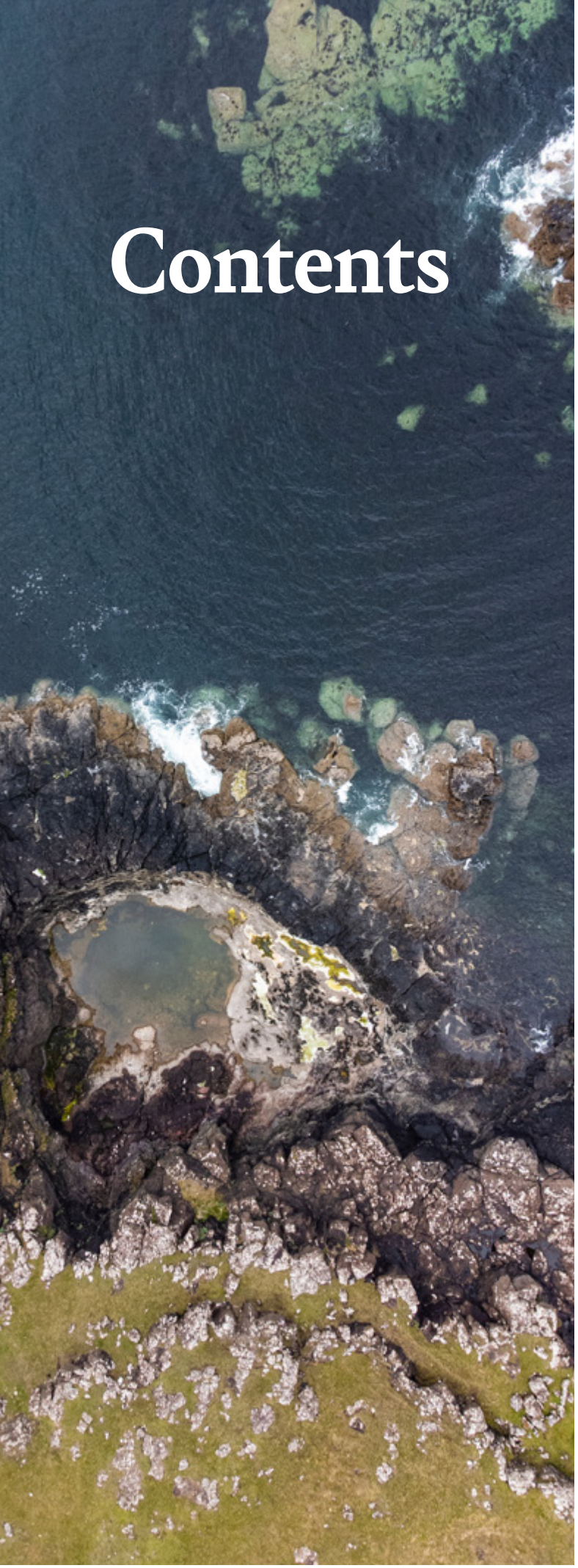
The RSPB response to the People's Plan for Nature



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Chief Executive's foreword

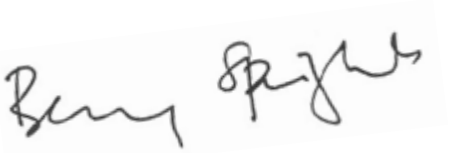
It is said a lot, but it bears repeating – the nature crisis affects us all. We can all appreciate the importance of clean air, fresh water, food, protection from floods... but none of this exists without nature, quietly doing its thing, providing the very web of life on which we all depend.

Looking out of your window it maybe doesn't feel like we're in a crisis at all. Perhaps you can glimpse some green, a bird, a tree, a river, the sea – isn't there plenty of it still around? Sadly, no – the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and our wildlife and the places it calls home are under enormous threat, right now. Organisations like the RSPB have been working and campaigning to stem this tide for over a century, and of course, there are wonderful success stories of species brought back from the brink and areas of habitat protected and kept wild. But the overall picture is undeniable. As a society we are failing. And it doesn't make sense to just keep doing the same thing and expect different results. More people need to know nature is in urgent trouble. And more people need to shape what we do about it.

That's why the RSPB joined forces with the National Trust and WWF to commission a different approach, a unique and pioneering citizen engagement project. It included the UK's first Citizens' Assembly on the future of nature, the remarkable group of 103 of your fellow citizens who created this new and brilliant People's Plan for Nature.

The Plan calls for a fundamental change in how we value nature throughout the UK – by giving it a seat at the decision-making tables, by enforcing and enhancing existing laws, by renewing nature, creating more access to it for all and by supporting those most affected by these changes through a just transition. The People's Plan is both thoughtful and thought-provoking – as well as highlighting areas that we have campaigned on for many years, it has given us cause to look at how we might do things differently at the RSPB, and we welcome that challenge. This response to the People's calls has been developed across the organisation, and we hope it encourages others to respond with honesty, self-reflection and an eagerness to take forward the actions.

Nature can't wait any longer. The time is now. The people have spoken – let's do this!



Beccy Speight, Chief Executive Officer, RSPB

RSPB Youth Council Response

We are the RSPB Youth Council – a group of 12 young people who want to make real change which benefits both the environment and communities. Young people are too often left out of important conversations which will affect our futures. So, we're incredibly excited to give our response to the People's Plan for Nature, a process which has given young people a clear voice with a fifth of the People's Assembly for Nature aged under 25.

We feel that this pioneering action plan has done an amazing job at highlighting so many issues which impact our climate and our people. The People's Plan for Nature has brought new, innovative ideas on how we can make our world a better place. It was inspiring to see that the People's Plan was written by such a diverse group of people, especially focusing on people who are often ignored by the environmental movement – such as people from lower economic backgrounds. We all have the power to make change. By coming together, however, we will be able to reach our full potential and create a world where communities and nature can truly thrive together. Just as every component of a natural ecosystem is essential to its survival, every one of us plays a significant role in its protection.

We were particularly excited to see a focus on access to nature. This is something we as the Youth Council care passionately about, with access for all communities being one of the core values outlined in our manifesto. It is our human right and our instinct to be in nature, and it is vital that accessibility is placed at the centre of our personal activism and national policy.

The People's Plan for Nature is truly inspiring. It brings together people from diverse backgrounds, making sure that every group is represented; it shows clearly what changes need to happen across a wide range of industries to protect nature; and, amazingly, it imagines a future where people and nature could live in harmony. But the fight isn't won yet. The People's Plan is a huge step forward, but we need to ensure that this proposal is not ignored. This is our chance to push for a brighter future. As individuals, as businesses, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), governments and everything in between, we have an opportunity to make change. Now is our time to take it.

Emily Major, on behalf of the RSPB Youth Council

The RSPB's response to the People's Plan for Nature

When we made the decision to commission an independent participatory process to create a People's Plan for Nature, we were clear that for the process to be worthwhile, we must reflect on all the recommendations, even those that might feel uncomfortable for us. This meant that NGOs and charities like RSPB were considered by the People's Assembly for Nature as one of the actors that hold power, and we committed to enacting the calls to action targeted at us, unless there was a clear and unarguable reason why we cannot or should not.

The People's Plan for Nature has absolutely held our feet to the fire. There are many calls to action targeted at us as a large nature NGO, several of which challenge our status quo. We won't be able to completely transform our ways of working and organisational policies overnight, but we are committed to delivering upon the changes required of us by the People's Plan for Nature and will continue to invite citizens to scrutinise our progress and hold us to account. This document sets out both our response to each recommendation within the Plan, and the actions we will take as a result.

This response goes in-depth on the specifics of each of the Calls to Action in the People's Plan for Nature. However, there are some big, headline actions that it has spurred or emboldened us to take. These are:

- **The RSPB will champion a 'just transition' for Nature.** A strong message in the People's Plan for Nature is that we need to ensure our move to a future where nature is renewed is fair, as well as fast. This aspect has, at times, been neglected by our sector, though is coming to increased prominence. We will carry out policy development to bring this perspective into our work much more strongly; and propose that a year from now we bring forward examples where we have incorporated 'just transition' thinking into our policy development for scrutiny.
- The People's Plan for Nature calls for NGOs to invest **in community mobilisation and provide seed funding to groups to kickstart locally driven projects.** We have provided seed funding through the Save Our Wild Isles Community Fund, in partnership with Aviva and WWF-UK, which is now open for applications. Further to this, we are actively fundraising, in partnership with the National Trust and WWF-UK, for a project to engage with and support local communities to save and restore nature in the UK. We will do this by working directly with communities across the four countries of the UK to identify and train local leaders, build community capacity to influence local decision making, and establish a network of local nature spaces, created by the people, for the people.
- The Plan calls for us to provide greater access to nature, including by making our own nature reserves more accessible. We will **commit to providing free access** to some of our reserves this summer (going beyond the existing reserves which are free to visit) – further details to follow in the weeks ahead as we confirm access arrangements. We are also **developing a proposal for free access for all under 24s**. More widely, we strongly support the principle of equitable, universal, responsible access to nature.

