

RSPB AGM 2023 Q&A

This document encloses the answers to all questions posed by members in the Q&A box at the RSPB AGM 2023, held on Saturday 14 October 2023 on EventsAir.

Questions have been categorised as follows:

Contents

Theme: AGM:	2
Theme: International	4
Theme: Political engagement	6
Theme: Carbon and the environment	8
Theme: Nest boxes	9
Theme: Policy	10
Theme: Eradication	12
Theme: Land acquisition	14
Theme: Collaboration / Partnerships	15
Theme: Our Reserves and Retail	17
Theme: Our People	20

Each theme begins on a new page. Please either scroll below or click on the heading you wish to view.

Theme: AGM:

Please can the RSPB consider having, on occasions, an AGM which members can attend in person? These were always very enjoyable events in the past.

We are currently discussing the approach to AGM for future years and cannot yet confirm the format for future years. An in-person option will be explored and considered as a part of this process.

Will we have a chance to feedback on the AGM? I would like to provide some suggestions and comments to make the next AGM even better.

A feedback form is due to be sent to all attendees. This will be sent via email.

How does the number attending compare with in-person events?

Moving to an online format in 2020 has made our AGM more accessible to many people and as such, we have seen an uplift in our attendance figures. This years' event followed the same pattern with more attendees joining the online event than we tended to see in person.

A very good and informative AGM. Thank you, but I really miss the face-to-face meeting of earlier years. Is there any chance of having a live AGM in London?

We are currently discussing the approach to the AGM for future years and cannot yet confirm the format. An in-person option will be explored and considered as a part of this process.

In the statement of accounts, there is one section headed 'Research, policy and advisory' and another headed 'Education and inspiring support'. Under which heading does the society's political campaigning come?

Political Campaigning and Mobilisation is included in expense line 'Education and inspiring support' in our Annual Report financial statements.

Board still seems a little lacking in diversity?

Thank you for your question on this important issue. Our commitment to EDI underpins the work we do to save nature. We recognise barriers to accessing nature including recognising that the conservation sector is one of the least ethnically diverse. We're not currently reflective of the communities that we are part of and that there are historical, societal, and institutional barriers that groups can face when accessing nature. We want to work together to remove these barriers and reflect on our role in creating them.

We are currently targeting a number of actions around recruitment, progression and inclusion, including specifically diversifying our recruitment practices.

- Externally we are collaborating with other conservation organisations to achieve meaningful change including signing up to the [WildLife Countryside Link ethnicity route map](#) and the [RACE report](#)

- Internally, as part of our resourcing project to modernise and create more effect and inclusive recruitment practises, we have been testing and trailing a number of interventions designed to attract and support candidates from a wide range of backgrounds and communities.
- These interventions have included trialling open briefings, and more inclusive job descriptions, alternative methods and sites for advertising roles, training and support for hiring managers on reasonable adjustments and alternative methods of assessment.
- Whilst board and senior leadership roles have far fewer and less frequent vacancies, Beccy Speight as CEO and other Senior Leader Colleagues, as hiring managers have been part of our process to trial interventions for board vacancies and roles that have significant strategic and cultural impact. We will continue to progress opportunities to build upon and embed inclusive recruitment practices as vacancies arise in the coming year.

Is there any update on the society's quest for a new patron following Beccy's comments last year? Are we actively seeking a replacement or are we still awaiting advice from the Palace?

The patronage is something that is granted to RSPB by the choice of the Palace and is entirely separate from our legal status (a royal charter body, just like schools, museums, institutes and councils) or from our name. Like many charities, we still await news of a new royal patron following the death of the Queen our previous Patron.

Theme: International

(see below 'Theme: Eradication' for more on Gough)

How do we link in with and work with other member country organisations within BirdLife International? I recently visited France and connected with LRP - a small France based organisation protecting birds. They have a small community and struggle to gather support from the broader French population. How can we help them to develop and grow?

