



CYMRU

# Priorities for Nature in Wales

2026-2030

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**From our mountain tops to our coastlines, Wales is home to spectacular natural beauty – it’s a source of national pride. Our sea stacks, carved from crashing waves, are home to bustling seabird colonies.**

Birdsong fills our western Atlantic Oak woodland, a habitat rarer than tropical rainforests, while Peregrine Falcons soar and stoop in pursuit of prey over our rugged mountain ranges. Without Welsh wildlife, our landscapes simply wouldn’t be so rich. Yet, nature is in crisis; the evidence is stark.

The 2023 State of Nature report<sup>1</sup> found that wildlife in Wales is in serious decline, with one in six species at risk of extinction in Wales, including plants and animals such as Fen Orchid, Water Vole and Sand Lizard.

## Welsh wildlife has decreased on average by 20% since 1994

Many species are now found at fewer locations in Wales than previously, while lots of Welsh bird populations are getting smaller. Swifts are regular summer visitors to Wales, yet their populations have plummeted 76% since 1995.

Experts consider that the Curlew could be lost from Wales as a breeding species in as little as eight years without concerted action. Black Grouse has seen its range contract to a few key sites in North Wales, and other species at risk include Merlin, Wood Warbler and Lapwing.

Seabirds like the Manx Shearwater and Gannet, for which Wales has global responsibility, are facing growing pressures from poorly sited offshore development. Our rivers are polluted, with less than half meeting good ecological status, and only a fraction of our protected areas are in good condition. We need action to recover nature now.



<sup>1</sup>State of Nature - [stateofnature.org.uk/countries/wales/](https://stateofnature.org.uk/countries/wales/)



## We’re in a nature emergency

Following the Senedd declaration of the nature emergency in 2021, the Welsh Government committed to the new Global Biodiversity Framework. It’s a promise to take urgent action to reverse biodiversity loss and put nature on a path to recovery by 2030. The next Welsh Government and Senedd will see us through to this milestone date. Our manifesto focuses on the actions urgently needed to double down and deliver on this commitment.

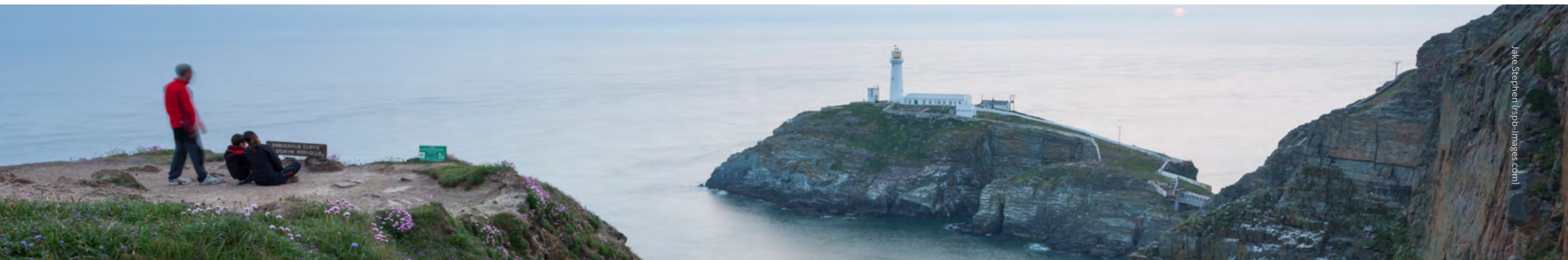
Delivering this isn’t just a necessity for our declining wildlife – it’s crucial for the people of Wales, too. Nature is our best ally in the fight against climate change, helping us to both reduce net emissions causing global heating, and to adapt to its worsening impacts. A healthy natural environment, with ecosystems that are capable of drawing down and storing carbon, holding back flood water, regulating temperature and improving air quality, will benefit society as a whole.

## For nature and for people

We know that in Wales, people highly value nature and green spaces. When asked in a 2025 survey<sup>2</sup>, 77% said they would like to see more nature thriving in their local green spaces and 80% felt that time spent in nature was important to their health and wellbeing.

When asked about action for nature, over three quarters (76%) said they believed that current and future governments need to take more action to tackle nature loss. For the next Welsh Government, investing in nature’s recovery must be a priority to deliver for the people and wildlife of Wales. This document is a call to action for the next Welsh Government – to guide decisions and point to levers, including policy and legislative changes, which are necessary if Wales is to respond to the nature crisis in time.