- **We will consider the words we use** – we recognise that how we talk about nature is vital in helping everyone understand the issues, the solutions, to feel empowered to act and also to communicate with each other. We listened to the citizens consider how language can positively frame what we have to do and we'll consider how we communicate, making improvements wherever we can. For example, we support the citizens' call to use 'renewal' rather than 'restoration' - framing our aims in ways that look to what can positively be achieved in the future, rather than looking back.
- The People's Plan for Nature offers a clear mandate from the public for UK and devolved governments to do much more to restore and protect nature. We will ask governments and political stakeholders to respond to their calls to action. **We will work across the nature sector to advocate for the plan, and build the people's calls to action into our individual and collective advocacy and engagement with government**. This response – and those of WWF and National Trust – are part of starting this process. A year from now we commit to checking in with assembly members to see how they perceive our progress.
- We will **involve people and champion citizen voices through our advocacy and campaigns**. As part of this, we commit to developing **'People's Panels'** with diverse groups of citizens to work with us on advocacy and campaigns for nature's renewal.

RSPB response to the Calls to Action

There are 26 Calls to Action in the People's Plan for Nature, grouped into eight themes and aimed at five key actors: national governments, local governments, food businesses, NGOs and communities/individuals. We have responded to all of the calls to action, regardless of which actor they are aimed at, but with particular attention paid to any calls for the NGO sector. We have pulled out the calls to NGOs – and our response – into a box at the start of each section.

We have included the headline Calls to Action in the text for cross-reference with the People's Plan - our responses seek to address not just these headlines, but also the other elements raised in the detail of the full Report on the People's Plan: https://peoplesplanfornature.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/PPFN-Report-Final%20%282%29.pdf

Vision and leadership

Child using binoculars to learn how to spot birds
Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

"Lead on agreeing a collective pathway to protecting nature that they can all contribute to, as they are trusted organisations with extensive grassroots support with reach into communities."

In addition to our ongoing partnerships with other NGOs, we will address this by working across the nature sector to agree a collective plan for delivery of the calls of the People's Plan for Nature. This response – and those of the other commissioning partners – are the starting point for this. A year from now we commit to checking in with assembly members to see how they perceive our progress.

The People's Plan called for:

"Establishment of a Union of influential organisations (including leaders in business, civil society and relevant scientific institutions) to establish a mandate for the proportionate inclusion of impact on nature in decision making at all levels. They should quantify and inform society about the tangible and intangible benefits of having nature at the table, and the cost of not having nature at the table, so that, as a basic principle, we do no more harm to nature; and together set UK-wide and regional targets to renew nature and increase biodiversity, led by ecological experts."

RSPB Response: Partial support

The RSPB agree that we are currently failing to protect and renew nature. The lack of a seat at the table for nature in so much decision making is an underlying driver for this, and we strongly support the need for a change. The RSPB strongly agrees on the need for targets for nature's renewal and we have been actively campaigning for these to be brought into law in each of the four nations of the UK. For example, the Environment Act 2021 introduced such targets for England. In Wales we are working with partners to call for Government to prioritise equivalent legislation for Wales.

While we support the intent behind the idea of a Union – and are supportive of the idea of bringing stakeholders from across society together – we think the challenge is the sheer scale of this. To effect a change in culture at all the key decision-making levels, nature really needs a seat at many tables, not just at the level of each of the national governments across the UK.

There are already a number of existing bodies that, with sufficient powers and properly resourced, would ensure that nature could not be ignored – examples include the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (though Northern Ireland does not presently have one), the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) in England/Northern Ireland and Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS). Wales does not yet have an equivalent to the OEP or ESS, we are campaigning for the establishment of this body. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales), which the People's Plan highlights as an excellent starting point, means that nature should be considered by all public bodies in Wales. We would support efforts across the other three nations to replicate this. Though we note that the implementation of this faces similar challenges to what has been highlighted above – how to bring the

broad principles down to the local level and needing more powers to tackle inaction. Our own campaigning priority is therefore focussed on making the existing bodies work as intended.

In addition to making the most of existing bodies, there is also a need to make the most of existing tools (e.g. regulation), which the Assembly has rightly picked up as a specific action elsewhere in the Plan. These must be supported, strengthened and implemented. We think that an 'Impact on Nature Assessment' could be a welcome addition to the toolkit – especially in places where impacts on nature are not currently well considered, like in Government procurement decisions.

We strongly support the idea of a requirement for 'Nature on the Board' and encourage businesses to adopt this approach.

Global day of action
Nick Hawkes (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called for:

"More collaboration [between campaigners] and a framework [shared agenda] that provides leadership and promotes and facilitates communication and coordination between relevant key actors (charities, government, universities, industry and communities) to cooperate with a common purpose and vision for nature."

RSPB Response: Support

It is clear that we need to pool as many resources as we can in the fight to protect and renew nature in the UK – we strongly support this action. There are already many examples of collaboration – we work as part of coalitions with other NGOs like Greener UK, Wildlife and Countryside Link, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Environment Links, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (which includes trade, faith and development groups), Climate Cymru and have collaborations with business, Governments and Local Authorities on a number of projects. The People's Assembly itself was co-commissioned by RSPB, the National Trust and WWF.

However, it is clear that we need to do better – indeed, our strategy to 2030 states "we will develop stronger partnerships with other organisations, businesses, governments and individuals to increase our collective impact". Perhaps one of the biggest areas for improvement is in building partnerships beyond those that we typically work with. As a key priority in our strategy, we are examining how to do this – with a range of partners from community groups to industry.

Regulation and Implementation

RSPB employees clearing scrub
Rosie Dutton (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Allocate researchers to work with businesses to help them understand, monitor and reduce their impacts.
- Work with Authorities and provide a scrutiny function on regulation and enforcement of nature protections.
- Work with the Research Community to provide evidence on solutions and how to manage trade-offs.

We will address this by continuing our business sector advice work and maintaining our long-running effort to ensure the implementation and strengthening of nature protections. In addition, we will carry out policy development to bring the 'just transition' into our work much more strongly and aim to bring forward examples of this for scrutiny in a year's time.

The People's Plan called for:

"A new permanent, UK-wide Assembly for Nature [a new regulatory body] comprising appointed representatives from NGOs, industry and members of the public. Their role would be to scrutinise, challenge and hold to account government leadership and action that impacts on nature."

RSPB Response: Support

The People's Plan itself highlights the importance, value and power of the citizen voice on nature, and we strongly agree that governments need to be held to account. We passionately believe that because the nature crisis affects everyone, everyone should have a say in how we solve it. We support the principle of establishing permanent Assemblies for Nature, though these would need to exist in all four of the UK's parliaments (rather than just at Westminster).

Much of our response to the 'Union of influential organisations' call to action is relevant here – the big challenge will be making sure that citizen's input on nature is considered at all levels of decision-making (not just nationally). The existence of assemblies would need to be supported by properly resourced and empowered regulators and advisory bodies – otherwise there are risks that action and accountability will be lacking. With regulators properly resourced, rather than the assembly being a regulatory body itself, it would serve the function of bringing a public voice into the discussion to support accountability.

Overall – we support this action but believe it needs these other elements in place to be truly effective.

The People's Plan called for:

"The urgent identification of a body to take responsibility for balancing social and economic interests in decision-making about nature protection and restoration. This should include an honest identification of [those segments of society and the economy] that will be the "losers", so that coherent plans can be formulated to mitigate these costs for the most disadvantaged stakeholders."

RSPB Response: Support

The RSPB believe that it is fundamental to our existence that we, as a society start to properly protect and renew nature, and therefore that ultimately the overall impacts of moving to a nature positive world are overwhelmingly positive. The RSPB agree, though, that it is vital that the potential negative impacts on particular parts of society, as we move from where are now to a more sustainable future, are properly considered and mitigated. In some places, there are already mechanisms to do this – Scotland has a Just Transition Commission, and nature could be added to the agenda of this group; the Future Generations Commissioner is well placed to look at this in Wales. Similar commissions or bodies should be established in England and Northern Ireland.

As with many of the calls to action in the Plan, this must be carried forward – as is implied in the wording of the action – at the same time as a strong nature protection and renewal agenda. One of the reasons that we have a nature crisis is that some economic interests have been prioritised at the expense of nature and have resulted in widening inequality. It is important that the transition to a nature positive future is just.

It is notable that there are already tools coming forward to support such a transition – a National Nature Service in Wales is being explored to build careers through skills development to create 'green jobs' and bring back biodiversity. This is the type of initiative we need more of.

Swift brick installation at Barratt Homes and David Wilson Homes
Barratt Developments PLC (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called for:

"Existing legislation and designations to protect nature to be more robustly enforced and for stronger, more ambitious legislation and targets introduced to show that nature is valued."