Wildlife crosses borders, as do the things that threaten it – so it's vital that conservation crosses borders too. We're proud to be the UK partner of BirdLife International – the global partnership of national conservation organisations.

We believe that great conservation comes from working together, sharing knowledge and collectively taking responsibility. International work is a cornerstone of what we do, and something we continue to maintain, develop and nurture as we move into the future.

Examples of where we work internationally includes:

- Research and work into the recovery of migrant birds such as Swifts, Turtle Doves and Wood Warblers, with the Birds Without Borders project.
- Conservation and campaigning efforts to save nature on the UK's overseas territories (UKOTs), both on land and at sea.
- Hosting the BirdLife International Marine Programme which includes action on fisheries bycatch to cut the number of seabirds killed by becoming caught on the longlines and gillnets of trawlers and fisheries – this includes the Albatross Task Force Project.
- Work to eradicate non-native invasive species such as rats and mice on the UKOT's and maintain island biosecurity to reduce threats from new invasive species
- Work in Sierra Leone's Gola tropical forest where we are undertaking projects working to reduce rainforest deforestation through the creation of the Gola Rainforest Company which employs rangers to patrol the forest and work with communities to promote the value of the forest and develop sustainable forest friendly livelihoods.
- Working collectively on the continued conservation of globally threatened priority bird species and habitats.

All our work in country is led by our local country partner (usually the BirdLife Partner member for that country). To become a BirdLife Partner member organisations needs to meet key criteria with respect to governance standards and civil society participation.

Through the BirdLife Europe & Central Asia regional office we work with the French BirdLife partner LPO, and we collaborate on projects to protect migrant birds such as curlew and turtle dove.

BirdLife International have recently been highlighting the role of free-roaming domestic cats in killing millions of birds across Europe, while the RSPB has traditionally downplayed this, with it being cited in the Guardian as particularly concerned; about the issue last year. It was good to see that the page on the RSPB website that used to suggest cats are not a problem was changed this year to be less dismissive, but this is just a start. We need to move from misinforming the public to

actively informing them about the effect their pets have on birds. There are continued studies showing the devastating effect of domestic cats on birds and other wildlife here and around the world, such as Pirie, Thomas, Fellowes (2022): the 9.5M pet cats in Great Britain may kill in the region of 160–270 million prey individuals per year. Can we rely on the RSPB to start making the problem of domestic cats a prominent part of its conservation effort?

The RSPB takes public concern about cat predation seriously and promotes measures to reduce the vulnerability of garden birds to predation by cats. There are a great number of pressures on the UK's wildlife including climate change and changes to land management, leading to loss of habitat and essential food resources. We believe that encouraging the public to help support wildlife by reducing cat predation is important.

There are a few ways the RSPB tries to help reduce cat predation in gardens. For example, we try to make it widely known to the public through our website and other communications that fitting bells to quick-release collars and keeping cats in overnight are simple ways to reduce the number of wild birds and other wildlife that they catch. We have also researched ways to keep cats out of gardens by using ultrasonic devices like CatWatch. This proved effective in reducing the amount of time cats spent in the garden.

Beyond gardens, cat predation can cause particular problems for vulnerable and restricted populations of birds, in particular birds that nest low to or on the ground such as Dartford Warblers and Nightingales. It can also be an issue for birds that have evolved on islands where terrestrial predators would not naturally occur. We undertake a lot of work to try to reduce these threats, including advising that new residential developments are not built too close to important sites for ground-nesting birds, and reducing feral cat populations on islands where they do not belong.

Eradication; Having been to New Zealand it must be one of the most experienced agent, do you talk to them?

New Zealand has led the way in island restoration and many of the methods and skills developed there have been applied to our projects. Indeed, many staff involved with projects such as Gough Island have had experience on New Zealand projects before joining us. As you'd expect we are constantly refining and improving our methodologies and much of this comes from talking and learning from others.