<sup>2</sup>Survey carried out by Beaufort Research Limited between 3 and 23 March 2025. A total of 1,000 interviews were completed online, with the results being representative of the adult population (aged 16+) in Wales



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## Investing in nature's future

Invest in nature and jobs to deliver for nature, including jobs in Welsh Government, relevant public bodies, such as Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the third sector.

### Support private finance for nature restoration delivery

Investing in nature is investing in people and the economy. The latest Global Risk Report<sup>3</sup> from the World Economic Forum places climate change impacts (extreme weather events) and biodiversity loss at the top of the list of severe risks over the next 10 years.

The socio-economic imperative to tackle climate change and restore nature – underpinning sustainable food production, protecting us from the worst impacts of climate change – is clear, but sadly so is the pattern of chronic under-investment in our natural environment and the institutions we depend on to protect it.

The nature funding gap demands a substantial increase in public investment, but in the current economic climate, is too great to be addressed through public investment alone. The Welsh Government has a critical role to play in enabling high-quality, responsible private investment to deliver nature's recovery in Wales.

### Investing in Welsh Government and NRW's ability to deliver for nature

Since its establishment in 2013, NRW's budget has been repeatedly and severely cut<sup>4</sup> with the impact falling disproportionately on environmental protection and nature conservation functions. This under-investment is shown starkly in the state of our rivers and protected areas; it is not compatible with the ambition – and need – to restore the Welsh environment. The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) is the Welsh Government's greatest opportunity, working with farmers, to influence and support nature positive land management – maintaining and restoring habitats and species in tandem with sustainable food production.

The Pathways to 2030<sup>5</sup> report estimates the costs of key actions needed for nature's recovery across land, freshwaters and sea. Many of these are dependent on increased capacity and expertise in the public sector – particularly NRW, Welsh Government and Local Authorities – for their delivery. The report suggests that an additional investment of £438 million per annum is needed for nature (this includes a £300m uplift in funding for farmers under the SFS).

### An investment strategy and framework for responsible private investment in nature's recovery

Investing in nature is investing in people and the economy. The next Welsh Government should develop an investment strategy and create a high-quality, robust regulatory framework to support private investment in nature's recovery that secures benefits for local communities and wider society.

Private investment in nature restoration, coupled with an increase in public investment, will be needed for Wales to deliver its biodiversity targets, and to provide the nature-based solutions to climate change that society desperately needs. It is essential the Welsh Government provides clarity for landowners and removes barriers to private investment.

### Green Jobs and Skills to deliver nature's recovery

Investing in nature is also an investment in the jobs of the future. Nature's restoration needs a work force, and a Nature Service has been created in Wales to connect people and communities throughout Wales with nature-focused green jobs and training.

The next Welsh Government should formalise the role of The Nature Service. This would help meet ambitions to improve skills and training opportunities and create sustainable long-term jobs as part of the green transition. It would also ensure we have the capacity and skilled workforce required to deliver nature restoration in Wales.

RSPB Cymru research found the potential for approximately 7,000 new, nature-based green jobs linked to nature restoration<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Global Risks Report 2025 | World Economic Forum [weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2025/](https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2025/)

<sup>4</sup> Safeguarding standards - Why Wales should lead the way [unchecked.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Report-Safeguarding-standards-why-Wales-should-lead-the-way.pdf](https://www.unchecked.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Report-Safeguarding-standards-why-Wales-should-lead-the-way.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Wales Environment Link 2024 - [waleslink.org/?s=pathways+to+2030](https://waleslink.org/?s=pathways+to+2030)

<sup>6</sup> Rayment, M 2020 Developing a Green Workforce in Wales – Estimating the Scale of the Need and Opportunity [natureservice.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/RSPBCymruEstimatingtheScaleReportNovember2020ENGI.pdf](https://www.natureservice.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/RSPBCymruEstimatingtheScaleReportNovember2020ENGI.pdf)

## Embedding ambition and accountability to drive environmental recovery

Following the enactment of the Environment Act Wales, the Welsh Government must urgently set targets to drive nature's recovery.

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) Bill will be one of the final pieces of legislation passed by the sixth Senedd, but its delivery rests with the next Welsh Government and Senedd.

Swift implementation of this vital legislation is critical to securing ambition and accountability for a healthier environment and to restore biodiversity.