RSPB Response: Support

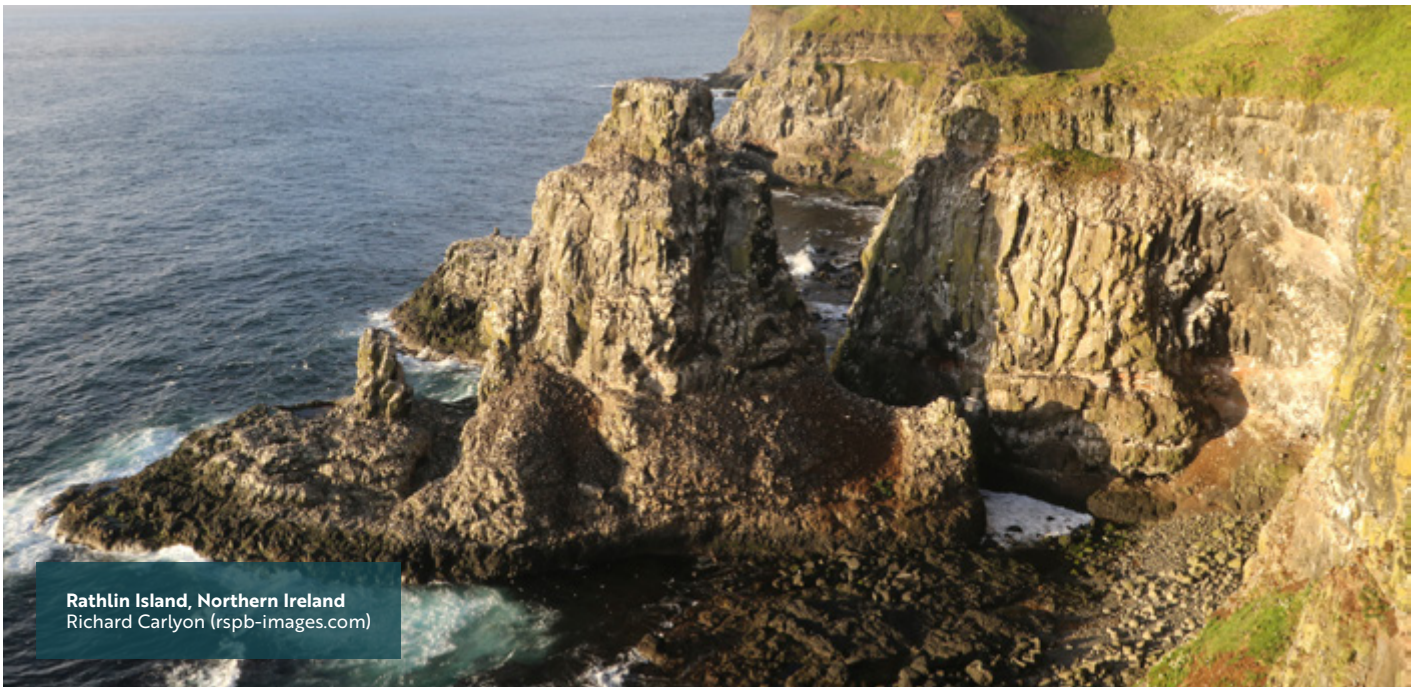
The RSPB strongly supports this recommendation. Indeed, this is something that we have long called for.

The evidence from multiple reviews shows that where properly implemented, existing legislation is effective at protecting nature without placing unnecessary burdens on business, landowners and civil society; but that implementation and enforcement needs to be significantly improved. For example, a report on Wildlife and Forest Crime by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, commissioned by the 4 Governments of the UK, made 72 recommendations for changes needed to legislation, prosecution and enforcement – which to date remain unimplemented.

Meanwhile, the State of Nature report makes clear that current protections (as currently implemented) are not enough to halt or reverse the decline in nature. And right now, the UK Government's Retained EU Law Bill means that the future of many of the laws that we currently rely on are far from safe.

The UK and devolved governments have all made a number of welcome bold commitments to protect nature (including to reverse the declines in the abundance of species and to protect 30% of our land and seas by 2030) and yet only one (England) has so far translated any of those commitments into any legally binding targets. All four governments in the UK have a long track record of failing to meet their commitments for nature, as set out in the RSPB's 'Lost Decade' Report.

We also support the Assembly's call for national governments to prioritise nature by adequately funding and resourcing nature protection agencies – this is also something that we have long called for – see for example RSPB England's report on the England 'arm's length bodies'.



Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland
Richard Carlyon (rspb-images.com)

We recognise the need to support individuals and communities to help them be more knowledgeable about nature in their area, and to support them in taking action when nature is damaged where they live.

There is a clear role for governments and their agencies here to help people to access information about the state of nature close to them, and also more that we can do to support and empower communities to take action to protect nature and to hold decision makers to account.

The Assembly also rightly highlights the role of NGOs working with authorities to provide a scrutiny function. The RSPB has campaigned for the creation, empowerment and resourcing of wildlife watchdogs in each of the four countries of the UK, including the Office for Environmental Protection (covering England and Northern Ireland) and Environmental Standards Scotland; we are still campaigning for the creation of a watchdog in Wales. We recognise that we also have a critical role to play in holding governments, their agencies, and others to account for their actions (or lack of action). Sometimes we have done this alone (see for example the Lost Decade report above) and sometimes working in partnership with others (as in the case of the recent "30 by 30" progress report for England and the Rhetoric to Reality Report by Scottish Environment LINK). However, we recognise that we will have to sustain our efforts and do more to ensure that Governments across the UK cannot get away with another lost decade for nature, and we welcome the challenge that the Assembly pose to us on this.

The Assembly's call for consideration of a "crime against nature" reflects wider calls for the introduction for a crime of "ecocide" which have been discussed at global and European levels. In the UK our focus is on the need for better policing and enforcement of wildlife crimes, strengthening the legal framework, and securing prosecutions and bigger penalties.

The People's Plan called for:

"A new norm that businesses can both value, and are enabled to create value, by protecting nature. We call for clearer reporting on activities and costs [of action to protect nature], tax breaks for nature-friendly research and development and league tables of nature-friendly businesses."

RSPB Response: Support

The RSPB recognises that business actions have a huge impact on nature, and our food growing, processing and supply sectors are a particular focus – so we support this call. We recognise the growing number of businesses that do value nature and who seek to help redress the nature crisis. The RSPB is already working in this area, with initiatives that are seeking to support and advise those business sectors that impact nature, including the food sector.

This includes active projects with a range of businesses in different sectors (quarrying, housing, renewable energy, green infrastructure, transport and golf), to help them to manage the land they are responsible towards a nature positive approach. We will seek to extend our business partnerships into food manufacturers, and potentially retailers.

As the People's Plan proposes, we will work with our partners to showcase and demonstrate best practice in working towards 'nature positive' to engage other businesses to follow suit. The RSPB owns the 'Fair to Nature' certification scheme, which is discussed in our response to the 'food transparency/labelling' action – this type of initiative is one example of businesses being able to demonstrate positive impacts for nature.

Nature-friendly Farming

RSPB Hope Farm
Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Undertake research into best practice and make information available to farmers.
- Support knowledge sharing, with awards schemes for successful farmers.

We will address this by continuing to practice nature-friendly farming on our working farms across the four nations, and celebrate this work publicly. We will look at the hosting arrangements of the 'Farm Wildlife' website to improve outreach to farmers.

The People's Plan called for:

"An overhaul of the current subsidy arrangements to provide incentives to farmers who farm sustainably and commit to rewilding land which is non-productive, whilst penalising those who harm the environment by not farming sustainably. This should include providing support, information and peer-to-peer training in new and environmentally friendly methods by way of bursaries, placements, access to research findings and investment in the development of new technology to improve farming practices. Subsidies should be provided at different rates for productive and non-productive land given over to rewilding and biodiversity enhancement and limit intensive farming practices to protect soil and water quality."

RSPB Response: Support

Overall, this is an action we support and an area we have campaigned on for decades – it is one of the priority objectives in our strategy to 2030 and a major opportunity for positive policy change for nature in the coming years.

While the broad intent and focus of this action is on supporting nature-friendly farming, we would note that the language on using subsidies to support 'high food output' (alongside 'low environmental impact' production) is something we don't support. This is because historically, subsidies have been tied to either the size of land holding or level of production, and this is contrary to the approach we support – where the majority of funding is focussed on nature and carbon-friendly farming. Of course, there are places where high yield agriculture and nature-friendly farming are not in conflict, but the historical focus on production over nature has been one of the drivers of the degraded state of nature in the UK. In short, the future subsidy regime needs to enable sustainable food production, but not actively subsidise it.

There has been some progress in nature-friendly farm subsidies in all four nations of the UK, so broadly there are foundations to build from. There is a need for all countries in the UK to see this through a 'public good' lens. Public goods are things that we as a society need - like clean air and thriving wildlife - but cannot purchase at the till or through the market. We agree with assembly members that subsidies need to be targeted and tailored, especially as the viable types of farming vary substantially across the UK.

With regard to 'rewilding' land, we support land use change to achieve governments' 'net zero' ambitions

and commitments to halting and reversing the loss of nature; for example, there will need to be native woodland creation, commercial afforestation and peatland restoration in order to meet targets. We would note that this does need to be done sensitively – both in ecological and social terms, and support an approach that includes 'land sharing' – i.e. an approach of improving the nature on working farms. This means taking a strategic and planned approach, that works directly with communities and ensures that we don't, for example, establish woodlands or forests on land that has existing high conservation value, high carbon value or is highly productive farmland. On productive farmland agroforestry and trees outside of woods can be integrated. The land use partnerships and frameworks in development in some parts of the UK have the potential to support this.

A nature-focussed subsidy regime sits well alongside some of the other actions proposed in the People's Plan, most notably the calls for improving access to local and sustainable food, more farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing and action on dietary change.

The action highlights the potential for NGOs to conduct research into best practice. This is an area RSPB works in extensively already - we run working farms in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – and work directly with farmers. This provides an opportunity for us to demonstrate nature-friendly farming in a very practical way.

The People's Plan called for:

"Long-term, cross-party commitment to ensuring that protecting nature is a priority for future farming practices across the UK. This means that there must be nature-protection-based subsidies provided to farmers to help them through this transition and incentivise farming practices that support both protecting nature and local food production."

RSPB Response: Support

We support putting nature at the heart of farming practices, and much of our response to the 'overhaul of farm subsidies' action is relevant here – this is an area that RSPB has been active in for decades, through campaigning, managing our own farms, conducting research and working with nature-friendly farmers in all four countries of the UK. The assembly members recognise the need for a strategic approach to land use across the UK and that a healthy environment is a key part of food security. We therefore welcome the link made to the need to adapt our diets and reduce meat consumption, in order to create more space for nature – noting the direct link to the People's action about diet change specifically. We strongly support the call to 'maximise the amount of locally produced food that is grown/reared in nature friendly ways'.

