordinary recovery, but *only* if we act now.

We need transformative and bold change right across society so we can pass on a better environment to the next generation. Over the past four decades, Ulster Wildlife has worked hard to protect our wildlife and wild places and we stand ready to accept the huge challenge facing us over the next ten years, to build on our successes and work tirelessly with all our supporters and partners to ensure nature's recovery across Northern Ireland and more widely across the island of Ireland and the UK.

Jennifer Fulton

Jennifer Fulton
CEO

Annex 1.

Building on Strong Foundations

Some examples of Ulster Wildlife's achievements and areas of activity during the last ten years are outlined below, providing the foundation upon which we will move forward.

Our Members

With exception of 2020/21, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our membership and supporter base continued to grow. With now approximately 14,000 local people supporting our work through membership. They are all part of our growing movement who believe that nature really matters - standing up for nature and bringing wildlife back from the brink. The financial support from membership has allowed the Charity to invest in new areas. The increase in our members and supporters also increases our influence when it comes to effecting change with politicians and decision makers. We've also worked to bring Members closer to the organisation through developing Members' Days and online sessions to better explain environmental issues and demonstrate the work of the charity.

Our Places for Nature

Protecting places for nature is one of the founding principles of *Ulster Wildlife*. Over the last ten years we've continued to manage a suite of nature reserves across Northern Ireland. We have the privilege of managing some of our best sites for nature. We've worked hard to improve the condition of the nature reserves with a host of improvements to access, infrastructure and habitats. A few highlights include: implementing restoration at Ballynahone Bog through the installation of hundreds of dams, which is now starting to show positive results; removal of a non-native pine plantation at Umbra to increase the habitat on this special site; and the delivery of seabird recovery project on Isle of Muck. We also purchased a new nature reserve in 2020 – Glenullin Bog. Development of a restoration plan is underway to return the site to favourable condition.

Our Partnerships and Projects

Working closely in partnership with other NGOs and with our funders, we have delivered some very impactful programmes over the last ten years to benefit and protect nature in Northern Ireland.

The 'Save our Magnificent Meadows' Project in partnership with Plantlife, delivered thousands of hectares of grassland conservation, creation and enhancement across Fermanagh. This then evolved into the successful development of an Environmental Farming Scheme Group in Fermanagh that now has over 400 members.

We continued with our work on saving species with a focus on red squirrels, barn owls and sharks, skates and rays. The Red Squirrels United Project saw us working in partnership with local volunteer red squirrel groups to deliver a project to increase populations of red squirrels and reduce greys in a number of key remaining strongholds including the Glens of Antrim and the Mourne. We continued our work to monitor and provide advice and nest boxes for barn owls. We also delivered a Lottery-funded project to increase awareness, knowledge and protection of our local shark, skate and ray populations in partnership with local sea anglers.

We further developed our expertise in peatland conservation and restoration. The 'Collaborative Action for the Natura Network' project saw us working in partnership with a number of NGOs and local Councils to deliver Conservation Action Plans for 13 designated peatland sites across Northern Ireland and cross-border at Cuilcagh SAC. We also worked in partnership with the Ministry of Defence to support the management of their designated sites at Ballykinler and Magilligan and worked closely with a number of businesses to help them put in place biodiversity action plans for their landholdings.

Our Community Impact

We believe that in order to protect NI's diverse landscapes and seas, and secure a future rich in wildlife, we must invest resources into re-engaging people with nature and educating our society to value the environment. With that aim in mind we have engaged with a broad range of people to develop a love of nature and encourage action to protect it.

Volunteers are central to what we do and we continued to support a network of dedicated volunteers to help us deliver on our objectives both outdoors and through our fundraising and office functions.

Inspiring the next generation of nature lovers and environmental leaders was also a priority. Up until 2020, we delivered the 'ParkLife' project in conjunction with Belfast City Council – engaging thousands of primary school aged children in their local parks and green spaces. For the last five years, we have delivered the highly successful Grassroots Challenge Programme, which engages with thousands of young people particularly through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Special Schools and the Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster. The programme has provided environmental education sessions, training and support for the groups to carry out their own local community action to improve nature near them. An external evaluation by QUB showed that the programme was highly effective at increasing environmental stewardship and confidence in the young people involved.

More recently we've developed a range of citizen science projects including the Shore NI – rocky shore monitoring programme and supporting the Irish Hedgehog Survey. We also engaged hundreds of people of all ages every year through wildlife events and interactive workshops.

For the last six years, the Lottery-funded 'Nature Skills' project has allowed us to provide paid year-long traineeships to over 35 people. This programme has helped equip them with skills and knowledge to pursue a career in the nature conservation sector with many already

going on to work for organisations like the National Trust and RSPB and several gaining employment with Ulster Wildlife.

We continued to work in partnership with two local authorities to distribute Landfill Communities Fund, on their behalf and to date, we have helped hundreds of projects across NI to make a difference in their local area, supporting community-led action to improve their environment and increase access to, and enjoyment of, community spaces.

We also engaged the wider community in nature conservation through our growing social media presence and channels.

Our Connections and Influence

We are proud to be one of 46 independent Wildlife Trusts working across the UK, as well as working across the border with our partners in the Republic of Ireland. Together we are the largest grassroots movement standing up for wildlife. Whilst we are independent and responsive to our own regional priorities, we also benefit from the collective knowledge and influence of all 46 Wildlife Trusts across the UK.

We collaborate on policy and influencing work with our sector colleagues; for example we share expertise with NI Environment Link, NI Marine Taskforce, and drive species action through groups such as Red Squirrel Forum. We have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding between ourselves, RSPB, Woodland Trust and the National Trust in agreement of working more collaboratively particularly on landscape scale conservation and nature recovery networks. We also regularly engage with other important stakeholders such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, NI Fisheries Federation and the Ulster Farmers' Union.

Our staff and Board of Trustees work together to influence key government policy and positions. Our ever-dedicated staff have grown in expertise and influence over the last ten years. Some areas of influence include eradication of Bovine TB, marine protection and fisheries management and the developing climate and environment legislation.



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part of



The
Wildlife
Trusts

For further information,
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Front Cover: Pine Marten © Robert Surgenor
Back Cover: Common Dolphin © Ronald Surgenor

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A wilder future where people and nature are thriving together.