Theme: Political engagement

Please can you be more expansive about what we can do? Writing to our MP and paying our subs feels a bit limited. I always want to do more, but don't know where to start.

While writing to your MP and paying subscriptions are valuable ways to support the RSPB's mission, there are many other ways to help achieve positive nature-friendly change!

For one, you can help spread the word about the Nature Can't Wait campaign by writing to your local media, community website, or using social media. Reminding people of the urgency of the nature crisis and seeing other people in their area can have a big impact and inspire more action. The letters section is one of the most-read parts of any newspaper, and social media is one of the most important ways people learn about the challenges facing our world. It is important for people to see that it is not just coming from the RSPB and other organisations, but from members of the public like them who are calling for real change.

Read our advice [here](#).

Another impactful way to campaign is to join a local RSPB group or start your own group of nature lovers and campaign on local issues about nature. It doesn't have to just be about campaigning though, you can start a local nature group simply to bring people together to meet, share ideas, and experience wildlife together. These groups can be incredibly powerful tools for encouraging people who are new to campaigning to get involved. These groups can be a powerful tool when calling on representatives to commit to change in their local area as well as at the parliamentary level. They help enact real, positive change for nature that everyone can enjoy, and send representatives a powerful message about the genuine love and passion there is for protecting wildlife among their constituents.

You can find advice on helping build a local group [here](#) and some examples of nature-friendly projects for green spaces [here](#).

You can also try meeting with your local representative in-person. Expressing your views face-to-face, either at their constituency surgery, a local meeting, or an event you have organised, can be a powerful way to show you or your new local group's support and passion for nature.

Read our advice on meeting up with your representative [here](#).

Do you provide specific guidance for densely urban areas? In particular what we should be saying to our MPs (Hackney)? Thank you for an excellent AGM and for the inspiring work you do.

Talk about your own personal connection to nature and what it means to you. MPs want to understand the thoughts and concerns of their constituents, and personal stories can help your message make a lasting impression. You can meet your MP at their constituency surgeries, a community event, or sometimes simply by asking to meet them. Be kind and respectful, but also be clear and concise about your thoughts and ideas.

When it comes to talking to them, ask your MP to support policies and projects that promote urban greening in Hackney. This could include things like planting more trees, creating green roofs and walls, and restoring urban waterways. Remind your MP about the benefits of urban greening for people and wildlife, such as improved air quality, reduced heat, and a home for wildlife. Make sure to talk about what this means to you given your journey and your experience as someone living in an urban area.

You can see our advice on meeting and talking to your representatives [here](#).

Urban environments can be challenging for nature lovers, but having so many people close to you can be a powerful tool for making your voices heard with your MP. Seemingly small projects like planting just one tree in a built-up area can have a huge impact on hundreds or even thousands of local people. This can make it easier for you to gather support for your message when you talk to your MP. You can knock on doors, join community Facebook groups or talk to people at local events. By bringing your voices together and explaining the huge impact and desire there is for green projects in your area can send your MP a powerful message about their constituents' concerns and priorities.

You can find out ways to engage your community [here](#).

Don't forget talking to other local representative like councillors can also be an effective way to enact nature-friendly change!

Theme: Carbon and the environment

Is the Carbon Reduction Plan available? Are the targets defined?

Yes, we are actively working on this and have set a 50% reduction target (all scopes) to 2030 in 2020 as part of our Strategy. This target is now under review as we start to develop our greenhouse gases Reduction/Net Zero Plan. We will set new targets and trajectories for all scopes and categories individually and as a composite. The plan is due to be published in 2024/25, and will include the actions RSPB will take to achieve our new greenhouse gases targets.

Why have RSPB greenhouse gas emissions increased by over 50% 2020-2021 compared to 2022-23 (page 89 annual report). If this is a Covid effect, what is the longer term trend?