We support the call for all national governments in the UK to invest in research, noting that there is a lot less research into agroecological systems than intensive, production-focussed systems. Redressing this balance will be vital in helping us find ways to produce food in a nature and climate sustainable way.

The People's Plan called for:

"Better communication between farmers, and the bodies representing them, to ensure the promotion of sustainable and nature-friendly farming. We want more, and better ways, of sharing knowledge, experience and good practice, both regionally as well as nationally to reflect local needs and incorporate input from scientists and experts."

RSPB Response: Support

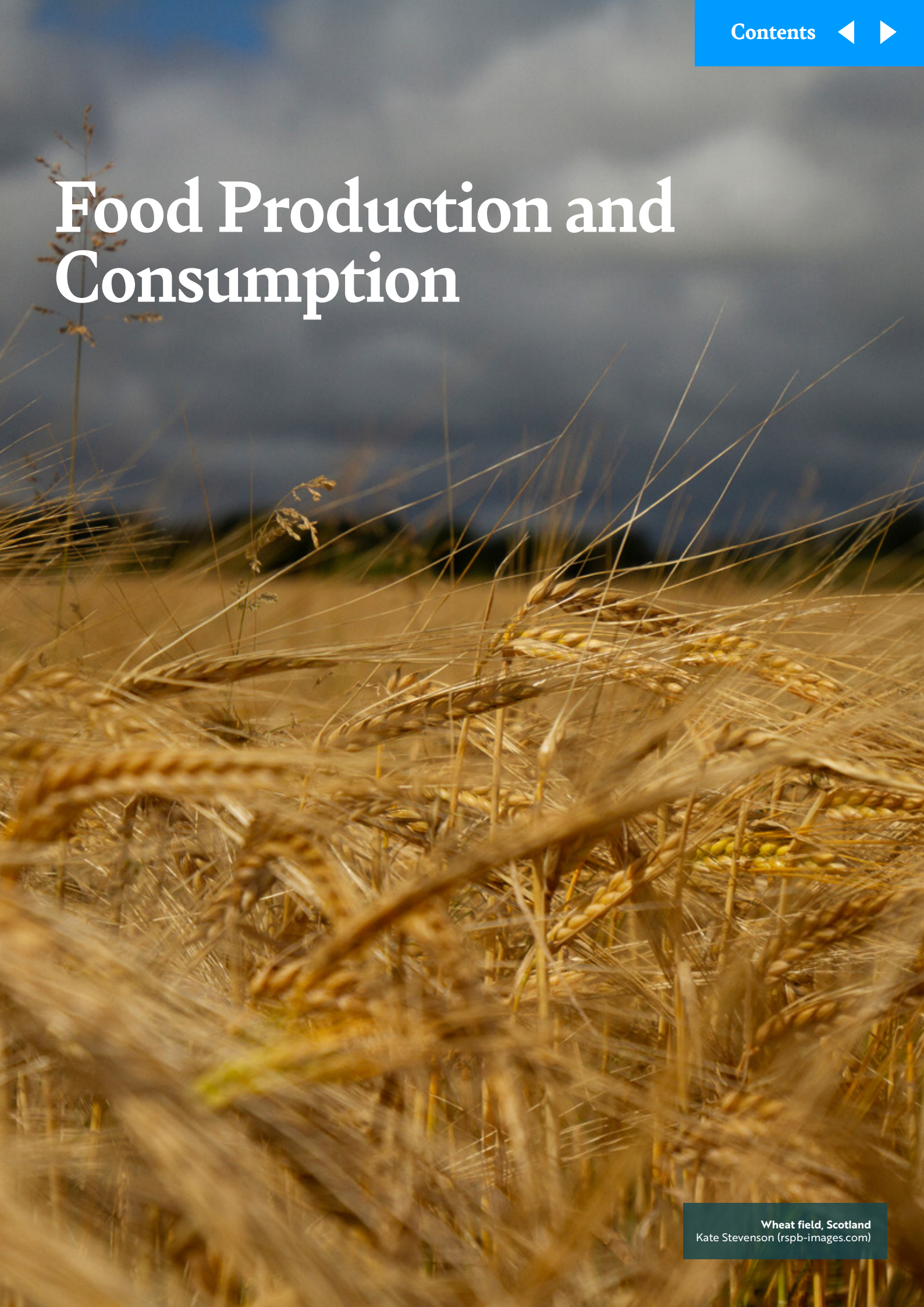
We agree that there is an important role for farmers and the bodies that represent them to promote sustainable and nature-friendly farming. The RSPB works with NGO partners, industry and the governments of the four nations to inspire more farmers to take action for nature. These initiatives are happening at a UK, country and local level. For example, we worked with many wildlife charities, such as Plantlife and the Wildlife Trusts, alongside the Nature Friendly Farmers Network, to develop Farm Wildlife, a website providing a single source of best-practice management advice for wildlife on farmland. We work with the National Farmers' Union of Scotland and other partners to deliver the 'Working For Waders Initiative' and at a local level, we have many projects working on the ground with farmers to safeguard particularly threatened species, like Curlew and Turtle Dove.

Other notable and excellent initiatives to promote sustainable and nature-friendly farming include 'Agricology' which shares practical information about sustainable farming based on agroecological principles. The 'Nature Friendly Farming Network' (NFFN) was formed in 2017 and has quickly become a hub for like-minded farmers interested in promoting and learning about nature-friendly farming. The NFFN already highlight existing farming champions, supporting each other and try to inspire and advise other farmers. But for a true 'Farmer's Assembly for Nature' to be created, we recognise that there needs to be space to call in more sceptical voices across the agricultural industry to make for a deeper discussion of the challenges – so this call to action from the People's Plan is a potentially powerful one.

We think that to deliver transformative change, this call to action should see national and local governments, food businesses and NGOs all playing a significant role, beyond reducing bureaucracy and providing incentives. Governments need to invest more in advisory activities, facilitation and knowledge exchange, ensuring an integrated approach between their various priorities. As noted in our response to the subsidies call to action, funded activities need to provide better mechanisms for helping farmers transition to become more climate- and nature-friendly in a cost-effective way. Food businesses should look to work with others to produce accreditation in a consistent way, building on the standards that already exist.

This call to action has given us cause to consider how we conduct our knowledge sharing with the industry through stronger partnerships, and we are now considering a hosting arrangement for the 'Farm Wildlife' webpage which will better embed it within farmer's groups.

Food Production and Consumption



Wheat field, Scotland
Kate Stevenson (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Partner with supermarkets and food businesses to assist with the work they are doing in labelling and implementing transparency policies.
- Prepare and publish a league table of good and bad companies.

As part of addressing these actions, we will launch our own biodiversity-focussed certification scheme, 'Fair to Nature' this year. We remain open to collaborations with other NGOs on scrutinising supermarket performance on nature protection. While not included in the actions directed at NGOs, we warmly welcome the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's major new project on the topic of a national conversation on diets, and see it as an important next step in this journey.

The People's Plan called for:

"A national conversation across the UK to explore, advise and encourage on the need to change our diets and how to do this. This would educate people on the impact of our food and food choices on nature and our health. We would seek for the majority of people to change their diet for the better and aim to reduce meat, dairy and fish consumption by at least 25% by 2030."

RSPB Response: Support

We strongly support this action, which deals with a sometimes controversial subject with clarity and wisdom. We agree that there is sound evidence for the reduction of meat and dairy in our diets from an environmental and health perspective, and there is clearly a need to have this conversation beyond a binary and heated debate. The fact that 100 informed citizens have developed this action should give governments more confidence to talk about and take action on this issue.

The need for change is clear from both a climate and nature perspective – the recent UK Food Security report pointed out the biggest medium to long-term threat to domestic food security was the loss of nature, climate change and the depletion of soils. To increase space for nature in the UK (and globally), there is a need to substantially reduce meat and dairy consumption.

Alongside the public education elements of this call, we support the call to use agricultural subsidies to support farmers and crofters in this transition. The diverse landscape of the UK needs to be considered here – in areas where it is viable, transitioning to protein crop production should be supported; there are other areas where nature-friendly meat production could be maintained, and yet other places where a change or partial change in land use could be supported. This all requires a meaningful conversation with the members of the farming community most directly affected by potential change to enable a just transition for the agricultural sector, and for this to be co-ordinated right across the UK.

We welcome mention of the role of public procurement, and would strongly encourage local authorities to implement the action called for in the Plan to increase the emphasis on nature-friendly foods.

We note that fish consumption is highlighted as part of the overall reduction target. The UK's 'Fish Dependence Day' was last assessed in 2018, and found to be 7th September – this is the point in the year after which the UK goes beyond self-sufficiency. Therefore there is evidently a need to reduce seafood consumption to some extent, but we would point to the other action in the Plan that highlights an additional need to diversify our fish consumption and ensure that stocks are exploited sustainably as part of the effort to address the nature impacts of fishing.

While our broad message has been to move towards more nature and climate friendly ways of eating, this call to action gives us confidence in our ambition and emboldens our policy and campaigning work in this space. We support the calls for a specific reduction target by 2030.

The People's Plan called for:

"Supermarkets [and all food retailers] to be required to be transparent about the sources and nature impact of products through a clear quality standard."

