



## Media release

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## Climate action needs nature. Nature needs climate action. Neither will succeed if we don't prepare for a changing world

The Wildlife Trusts' COP26 report says it's time to tackle the twin crises at speed

The Wildlife Trusts are calling on the UK Presidency of the global climate conference COP26 to tackle the nature crisis alongside the climate emergency – or neither will be solved. Today the charity publishes a COP26 edition of its nature-based solutions report, ***Let Nature Help***. It explains how climate change is driving nature's decline, whilst the loss of wildlife and habitats leaves us ill-equipped to reduce emissions and adapt to a changing world.

### **Craig Bennett, chief executive of The Wildlife Trusts, says:**

"Net zero needs nature. Nature needs net zero. Both need to be resilient to the climate of the future. Nature's fantastic ability to trap carbon safely and provide other important benefits is proven – peatland, woodland, saltmarsh and other wild habitats are vital carbon stores. But these natural places are in decline and face even greater risk of degradation from the extreme climatic conditions that are already inevitable over the next 30 years. It's becoming a vicious spiral of damage – one that has to be stopped right now.

"In addition to the urgent task of cutting emissions at source, we need to see an enormous rise in the amount of land and sea that's protected for nature – and increase it to at least 30% by 2030. Also, the Government must embed climate action – mitigation and adaptation – across every department and take urgent steps to stop carbon-emitting activities such as new road building, peat burning and trawling the seabed."

### **The Wildlife Trusts call on the Government to:**

#### **PEAT**

- Significantly increase peatland restoration and repair 100% of upland peat by 2050
- Implement an immediate ban on peatland burning and end farming on deep peat
- Ban the sale and use of peat in gardening and compost products, including imports

#### **THE SEA**

- Implement a ban on bottom-trawling the seabed in England
- Give all seagrass habitats highly protected status
- Renew pledges to protect coastal habitats and invest more in natural sea defences

#### **FARMING**

- Give a boost to sustainable farming that locks carbon into the soil and helps wildlife
- Publish details on how Environmental Land Management Scheme will incentivise farmers to manage their land for nature-based solutions

## WOODLAND

- Increase the natural regeneration of woods and where this cannot be done, plant resilient native trees instead
- Ensure a mix of trees is planted in every location so as to have the best chance of survival in unpredictable conditions and in the face of increased pests and diseases

## PLANNING

- Make more space for nature everywhere including in towns and new developments. By 2030 we need to have protected 30% of our land and seas for nature. Create a new designation, Wildbelt, which protects places, including degraded land, that is put into recovery for nature
- Ensure that planning reforms deliver the Government's legally binding target in the Environment Bill to halt species decline by 2030

During COP26 The Wildlife Trusts will host live daily updates online on key issues. There will also be a panel event, *Let Nature Help*, on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November at 7pm chaired by The Wildlife Trusts' chief executive, Craig Bennett. Guests include:

- **Baroness Brown of Cambridge**, chair of the Climate Change Committee's Adaptation Committee
- **Holly Owens**, Young Leader at Scottish Wildlife Trust
- **Professor Nathalie Seddon**, Director of Nature-based Solutions at Oxford University

The Wildlife Trusts have a list of things people can do about climate change [online](#) ranging from choices about the food we eat, the way we travel and how to stop homes overheating.

### **Kathryn Brown, director of climate action at The Wildlife Trusts, says:**

“There are simple and easy things that we can all do to reduce our carbon footprint, adapt to climate change and make a big difference to the natural world – such as to reconsider what we eat, how we travel and how we use resources like water and energy.

“We can also help nature and do ourselves a favour by planting more around our homes to lower high summer temperatures and soak up floodwater – and reduce the amount of water we use to help save our precious rivers and the wildlife that depends on them.

“The Government largely treats mitigation and adaptation separately – but they must be considered together because adaptation is fundamental to reaching net zero. We need to see policies to improve the resilience of natural carbon stores – such as reducing the risk of wildfire, addressing the threats to freshwater habitats, and giving guidance on managing woodlands and farmland during hot weather and drought.”

**Read a copy of our COP26 edition of *Let Nature Help* report [here](#).**

## ENDS

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## Editor's Notes

- The Wildlife Trusts originally published *Let Nature Help* in June 2020. The new edition reflects the changed political landscape and the requests that we are making of Government at COP26. Read a copy of our COP26 edition of *Let Nature Help* report [here](#).
- During COP26 The Wildlife Trusts will host **live daily updates online** on key issues. Anyone can sign up here: [www.wildlifetrusts.org/cop26](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/cop26)
- The Wildlife Trusts will host a **Wild LIVE event, *Let Nature Help***, during COP26 on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November at 7pm. See: [wildlifetrusts.org/events/2021-11-07-wild-live-let-nature-help](http://wildlifetrusts.org/events/2021-11-07-wild-live-let-nature-help)
- The Wildlife Trusts' list of ***things you can do about climate change***: [wildlifetrusts.org/things-you-can-do-climate-change](http://wildlifetrusts.org/things-you-can-do-climate-change)
- ***Let nature help bibliography***: [www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-based-solutions-reference-list](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-based-solutions-reference-list)