Emissions have increased significantly for a number of reasons. Covid did have an impact on Scopes 1 and 2 in 19/20 and 20/21. In addition, some areas of reporting have become more accurate. For example, we have changed the method of gathering fleet emissions (using direct fuel card data), and improved accuracy means that our reported emissions have increased.

We are constantly bringing in more categories of emissions; this should be finalised in reporting year 24/25 when we will have a full RSPB inventory. We expected our emissions - like other organisations - to rise significantly once Scope 3 became part of our report. We expect this to continue to rise as we bring in staff commuting and other areas.

In terms of overall trends, it is difficult to say as there is variability in historical accuracy (now improving year on year), and changes to what data is included (as mentioned above). We are committed to reducing our emissions, and are working on actions to tackle emissions in every category as part of our work programme, from implementing our Business Travel Hierarchy through to looking at new opportunities for renewables.

Theme: Nest boxes

Are you going to do any work with new buildings such as putting nest boxes up or nest bricks? perhaps they could be donated to building companies.

We work with several partners in the construction industry – notably with Barratt Developments PLC, who have already fitted more than 4,500 ‘swift bricks’ into their new build developments, and have plans to ramp up installations to exceed 7,000 by 2025, taking part in a new swift brick video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8NuL5mEpjo>) made by the RSPB for developers, planners and volunteers. Our Swift conservation work is carried out in partnership with many other groups and organisations committed to helping these birds – Swift Conservation, Action for Swifts and the Swift Local Network of volunteer-led conservation groups.

Through our Species Recovery Network project, we are actively building volunteer-based conservation groups focussing on Swift conservation in multiple areas of the UK: Northern Ireland, English West Midlands and Manchester areas. These are intended to act as model examples that could be repeated elsewhere. We also provide a free-to-use online conservation targeting tool – SwiftMapper – to help anyone interested in Swift conservation locate the most beneficial areas for action.

We are not directly funding boxes for house builders at the moment. We have invested in developing resources and tools for individuals, volunteer conservation groups, the construction industry, local councils and planning authorities to install new nesting sites for swifts – both into new builds, and also by retro-fitting into existing buildings.

Can the RSPB donate nest boxes and swift bricks to house building companies to put on new buildings?

We are not directly funding boxes for house builders at the moment. We believe it is more effective for us to invest our resources in developing resources and tools for individuals, volunteer conservation groups, the construction industry, local councils and planning authorities to install new nesting sites for swifts – both into new builds, and also by retro-fitting into existing buildings. This approach also allows the design and quantity of boxes to be tailored to local needs by the people best placed to decide this.

Are swift nestboxes installed at The Lodge or any of the RSPB's reserves?

Yes. Swift boxes have been installed at the Lodge for several years, and we have used caller systems to attempt to attract Swifts to these. We have succeeded in attracting small numbers of swift to investigate these boxes but so far no nesting by swifts has taken place here. This may be due to a small local breeding population of Swifts and/or no shortage of other nesting opportunities for them in local towns and villages. This demonstrates the value of our Swift conservation targeting tool, SwiftMapper, which allows Swift conservationists to target the placement of new nesting sites as close as possible to known existing colonies and nest sites.

Theme: Policy

What is your view & policy on Speciesism? The reason I ask is that I have a university project which involves our local environment and human interaction and would like to involve or offer the research to you. This included avians. However, this would be dependent on how other partners view Speciesism and the destruction of another species in order to protect avians

Our mission is to create a world richer in nature. We deliver science-based conservation that will either directly or indirectly benefit a wide range of species as we restore habitats or support threatened species. If you feel you have research that would help us in advancing our conservation work please email consciadmin@rspb.org.uk and we would be happy to discuss this further.

Please could you say more on your policy on the disposal of invasive species. Have you looked at prevention as a mode of working or observation in how the indigenous species, over time, deal with other invasive species?