RSPB Response: Partial support

We support the need for much more transparency about how the food we buy is produced, and think that both market-based mechanisms like standards/labelling and regulatory mechanisms have an important place in achieving this. Indeed, the RSPB have established the only UK certification scheme (Fair to Nature) that focuses explicitly on biodiversity and a proven approach to restoring the balance of nature in farming.

However, we think there are two big challenges that affect our ability to fully support this action – the first is the call for this to be universal. Large, universal standards, by their very nature, have to minimise the specifics of their requirements so that they can be widely applied – this inevitably means the creation of loopholes that permits negative practices to continue. So, the broader the standard, the more diluted it becomes.

The second big challenge is the suggestion of making this a legal requirement. Solid and actively enforced regulation creates a level playing field and sets the minimum standards for everyone; the purpose of a label or standard is to go above and beyond that minimum standard.

That said, we welcome the assembly's call for more transparency via clear standards, and agree that any new labels or standards should be independent. There is certainly a role for key players in the food industry to be involved in development, but any standard should clearly be based in science, with specific, measurable requirements in place on-farm.

We welcome the focus on supermarkets in this action – they are powerful players in this area. We would also encourage the inclusion of the wider food and drink supply chain actors (e.g. brand owners, large food companies, food service operators and manufacturers), though note that there is another action aimed at transparency and reducing impacts in the wider sector.

The People's Plan called for:

"Policy, including legislation and incentives [if required], that forces all companies involved in food production and retail to stop their negative impact on the natural environment and to actively support the restoration of nature. We want to see that the "polluter pays" principle is enforced to reduce the amount of pollutants that impact the environment and our health and to ensure that food production, processing and retail do not destroy habitats in the UK or abroad."

RSPB Response: Support

We support action to prevent environmental damage by industry, and it is right that there is a focus on large food companies in this call. We have already been part of a coalition calling for the introduction of mandatory 'Nature-related Financial Disclosures' – essentially a means of businesses disclosing their impacts on nature and taking action to reduce them. What is needed now is (1) Governments to make such disclosures mandatory, then (2) a robust and independent framework for assessing impacts and taking action to utilise this mechanism, ensuring companies stop their negative impacts on the natural environment, as per this call to action.

We agree that it should be on businesses to take responsibility for their impacts, and that this action would be an excellent way of truly making the polluter pay. We would also note that there is need for the polluter pays principle to be better implemented through existing legislation.

It will be important for any system to be independent so that industry is not 'marking its own homework'. We agree that in the short term there is a role for NGOs in providing honest scrutiny of any process that has been developed (RSPB and other NGOs have, in the past, been involved in scoring supermarkets and labelling schemes). We would be open to working with other NGOs and other organisations developing frameworks again to achieve this, if useful.

The People's Plan called for:

"Governments to implement regulations that stop food retailers (supermarkets in particular) from driving wasteful producer and consumer behaviour that means a high proportion of the food produced is thrown away. Eliminating unnecessary packaging would also make it easier for consumers to buy individual products or items in the required amount and help make retailers more accountable to their community's needs."

RSPB Response: Support

We strongly support efforts to address food waste and support the focus on governments to regulate and industry to take responsibility - it is clear that supermarkets have a major role to play, in terms of the promotions and marketing tactics deployed in-store that drive wasteful behaviour.

We would flag that better distribution of food that would otherwise be wasted is of course sensible, but in reality, is not a long-term viable solution when it comes to solving food poverty.

There has been some progress at government level – there are targets around waste reduction (e.g. Scotland's 33% reduction target by 2025) and there have been a number of consumer initiatives to raise awareness (e.g. WRAP). These are efforts that must be built on to achieve the People's ambitions. Addressing the overproduction of food is particularly important, as a key driver of food waste.

There is also an individual aspect to addressing waste, as a lot occurs after purchase. Efforts to address this could be tied to the wider national conservation about diets that has been proposed in the People's Plan.

The People's Plan called for:

"Food hubs in local areas that are accessible to all, to enable people to have easy access to sustainable, locally produced food. Food hub coordinators should work with community organisations, supermarkets, farmers and growers, to sell food produced as locally as possible. Signs in supermarkets should indicate where food has been produced and "buy local" should be encouraged."

RSPB Response: Support

The RSPB strongly supports this action and have been campaigning across the UK as part of groups advancing this, like the Scottish Food Coalition and the Food Policy Alliance Cymru. Some of the necessary tools and key evidence is in place to achieve this – like the National Food Strategy in England, Scotland's Good Food Nation Act (and forthcoming National and Local Food Plans) – but these need to be delivered with practical action and support. Local Food Investment Funds – identified in the RSPB/ Sustain 'The Case for Local Food' Report – are an excellent example of the type of support needed. This action would create a more resilient food system, less impacted by shocks, which have become particularly marked in recent years with the Covid pandemic, war in Ukraine and fruit/veg shortages in UK supermarkets.

As with the 'diet change' action, we would support public procurement (e.g. school meals and the like) that purchases local, sustainable food, thereby helping to invest in shorter supply chains.

There are links from this action to the other 'Food and Farming' actions – subsidies need to be used to help create shorter supply chains (particularly for small producers), and overall policy on farming and food needs to be aligned to pull in the same direction – to tackle food poverty, create communal growing space in both urban and rural areas, support local production, drive nature-friendly practice and reduce waste.

Marine Protections for our Coastal Waters

Calgary Bay, Isle of Mull, Scotland
Kate Stevenson (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Work alongside industry to help them know what to do and provide evidence and solutions to the key players.
- Provide knowledge and expertise and drive research and education projects around the National Marine Parks. They may also become custodians of the Parks.

These are two areas where the RSPB is already active – we will continue our work with the fishing industry to minimise the accidental capture of seabirds in fisheries. We will also continue utilising our seabird reserves as gateways to discussion about marine protection (e.g. Bempton Cliffs, Sumburgh Head, South Stack, Rathlin Island) – and aim to continually improve the way we incorporate our seabird research into education for visitors.

The People's Plan called for:

"Government and industry to ensure the balance of nature in the sea is restored. This will include a considerable reduction and reallocation of fishing quotas, using up-to-date technology and scientific knowledge, so that we can protect marine biodiversity and recover local fish stocks to a point that enables fishermen to take the maximum sustainable yield in any area.

It will also mean ensuring seafood is sustainably sourced and distributed.

We recommend the immediate mandatory introduction of remote electronic monitoring (REM) to enforce standards and regulations. This should be delivered [paid for] through a Government-held fund made up of contributions from food supply chain fines for non-compliance regarding quotas and industry related taxation."

RSPB Response: Support

The RSPB strongly supports this action. The reduction and reallocation of fishing quotas is one of the measures that can be taken to help address unsustainable fisheries management and the RSPB is clear on the need for the four governments of the UK to review what fishing opportunities are available to the UK and in turn assess whether or not UK fleet capacity is in line with this. Only by getting this balance right will we stand a chance of achieving sustainable fisheries. There are around 100 stocks that the UK needs to negotiate on an annual basis post-Brexit with the EU and other coastal states. This negotiation process is not one that the RSPB has the capacity to engage in, but we do work with others to hold governments to account on following best scientific advice and to be transparent in how sustainably managed stocks are in relation to scientific advice.

The RSPB is committed to the call for the introduction of Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM) as a condition of fishing in UK waters.

We strongly believe this will be transformative, underpinning the sustainable management of fisheries, providing data for management purposes, allowing us to understand the true impacts of fishing on the marine environment, especially that of wildlife bycatch and supporting bycatch mitigation, as well as allowing fishers to provide evidence of best practice. This is on the understanding that REM is robustly and effectively rolled out on a level playing field. We are working with Governments across the UK to urge the strongest and most ambitious timetable for the delivery of REM. We collaborate with others on this advocacy in order to make our messaging as impactful as it can be.

We welcome the call in the plan for NGOs to work with industry on solutions – we have considerable experience of working with fishers to minimise seabird deaths in fisheries (mostly overseas, but more recently in the UK, in Yorkshire and Cornwall). We welcome opportunities to build on this.

Our work with businesses is less well developed but it is a clear area of opportunity and we will use our resource strategically to engage where we can to influence supply chain impacts.

The People's Plan called for:

"The creation of a series of Marine National Parks, using existing national park structures and incorporating currently protected areas. These would be designated as 'no-take zones' and be a mix of both coastal and off-shore sites, chosen to increase biodiversity and reduce fishing impacts in designated areas.

They should be overseen by the scientific community to monitor impacts of land and sea-based pollution and fishing demand on fish stocks and marine health. This monitoring should be funded in a blended way by governments, NGOs, the academic research community and the private sector fishing industry [to support industry sustainability], and managed as an independent local authority with a remit to increase biodiversity in the area by 30% by 2030."

RSPB Response: Partial support

The RSPB partially supports this action. We agree with the need to have a robust, effective network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to increase biodiversity, protect fish stocks and recover seabed habitats, underpinned by regulation and consistent management. But we are cautious of the term 'Marine National Park' in achieving this, given we have existing mechanisms in place to deliver MPAs. The creation of new mechanisms has the potential to result in yet more delays for action for nature through the creation of new policies or consultations. In addition, the vast majority of National Parks on land are neither designated primarily for nature conservation, nor bucking the trend of the loss of nature seen in the wider landscape. That said, we are supportive of proposals for at least one new National Park in Scotland by 2026, which could be a coastal and marine National Park. We think that all National Parks in Scotland - new and existing - must be supported and empowered to deliver more for nature.