### Office for Environmental Governance Wales

The new Office for Environmental Governance Wales must be brought forward promptly, in line with an ambitious transition plan, so that the new body is operational within 18 months of the new Senedd, and able to hold Government and other public bodies to account for their delivery of environmental law.

### Legally binding targets for nature restoration in the first year

There is huge urgency to get targets in place to drive action and investment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in line with the global 2030 mission<sup>7</sup>. It is essential that the secondary legislation containing ambitious nature targets is brought forward swiftly in the seventh Senedd.

The targets must be robust enough to enable the Senedd to hold Government to account for increasing species abundance, reducing species' extinction risk, restoring quality habitats and securing good condition, as well as increasing the area of land and sea protected and effectively managed for nature.

The suite of targets must include both long and short-term measures, providing clear goals to work towards as well as milestones to mark progress along the way. They must be supported by funded action plans and monitoring programmes to drive urgent action during the Senedd term, as well as providing a firm platform for action to endure into the future.

<sup>7</sup> [www.cbd.int/gbf/vision](http://www.cbd.int/gbf/vision)

## Securing our protected areas and reforming our national parks

Ensure our best sites for nature are the best they can be – on land and at sea.

A high-profile global biodiversity target, which the Welsh Government has committed to deliver, is the '30 by 30' target. This means 30% of land and freshwater, coasts and seas must be protected and effectively managed by 2030. This must be reflected in Wales' suite of statutory targets and backed by investment, as well as further new legislation.

### Invest in our protected areas for nature

The monitoring and management of our protected areas has been critically under-resourced for decades and as a result the wildlife in many of them, on land and at sea, is not thriving. Protected areas are the jewels in the crown and, if managed effectively, can support the regeneration of wildlife throughout our countryside and seas.

Well-managed protected areas can also pay back towards investment through the ecosystem services and wellbeing benefits they provide. Proper resourcing and strengthened legal duties are needed to fast-track assessments of the condition of existing sites, the designation of new sites and their ongoing monitoring and management if Wales is to deliver on its 30 by 30 promise.



Martin Clift (rspb-images.com)

### New legislation to reform National Parks to deliver for nature

Covering approximately 20% land area in Wales, our National Parks have enormous potential to drive nature's recovery, providing benefits well beyond their boundaries – but they lack adequate tools and means to do so.

New legislation is needed to reform the statutory purposes, duties and governance arrangements to ensure all parties within these spectacular landscapes play their part in nature's revival.



Newt by Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)



Curlew by Jake Stephen (rspb-images.com)

## Nature positive development

**Nature must be prioritised when selecting new sites for development in order to ensure our wildlife is protected. New built development must also result in positive outcomes for nature during and after building – for the benefit of nature, as well as the people living in and using the new developments.**

The planning system presents an excellent opportunity to deliver for nature through implementation of robust, nature positive policy both at project level and at scale. We want all planning and development to be nature positive in the future.

### Securing biodiversity benefits through development

Net Benefit for Biodiversity, set out in planning policy, is a means of securing private investment in nature's recovery. It should provide a vital boost to biodiversity in Wales, requiring developers to leave biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems in a significantly better state than before.

However, the policy in its current form does not provide certainty for nature or developers, meaning a case-by-case approach that inevitably results in patchy and inconsistent outcomes for nature.

Policy and legislation need to be strengthened to deliver quantifiable, measurable and mandatory benefits for nature as part of and commensurate to every development proposal in Wales.

### Policy development for nature-friendly building and design

Nature-friendly design and building should be mandated in all new developments. Existing approaches, which lack a statutory onus on developers to deliver, have not resulted in the required increase in nature-inclusive development needed in Wales.

A new biodiversity chapter added to the Building Regulations should require all new buildings to include provision for biodiversity – such as suitably designed and located Swift bricks (which also benefit other struggling species such as House Martins and Sparrows), bat boxes/slates, bee bricks, Hedgehog highways and green roofs. An amendment to Planning Policy Wales (PPW) is needed to require all new developments to embed wider nature-friendly design, alongside nature-friendly building.



### Renewable energy in harmony with nature

The ramp up of renewables is essential to ensure a liveable planet, and cheaper, cleaner energy, but this must not come at the expense of nature. Developments of renewables continue to be proposed in locations that pose high risk to already under-pressure bird species, and other wildlife and protected sites.