Eradications are always a last resort and are never undertaken lightly. The preference is always for preventing invasive species from arriving in the first place and we have (and continue to have) many biosecurity projects across both the UK and UK Overseas Territories with this as a goal. But eradication is sometimes the only way to stop species being lost - on Gough Island, for example, we monitored a cave of breeding prions and found that not a single chick survived in seven years because of invasive non-native mice eating both chicks and eggs.

So while our focus is to first prevent invasive species from arriving, once they're there our hand is sometimes forced into removing them. We are still trying to overcome the legacy of introductions of invasive species that took place hundreds of years ago. Whilst some indigenous species can co-exist with invasive species, over time vulnerable native species such as ground- or burrow-nesting seabirds simply become locally extinct as they have no defence against invasive predators.

In terms of removal of the invasive species, in some situations relocation of animals may be possible, but in many cases this is not considered the best option for the animals concerned. If animals need to be despatched (killed) and we seek the most humane method possible. All of our work in this area is scrutinised by the RSPB's Ethics Advisory Committee –which includes independent professionals including from veterinary and animal ethics backgrounds, to ensure we have the best possible advice.

What is RSPB's policy on curbing river and sea pollution by the water companies?

The RSPB has worked with partners for many years to remove and reduce pressures on the water environment and has been at the forefront of developing legislation to improve water quality such as the Water Environment Regulations 2017 (which implemented the EU wide Framework Directive). Our approach is to condemn behaviour that is unlawful or unacceptable by water companies. We also directly engage with them to inform, educate and influence. Long term, we want to see a sector that not only reduces harm to the environment, but actively drives its recovery by delivering green infrastructure as default. Today's polluters must become tomorrow's protectors, and as long-term protectors ourselves, we have the passion and expertise to help drive the transition.

We are also engaging directly with the UK and devolved Governments on this. We are concerned that the UK Government's response to the sewage crisis treats storm overflows as a standalone cause, rather than a symptom of a wider, dysfunctional regime for water management. So whilst we

are pushing action to tackle sewage pollution in our waterways, we think that a sole focus on storm overflows is not the right way forward. The UK Government's targets will involve lots of carbon-intensive infrastructure at huge expense, but that will still not deliver ecologically healthy waterways. We need a more balanced approach is to ensure that much-needed investment addresses the most serious causes of ecological harm in an integrated manner (which, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, are not always storm overflows) and does so in way that maximises the biodiversity value of the money spent. The current approach does neither so is a huge missed opportunity to get our waterways into recovery. We will continue to engage on this issue. You can read more about it [here](#).

Theme: Eradication

Can you please provide an update on how we plan to progress our hugely important work on Gough.

We are still determining next steps for Gough Island following the devastating news that the eradication had not been successful. Gough is home to some of our most iconic and vulnerable seabirds, and we remain committed to making it a safe place for them to raise their chicks. Mice on islands have always been harder to manage than rats – we used the practice advice and thought concerns had been overcome and this gave us the confidence to attempt their eradication from Gough Island. However, the discovery that mice survived on Gough has brought many things back into question again. Since we discovered mice were still on the island we have been gathering vital information that we hope can shed light on not only what might have allowed mice to survive but also what we might be able to do differently to create a different outcome next time. We continue to work with international experts in this field to consider further refinements in methods that may be necessary before we can try again.

What is the current situation on Gough Island?

We were sadly not successful in eradicating Gough Island of invasive non-native mice. The island's birds had an excellent breeding season, however, immediately after the eradication attempt (i.e. when there were few mice about) with the Critically Endangered MacGillivray's prion successfully fledging 82% of chicks in our monitored colony as opposed to an average of just 6% (and many years of 0%) in the years before the eradication attempt. Critically Endangered Tristan Albatrosses had a breeding success of 76% compared to the previous average of 32%. For both species this represents a vital addition of new birds into the population. Sadly though, we do have evidence that some mice are starting to predate seabirds again, though not yet at the levels seen before. MacGillivray's Prions had a breeding success of 62.9% this year, which is what we would expect from a mouse-free island, though obviously not as high as the year before. Unfortunately, we expect that these numbers will start to decrease in the coming years. We are still awaiting this year's figures for Tristan Albatross.