The RSPB considers MPAs to be the key delivery tool in achieving Good Environmental Status at sea (if managed and enforced effectively) and strongly support the need to go beyond existing designation to

ensure better protection and renewal of UK seas, including the commitments to deliver Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) or No Take Zones.

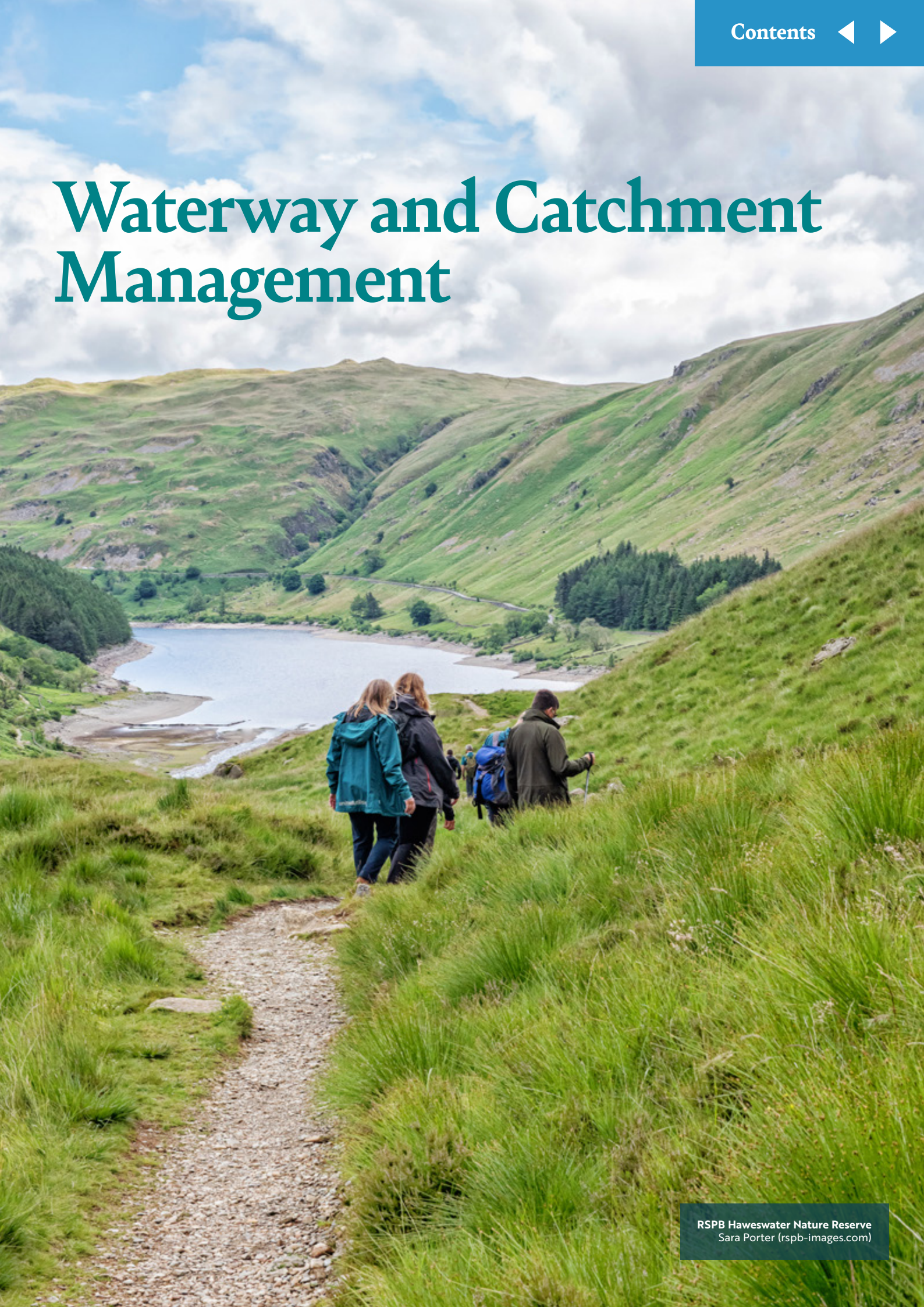
The RSPB is calling for the gaps within the network to be filled in order to ensure the network delivers for wildlife. This includes the designation of protected sites for seabirds, as well as significant blue carbon features, building climate resilience into the network. Key to this is the need to undertake a sufficiency review of Special Protection Areas (SPA), which remains outstanding for at least 49 marine birds. It is imperative we strengthen the MPA network for seabirds as well as ensuring it is truly coherent and complete, through inclusion of key foraging areas for cliff nesting seabirds where gaps remain across the UK.

In addition to ensuring the network contains 'the best bits for nature' it will achieve little to protect or renew wildlife if not well managed. Many of the current designated sites remain inadequately protected to halt biodiversity decline, with damaging activity continuing to take place across large areas, particularly in offshore waters. In particular we welcome the people's call to monitor protected areas, alongside effectively resourcing this. Currently only 13% of sites have full monitoring in place and all but one offshore MPA designated for seabed features experienced bottom trawling and dredging between 2015 and 2018.

We welcome the call to action aimed at NGOs, which calls for us to support research and education around protected areas – we will, of course, use our network of seabird reserves as a gateway to talking about marine protections.

Atlantic puffin
Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

Waterway and Catchment Management



RSPB Haweswater Nature Reserve
Sara Porter (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Use their expertise about what supports the renewal of nature to get people involved in 'Citizen Science' projects and foster community ownership of their spaces for nature.
- Campaign for access to clean water and assist with the research into impacts and solutions.

In response to this, we will work with partners and on our own nature reserves to expand opportunities to get more people involved in citizen science projects that help identify problems facing freshwater environments and the best solutions to fix them. We will also use our reserves to continue to explore landscape scale nature-based solutions that contribute to improving water quality (e.g. RSPB Haweswater). In addition, we will continue to advocate for legally binding water management frameworks and the scaling up of nature-based solutions for addressing water pollution, flooding, and drought.

The People's Plan called for:

"The urgent restoration of all rivers and wetlands to a healthy ecological status, driven by a Water Management Framework with incentives for compliance and penalties for non-compliance (based on the polluter pays principle). Monitoring, maintenance and accountability for this framework should be held by the Environment Agency/Natural Resources Wales/NIEA/SEPA or other relevant bodies."

RSPB Response: Support

We agree that a UK wide water management framework that protects the health of our waterways is imperative for protecting nature. We also agree that overall health of waterways should be the focal point, to ensure holistic action to protect and renew all aspects of freshwater environments. We note that this currently exists in all four UK countries, where the EU-derived Water Framework Directive was transposed into domestic legislation. Retaining this mechanism across all countries of the UK will allow for cross-border management and water body protection.

We also note that despite this framework already being in place for decades, a large proportion of UK waterways are in poor ecological condition. We think that this failure is primarily due to insufficient resourcing of the agencies responsible for implementing the framework (Environment Agency/ Natural Resources Wales/Northern Ireland Environment Agency/Scottish Environment Protection Agency). We agree that it is essential to appropriately fund these agencies to ensure they can fully implement, monitor, and regulate the water management framework and achieve the desired outcomes for protecting nature.

There is also an opportunity for the framework to go even further, by integrating its objectives and approach into the development of any future land use frameworks. This will help to ensure that decisions about the way we use land also consider the potential impacts or opportunities for water health.

The RSPB will continue to support this call by advocating for legally binding water management frameworks in each of the UK countries, backed by robust and holistic targets for overall health of water bodies.

The People's Plan called for:

"[Collaborative action to deliver] Significant ecological health improvements to river catchments based on long term, legally-binding targets, with repercussions for any targets not met. Partners [local authorities, landowners, communities, water companies and government agencies] need to develop a shared masterplan for renewal that includes improved sewage management and treatment, eliminating harmful chemicals especially in non-essential roles, improved agricultural practices to reduce run-off to rivers, reducing flooding and which are focused on nature-based solutions."

RSPB Response: Support

We strongly support this call for collaboration. There are existing structures in place (such as river basin management plans and Catchment Based Approach partnerships) that could be appropriately resourced and scaled up to deliver this.

We think that far more leadership and accountability is needed to successfully drive catchment-based partnerships and approaches. This role could be played by water utility providers or by appropriately resourced government agencies. Without this leadership and accountability, catchment-based collectives are unlikely to succeed.

We also agree that nature-based solutions are an underutilised tool for preventing and mitigating the effects of pollution, flooding, and drought. Scaling up nature-based solutions to these problems is imperative for adapting to rapidly increasing climate risks.

The RSPB proudly participates in catchment-wide partnerships that support collaborative action for the protection and renewal of freshwater environments. We will continue to participate in catchment-wide collaboration to address water health issues and scale up our participation where there are opportunities to go further. We will also work with these partners and on our own reserves to expand opportunities to get more people involved in citizen science projects that help identify problems facing freshwater environments and the best solutions to fix them.

We will also continue to advocate for policy change that enables scaling up the use of nature-based solutions for addressing water pollution, flooding, and drought. We will also continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of nature-based solutions by developing them on our reserves and measuring the impact to water environments.

The People's Plan called for:

"A long-term national strategy to create a wastewater system that [reduces the risk of sewage entering our natural environment] and supports nature's restoration and renewal by upholding relevant frameworks and standards.

The delivery of this should be overseen by a publicly representative independent body (established by central or devolved governments), with investigative powers to inspect, impose and enforce criminal [and financial] sanctions upon polluters in ways that raise funds for investment in infrastructure."