***Let nature help*** – outlines key habitats that will store carbon if restored:

- The UK's **peatland** soils store around 3.2 billion tonnes of carbon, but are heavily degraded and release the equivalent of 23 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> every year. Restored peatlands can capture more carbon, reduce flooding, clean our water, and allow wildlife to thrive.
- A hectare of **seagrass** may store two tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year and hold it for centuries, while providing nursery habitat for young fish. But we have lost half our seagrass meadows since 1985. Reducing water pollution and replanting would bring them back to health. Well-managed Marine Protected Areas are vital for nature's recovery at sea.
- A hectare of **saltmarsh** can capture two tonnes of carbon a year and lock it into sediments for centuries, but we are losing nearly 100 hectares of saltmarsh a year. Coastal realignment could restore much of it and reduce flooding and erosion.
- **Wetlands** can accumulate carbon for centuries, but in some areas of the UK we have lost over 90% of our wetland habitat. Restored wetlands provide rich habitat, clean water naturally and reduce flood risk downstream. Less drainage and over-abstraction, the return of beavers and naturalising rivers will lock up more carbon.
- **Oceans** absorb 20-35% of human-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions every year. Carbon is incorporated into the tissues of plants and animals, and later into mud and sediment. Human activities release this carbon and also impact populations of marine animals. Introducing Marine Spatial Planning would integrate all activities to avoid harms and maximise benefits.
- UK **grasslands** store 2 billion tonnes of carbon, but this is vulnerable to disturbance. Between 1990-2006, arable conversion of grasslands released 14 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. We can restore species-rich grasslands to lock up carbon and support abundant wildlife
- About 1 billion tonnes of carbon are locked up in UK **woodlands**, mostly in the soils. Planting more woods could lock up more carbon, but this must be carefully planned to maximise benefits and avoid harming other habitats. We need to protect our existing woodland, help it to expand and join-up. We're calling for 40% more hedges to help reach net zero by 2050.

**On land, 66% of carbon in nature-rich areas is outside protected sites.** We need to identify, map and protect these ecosystems, and restore them locally as part of a national Nature Recovery Network. We also need to incentivise farmers and other land managers to improve their land for nature and contribute to this network. **At sea, we need effective marine planning, and an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas.**

Healthy ecosystems on land and at sea can absorb vast quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and lock it away as carbon. However, human activities such as intensive arable farming, overgrazing, overfishing and irresponsible development, release this stored carbon and drive nature's decline. As a first step, we urgently need to protect important ecosystems so their carbon isn't released and they can continue to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. We also need to put nature into recovery across 30% of land and sea, so the natural world can cope with the climate change that is already happening and contribute

effectively to stabilising it. Doing this across a mosaic of connected habitats will also deliver many other benefits for flood prevention, coastal defences, healthier lives and natural resilience.

### Context

- In its July 2019 progress report, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) said the UK government's policy actions "[fell] well short of those required for the net-zero target". The UK is currently not on track to meet its previous target of 80% emissions reductions by 2050, let alone 100%.
- According to the CCC, over 2018-2019, the Government delivered just 1 of 25 recommended policies needed to get emissions reductions back on track. The UK is on course to miss its fourth and fifth carbon budgets (2023-2027 and 2028-2032) [here](#).
- The Government announced £27bn for road building in its budget in March 2020, to fund a road building programme 2020-2025.
- By comparison, the government has announced a £640m Nature for Climate fund to restore peatland and plant trees. The plan under the budget is to restore 35,000 hectares of peatland by 2025 – only around 1% of UK peatlands. The Climate Change Committee suggests we need to restore 100% of upland peat to get on track to net zero. See [www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2021-progress-report-to-parliament/](http://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2021-progress-report-to-parliament/)
- On average, the UK government spends just £2 per person on trees compared to £90 per person on roads. (2017-2018). [Here](#).
- The UK is set to miss 14 of its 19 international biodiversity targets: [here](#). The UK has only achieved 4 of 15 indicators for Good Environmental Status in the marine environment. Missed targets include on the health and size of fish communities, bird populations, food webs, marine litter and underwater noise: [here](#).

**The Wildlife Trusts:** The Wildlife Trusts are here to make the world wilder and to make nature part of everyone's lives. We are a grassroots movement of 46 charities with more than 850,000 members and 38,000 volunteers. No matter where you are in Britain, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people and saving, protecting and standing up for the natural world. With the support of our members, we care for and restore special places for nature on land and run marine conservation projects and collect vital data on the state of our seas. Every Wildlife Trust works within its local community to inspire people to create a wilder future – from advising thousands of landowners on how to manage their land to benefit wildlife, to connecting hundreds of thousands of school children with nature every year. [wildlifetrusts.org](http://wildlifetrusts.org)