In a nature and climate emergency, we need to develop renewable energy – both on land and at sea – in harmony with nature. This requires strategic planning and an understanding of where important sites for wildlife are, as well as the ecological impacts of different renewable technologies.

This must be secured through the implementation of a holistic spatial approach that plans coherently for the accelerated delivery of renewable energy, ensuring that key wildlife sites are avoided, that overall and cumulative impacts of development are understood and mitigated, and that all projects deliver nature enhancement.

Rigorous post-construction monitoring and enforcement must also be prioritised to ensure that proposed enhancements are delivered throughout the sector.

## Protect our seas and seabirds

**Protect, invest and plan for the long-term effective management of important sites at sea for our marine wildlife.**

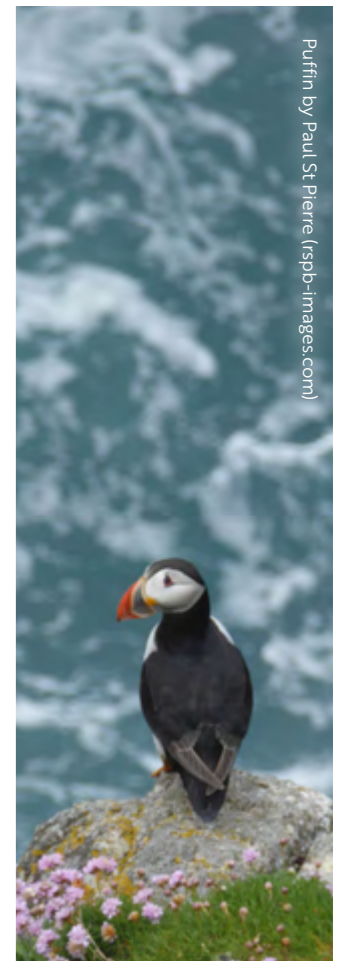
In June 2025, Natural Resources Wales published<sup>8</sup> new condition assessments for a total of 85 features designated in Welsh Marine Protected Areas. Of these, 47 were in unfavourable condition (55%) and six were in unknown condition (7%).

Seabirds are the most threatened bird group in the world, and a shocking 62% of UK seabird species are in decline. Seabirds are a key indicator of the state of our overall marine environment. It is clear that urgent action and significant change is needed to address the status of the marine environment.

### This should prioritise:

- **An uplift in funding for monitoring and management of marine protected sites**, informed by the condition assessments of Welsh Marine Protected Areas and the long-awaited Welsh Seabird Conservation Strategy.
- **The creation of Marine Protected Areas**, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and Marine Conservation Zones, to address gaps in the protections for seabirds and other marine wildlife and habitats, as well as contributing to '30 by 30'.
- **Marine planning to reduce the threats seabirds face**. Delivering conservation action for seabirds whilst they are at sea is challenging – it's much more effective to prioritise prevention of damage. Therefore, carefully planning how and where human activities (such as offshore energy developments) take place is vital.
- **Investment in marine surveys** to improve the understanding of seabirds and their prey species, and to inform spatial marine planning and conservation. This investment is long overdue, with gaps in knowledge a frequent barrier to informed decision-making about marine issues.
- **A long-term solution to ensuring the biosecurity of seabird islands**, keeping seabird colonies free from invasive mammalian predators. This will allow more chicks to survive to adulthood and help counter declining populations.
- **Introduce Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)** for large fishing boats to ensure the impacts of fishing activities on seabirds, their food sources and other sealife are better monitored and understood.

<sup>8</sup> [naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-blogs/news/further-action-needed-to-protect-wales-s-marine-protected-areas/](https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-blogs/news/further-action-needed-to-protect-wales-s-marine-protected-areas/)



# Delivering for nature through land use

## Ensure we use and manage our land in a way that drives nature's recovery.

With over 90% of Wales farmed and forested, how we use and manage our land has a huge impact on nature. To enable nature recovery in the Welsh countryside, we need a strategic approach to land use that balances nature, food and action for climate change. We also need a suite of effective incentives and regulations to help farmers and other land managers meet our biodiversity commitments.

### Establish a Land Use Framework for Wales

The framework must address the drivers of unsustainable land use and land use change, as well as supporting integrated land use decisions at a spatial level.

Welsh land must be utilised as effectively as possible to meet a range of interconnected challenges, including restoring nature, tackling climate change, storing drinking water, reducing flood risk and producing food and timber sustainably. The Framework would promote nature-based solutions as an effective means of securing multiple benefits through land use.



Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

### Delivery of a Sustainable Farming Scheme

The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) enters into force on 1 January 2026. Consequently, the next Government needs to ensure farming's transition to a more sustainable and resilient future and use public money responsibly to deliver multiple public benefits for everyone – key of which is the required contribution to biodiversity (habitats and species) and net zero targets and commitments.



Our media (rspb-images.com)

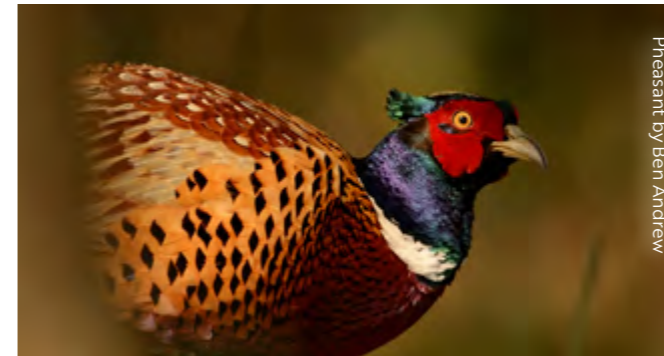
### Ensure the management and expansion of woodlands in Wales is sustainable

This includes ensuring all our ancient semi-natural woodlands are protected and well-managed, as well as delivering the widest range of public benefits alongside commercial forests producing the timber we need for Wales. All new woodlands must be appropriately located and avoid planting on carbon-rich soils and valuable wildlife habitats, with a focus on expanding and connecting our internationally important temperate rainforests.

### Restore, protect and manage peatlands to secure nature and the services they provide

This includes capturing and storing carbon by committing to increase the rate of peatland restoration delivery up to 2030 and beyond.

In addition, the Government should work towards the ambition of all of Wales' peatland to be restored and effectively managed for nature and climate by 2050, with ringfenced funding for peatland restoration to deliver against the target of 45,000 hectares restored. Working with the other UK nations, the sale of horticultural peat must be banned.



Pheasant by Ben Andrew

### Tackling threats to Wales biodiversity from Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

INNS has been identified globally as one of the five primary drivers of biodiversity loss<sup>9</sup>. Increased resourcing of prevention of INNS establishment through robust biosecurity is effective and avoids the much higher reduction or eradication costs.

Invasive non-native trees (self-seeding beyond the boundaries of forestry plantations) should be included within the INNS definition due to their negative impact on native habitats. A costed INNS Strategy for invasive non-native trees should be produced and delivered in partnership with woodland experts and appropriate landowners. It should include taking positive action that will benefit species and habitats, such as peatlands and ancient woodlands, and reduce the continuing costs of removal.

<sup>9</sup> From the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. [ipbes.net/global-assessment](https://ipbes.net/global-assessment)

### Introduce Gamebird Licensing

Over 2 million non-native birds are released every year into the Welsh countryside, without proper controls or oversight. Large-scale releases with no restrictions can damage habitats and harm reptiles, and gamebird management is associated with illegal killing of birds of prey. NRW has advised the Welsh Government to introduce a licensing scheme for the release of Red-legged Partridges and Pheasants. A scheme must be introduced without further delay.

### Commit to addressing water pollution

Ensure water companies and agricultural businesses are effectively regulated and if necessary, enforced against. Ensure water companies are mandated to invest in catchment scale Nature-based Solutions (NbS) that secure benefits for water quality, the environment and nature.

Ensure the Sustainable Farming Scheme enables NbS to secure on-farm improvements to water quality as well as other environmental and social benefits.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

## Nature and our health

### Enabling connection to Nature for Wellbeing and Health

Evidence shows that exposure and meaningful connection to nature can have a profound positive impact on our health and wellbeing. Healthcare in Wales faces multiple challenges and innovative, and especially preventative, approaches are needed to support our services under strain.

### Nature Prescriptions

Nature Prescriptions support the integration of nature connection and nature-based activities into daily life across urban and rural environments. Nature Prescription pilots, launched by RSPB Cymru, are being trialled by GPs and health organisations in Newport and Cardiff. The next Welsh Government should back nature and people by ensuring that connection with nature, through Nature Prescriptions and similar programmes, is encouraged by services across Wales and that nature-rich green spaces are accessible to everyone.



Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)



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

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