RSPB Response: Support

We agree that ageing and failing sewage infrastructure that is leading to pollution needs to be replaced as a matter of urgency. We also agree that countries should have long-term strategies to ensure investment in managing sewage is used to best effect. However, we think it is important to take a broad perspective on what should replace this infrastructure. Simply reinvesting in an extensive sewage network made up of grey infrastructure is inefficient, carbon intensive, and may not be resilient in the face of increasing climate risks (like flooding).

If preventing sewage pollution is considered holistically and as part of a model of integrated water management, green infrastructure options such as nature-based solutions (like sustainable urban drainage systems in our towns and cities - SuDS – green roofs, urban wetlands, and rain gardens etc.) are potentially a more efficient and effective use of funds. Such nature-based solutions also have benefits for flooding, water resource protection, biodiversity and human wellbeing as well. This also links well with the previous action in the Plan.

We also think that action on pollution needs to go beyond dealing with sewage pollution and address the other significant sources of pollution that are causing equal and, in some cases, even more damage. In particular, we think that decreasing pollution from agriculture needs urgent prioritisation if progress is to be made.

We don't think that a new, independent body needs to be established. Water management is already complex with a multitude of actors and stakeholders involved, so adding a new body into the mix may well just increase complexity and inefficiencies in the system. Instead, we think that success can be achieved by appropriately resourcing existing responsible agencies so that they can properly monitor and enforce compliance with regulations.

The RSPB will continue to explore landscape-scale nature-based solutions that contribute to improving water quality and overall water health, for example through our work at Haweswater in the Lake District.

We will continue to advocate for policy change to secure clean water and hold governments to account for failures that result in water pollution.

The People's Plan called for:

"All household water usage to be valued [and metered] and the consequences of misuse recognised [because it will be measured and paid for by the consumer directly]."

RSPB Response: Support

We agree that there needs to be widespread recognition of the value of freshwater and the importance of using it wisely. Reconnecting people to the vital role that water plays in their wellbeing is a crucial step in changing behaviour.

We think that expanding the use of metering and socially appropriate financial incentives/ disincentives is positive as these are key tools to help people understand their water-use and take steps to reduce it. We also support behaviour change measures to stop pollution happening at home.

However, we think that domestic water-use is only one part of the picture for water resources. We think that water efficiency and water resource protection requires broader action, with businesses and other non-household users also needing to take more responsibility for using water wisely. We also think that regulators need to be better and monitoring water abstraction and ensuring compliance with regulations. This is really important as non-household water use is a significant driver of over-abstraction of water (for instance the agricultural and energy sectors) and non-household demand is predicted to grow.

We will continue to advocate for policy changes that promote water efficiency and water resource protection across all sectors.

We will also continue to help connect people to freshwater environments on our reserves, and raise awareness of the valuable role clean and plentiful water plays in environmental protection and renewal as well as human wellbeing.

We will investigate how catchment and landscape scale nature-based solutions can help communities mitigate and adapt to increasing water scarcity.

RSPB Newport Wetlands Nature Reserve, South Wales
Our Media (rspb-images.com)

Local Access to Nature

Trainees working at Waterloo Millennium Green
Eleanor Bentall (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Work with local communities and local authorities to identify underused spaces that can be used for [provision of local access to nature].
- Invest in community mobilisation and provide seed funding to groups to kick-start locally driven projects.
- Examine how to provide greater access to nature and properties.
- Establish and publicise a database of local projects that are working towards improving the future of nature to inspire people to action and demonstrate the change that can be achieved by local action.

We have provided seed-funding through the Save Our Wild Isles Community Fund, in partnership with Aviva and WWF-UK to support locally driven projects. We are also actively fundraising (in partnership with the National Trust and WWF-UK), for a project to engage with local communities to save and restore nature in the UK, through identification and training of local leaders, helping to build community capacity to influence local decision making, and establish a network of local nature spaces. We will commit to providing a number of free access passes to our reserves this summer. A database of projects was created for the People's Assembly for Nature and can be viewed on the website.

The People's Plan called for:

"A network of local biodiverse and health focused green spaces owned and run by the people, for the people. We call for local people to be involved in initiating this process in alliance with local charities and wildlife NGOs so that ownership starts with the community and we create areas that are effective 'wildlife corridors', enhance biodiversity, enable more local food production and bring communities closer to nature."

RSPB Response: Support

Community green spaces are vital to nature and people, not only as spaces for wildlife and for recreation. Green spaces also contribute to tackling the climate crisis by acting as nature-based solutions that can store carbon and get us closer to net zero. We therefore support the call to action for a network of green spaces that communities are deeply rooted in and are rich in nature. This can be achieved by transforming underused spaces, connecting spaces together and improving existing areas through wildlife-friendly practices. In doing so, communities will see the benefits of better community cohesion and connection to the natural world, wherever they may live.

There are already many communities who own and/or look after their local green spaces, from parks – big or small, to community orchards and allotments.

To meet this recommendation, this network of community spaces needs to expand, along with bolstering the hard work of organisations who are supporting communities, including showing communities how they can take ownership of spaces where appropriate.

To achieve this, we recognise the importance of local community groups and NGOs, but there should also be a strong emphasis placed on local authorities. Despite under-resourcing and competing priorities, they must fulfil their legal obligations and commitments to nature and communities. This will require the collaboration between appropriate NGO groups and organisations to support local authorities to build their confidence and capability, whilst lobbying central government into supporting funding gaps.

In developing local nature-rich green spaces, the RSPB will where it can, work with the organisations already specialising in supporting communities. We will look to build on our well-established programmes of work and partnerships to support communities through a range of activity, including many of those raised in the call to action; digital resources, face to face volunteer advisory networks, initial funding and promoting the work of communities across the UK and the impact that their actions can have for wildlife and people.

The People's Plan called for:

"Legislation to require a minimum of 12% of all new build infrastructure [land area] and retrofits [of public places] are given over to nature and supporting biodiversity, and to ensure that people are able to access nature every day (e.g. time outside during curriculum and employment.) The legislation should be informed by relevant expertise (e.g. ecologists working with engineers) and ongoing investment and management should be expertise driven. Doing this will improve the environment and bring it to the forefront of people's lives."

RSPB Response: Partial support

The RSPB fully supports the intent behind this action, but believes it needs to be tailored to both reflect and push for ambitious biodiversity net gain / biodiversity enhancement requirements (i.e. leaving nature in a better state after development) in each of the four UK countries. For example, a requirement to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) comes into effect in England from November 2023, and a requirement to deliver Biodiversity Enhancement is set out in Scotland's National Planning Framework 4, adopted in February 2023 (although this requirement remains to be clarified in guidance relating to larger developments). Wales is currently consulting on the principle of Net Biodiversity Benefit with no set % as yet. In NI, the principle is being discussed, but not yet defined or consulted on. In England, the mechanism for securing BNG from Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects is different to that for securing BNG from commercial and residential developments.

These varying requirements are not necessarily intended to result in the setting aside of a percentage of space within infrastructure or retrofit developments for biodiversity, but rather to ensure that developments' impacts on biodiversity are properly addressed and that biodiversity enhancement or a percentage increase in biodiversity is secured from the developments, whether that be on or off site.

Through its work to influence government policy in all four UK countries, the RSPB will continue to advocate for maximum biodiversity enhancement to be secured and delivered over the longest possible timeframes as an integral requirement of the planning development management process – and this call from the People's Plan strengthens this. The RSPB will also continue to advocate to link people with nature for health and wellbeing purposes.

Volunteer gardeners, Railways Gardens Community Garden
Rob Carmier (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called for:

"A legal right to equitable access to nature [as a human right] and for this to be supported by clean air legislation and funding to realise it. This will support people to [connect with] value and protect nature and improve people's well-being, health and happiness."

RSPB Response: Support

We strongly support the principle of equitable, universal, responsible access to nature. The RSPB is part of BirdLife International's '1 Planet 1 Right' campaign to have the universal right to a healthy planet affirmed by the United Nations at the highest level. We recognise that improving access to nature is not just about extending the "right to roam," but also creating and managing places for nature in our urban and peri-urban environments. At the local level, the RSPB is active in a number of cities to strengthen access to nature, including Glasgow and Cardiff.

We believe universal access to nature needs to be supported by the actions identified in the People's Plan and elsewhere – to properly implement existing regulation, to put strong targets in place and to resource key bodies and regulators to uphold the law and make progress towards these targets.

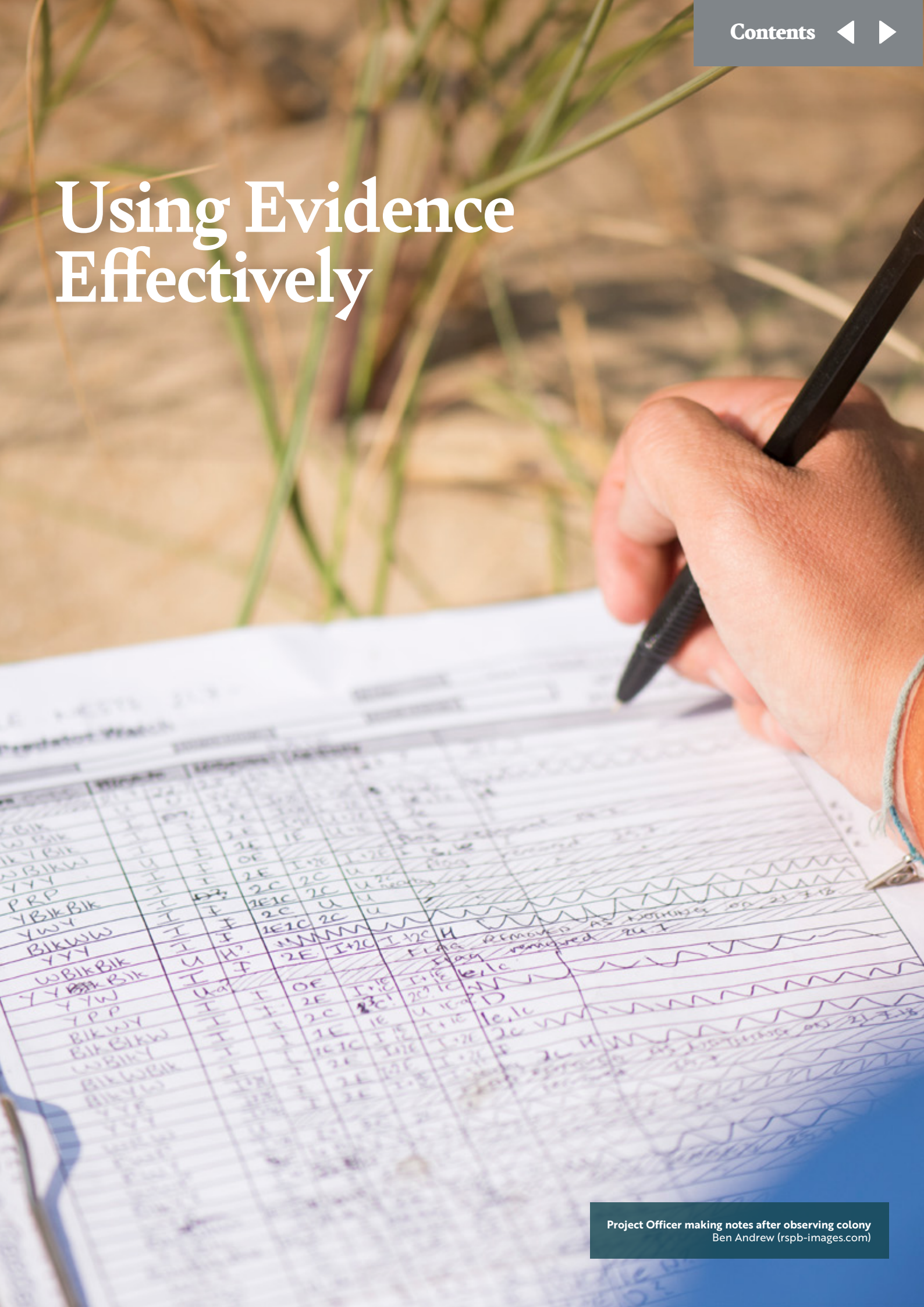
We welcome the call in the Plan for NGOs to help improve access to the countryside with our own assets and also invest more in bringing nature into urban areas. In general, our focus when it comes to purchasing nature reserves is predominantly for their species and habitat potential, followed by an aim to

make the most of the potential for visitors. The cost of purchasing land in cities is so high that we could not afford to do this sufficient justice and truly improve access to nature via this route. That said, we do work with others to set up projects on land already in the right place – much like our work in Glasgow and Cardiff, mentioned above – and we strongly support the call of the assembly to create local green spaces 'by the people, for the people'.

In terms of how we support more people to access our nature reserves, we are committing to provide free access to some of our reserves this summer (going beyond the existing reserves which are free to visit) – further details to follow in the weeks ahead as we confirm access arrangements. We are also developing a proposal for free access for all under 24s. We would of course welcome wider, structural initiatives that support better access to 'wilder' nature e.g. through improved public transport provision.

Tree planting, Dove Gardens community garden initiative
Rob Carmier (rspb-images.com)

Using Evidence Effectively



Project Officer making notes after observing colony
Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

The People's Plan called on NGOs to:

- Lead on providing high quality factual information to the public.
- Work with natural and social scientists to produce a growing evidence/knowledge of why nature matters and make this more accessible and understandable.

In response, we commit to increasing the open sharing of our own scientific work and its conservation impacts through our 'Centre for Conservation Science' pages, via a planned new publication repository. We also commit to ensuring the information in our next 'State of Nature' report is as accessible as possible to a wide audience.

The People's Plan called for:

"Fact-based locally/regionally relevant information about nature to be more readily available and positively promoted to the UK public so that public knowledge of the state of UK nature is deepened."

RSPB Response: Support

Nature organisations across the UK have collaborated on a science-led report on the State of Nature every few years since 2013. The next State of Nature report will be published this autumn and will provide the UK public with the most up to date information about the state of our shared wildlife. We commit to ensuring the information contained in the report is accessible to a wide audience, so that people across the UK can deepen their own understanding of the challenges facing UK wildlife and share this with family and friends. We also want them to be able to use this to challenge those in power to take action for nature.

This report will present results for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but the way in which key existing data sets are captured makes it difficult to present the results at a more local level at present. We are actively working on how we can make more local data about the state of UK wildlife available in future.

The People's Plan called for:

"A validated, transparent and accessible evidence base, drawing on both public and private research which must be used to inform decisions and policies impacting on renewing and protecting nature in the UK so that we have confidence decisions will have the most appropriate impact."

RSPB Response: Support

This is a call to UK Governments and other actors to adopt evidence-led approaches to informing decisions, policies, and practices that affect nature, and to ensure that this evidence is appropriately reviewed, transparent and accessible. This approach is essential to ensure limited resources are targeted to actions that are likely to have the best impact. With a proud history of commitment to evidence-based conservation, the RSPB strongly supports this position. Actors should respond to this call by:

i. ensuring that public research funds are directed towards providing peer reviewed evidence on causes of and solutions to the nature crisis;

ii. ensuring that appropriate and urgent actions that can be taken by UK actors to meet obligations of the Global Biodiversity Framework are evidence based;

iii. ensuring that evidence-led strategies for decision-making for nature are adopted comprehensively by public bodies, following and developing the example set by Natural England;

iv. ensuring that data and peer reviewed scientific publications are accessible to all under the principles of Open Access publication and Open and FAIR data sharing, whilst maximising equity in publication access;

v. strengthening long-term financial support for the often volunteer-led schemes and supporting infrastructure which secure collection and curation of the species, habitat and wider environmental data that allow us to track the state of nature in the UK and its responses to our actions;

vi. ensuring that bodies with decision-making responsibility for nature use, contribute to, and support open access repositories of evidence that guide environmental decision-making such as www.conservationevidence.com, the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence and Conservation Measures.

vii. ensuring the impact of actions is evaluated as the basis for adaptive management.

We are willing to strengthen our scientific advocacy in support of all the above outcomes. In addition, as an evidence-based conservation charity we will aim to practice what we preach through the work of our Centre for Conservation Science (CfCS), whether through generation of new knowledge or review and synthesis of existing information. We commit to increasing the open sharing of our own scientific work and its conservation impacts through the CfCS pages of a relaunched website and a planned new publication repository. In addition, we will seek to strengthen the extent to which our own conservation policy, advocacy, communications, and practice is evidence-led. This includes the routine informing, testing, evaluation, and improvement of our own conservation interventions across our nature reserves and in the wider landscapes in which we work in the UK and overseas, and sharing our experience and insights with others, especially the global BirdLife partnership.

The People's Plan called for:

"The revision of the language used by experts, policy and decision makers in communicating to the public about nature. By focusing on renewal and not just restoration, we are looking to the future and not to the past."

RSPB Response: Support

Language, and choice of words, are obviously critical in communications. Language choice has the potential to exclude, disengage and even intimidate audiences by obscuring meaning through unfamiliar or highly technical vocabulary. We acknowledge that the environment sector has in the past, and sometimes still does, fail to achieve and maximise inclusivity through language choice. This can be caused by carelessness, failure to consider and understand the needs of audiences, and even sometimes deliberately, to retain an aura of exclusivity around technical expertise. Considerable efforts have been made in recent years to address this, particularly by RSPB communications colleagues, but this call to action is a welcome reminder that the job is not yet complete and there remains significant room for improvement.

On the specific use of the term 'Renew' rather than 'Restore', we accept the suggestion, recognise that the term points more firmly towards the future, rather to recreation of the past, and will encourage wider use from now on. It will take time to 'spread the word'. Much of what we do focuses on halting and reversing declines in nature caused by people. There is a tendency to then forget that we are not trying to move the world backwards generally. Using the word 'renewal' we think captures the need to 'bring back' nature, and to focus on building a better relationship with nature and a better world to come.

On maximising inclusivity via language more generally, we will use this call to action as a rally to more vigilance and will try to shift organisational culture towards better and more inclusive practice. It is important to note that this will not simply be a matter of rapping knuckles whenever technical language is used, and instructing people to find more widely understood vocabularies. Nature conservation is a difficult, highly complex and sometimes very technical challenge. It spans politics, policy, science, art, economics and social disciplines. There will be times when our communications must reach multiple audiences, from the very general to the highly specialised. To achieve the precision needed whilst retaining inclusivity is and will remain a major challenge. One way to begin may be to encourage RSPB colleagues to see and work with the tensions, between achieving both technical accuracy and inclusive accessibility in our language, as creative tensions, and an everyday challenge that we must all, technical experts and communications specialists alike, approach in a spirit of collaboration and collective creativity.

Survey of plant rich field margin
Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Protecting habitats, saving species and helping to end the nature and climate emergency.

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