What do you do with the stoats once removed?

The Stoats are killed using humane, lethal traps. This was the only feasible method to complete the eradication which requires every last Stoat to be removed from Orkney. Sadly, moving stoats elsewhere would not have been feasible as well as being crueler and inhumane for the Stoats. Stoats are not native to Orkney – they were first reported in 2010 – and, as such, pose a serious threat of causing irreparable damage to Orkney's native wildlife as well as to parts of the economy that rely on it. Invasive non-native species are one of the biggest threats to nature globally. They are responsible for 40% of extinctions in the past 400 years. What is more, 60% of all extinctions have occurred on islands, even though they account for less than 6% of world's surface showing how vulnerable island wildlife can be. Eradications are never undertaken lightly, and keeping our islands free from invasive non-native species through strong biosecurity measures is the best approach. However, once an invasive species has established there is no other way to protect our vulnerable native wildlife. You can find out more about the Orkney Native Wildlife project, and the species it is working to protect (from Hen Harriers to Curlews to a vole found nowhere else in the world) at orkneynativewildlife.org.uk

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Theme: Land acquisition

How much of an impact do you anticipate regarding the loss of EU funding?

As a result of the UK having left the European Union, the RSPB has in most cases lost the ability to access EU grant funding. The major funding stream in the EU for habitat restoration was the EU LIFE programme which RSPB had previously had a history of successful applications. Sadly, no equivalent fund has been created by the UK Government to replace this fund.

We remain eligible to access some EU funding opportunities for our work in Northern Ireland through the PEACEPLUS funding programme and the news that the UK is re-joining the HORIZON (science) fund may enable future collaborations that could access this fund.

While European Union grants have been an important source of funding for many years, we are working hard to minimise any potential impact. Our income team continues to focus on identifying new funding opportunities and building long-lasting relationships with a range of grant funders, trusts and corporate organisations to support our work to help save nature.

Is there a target for future land reserve acquisitions?

The RSPB wants to see 30% of UK land well managed for nature by 2030 and the RSPB's reserves have a part to play in this. We have been prioritising the extension of existing sites over establishing new sites as larger sites deliver more for nature than smaller sites and are also more cost-effective to run. We are also targeting acquisition activity towards our Priority Landscapes, where we shall be seeking to use our reserves to not only deliver for nature, but also to unlock nature in the landscape in which they sit.

Does the RSPB plan to purchase more land - even smaller areas - to protect it from the government?

The RSPB has been prioritising the extension of existing sites over establishing new sites as larger sites deliver more for nature than smaller sites and are also more cost-effective to run. This is part of our strategy aim to see 30% of UK land well managed for nature by 2030.

Theme: Collaboration / Partnerships

There are a lot of conservation organisations in UK, which on the one hand is great, but on the other could lead to fragmentation of effort. How do RSPB help ensure that all these organisations work collaboratively to maximise effectiveness with limited funds and not inadvertently compete or duplicate?

Collaboration is vital, across the environmental sector, civil society, governments and businesses. As an organisation, the RSPB is evolving, redoubling our efforts to deliver nature and climate solutions with partners, building on everything we have learned so far. By working together, we can achieve even more for nature.

The RSPB frequently works alongside other conservation NGOs.

We work closely with sister NGOs in the UK who are species focused (a grouping known as [Rethink Nature](#)) and the fruits of this collaboration include integrated agricultural advice [FarmWildlife](#) Partnership and also the major Heritage Lottery funded projects Back from the Brink (England), Species on The Edge (Scotland) and Natur Am Byth (Wales)

For example, the RSPB was the lead organisation on the recently published State of Nature 2023 report, which was produced alongside 60 partners including many eNGOs as well as academic and statutory conservation sector. By collaborating with shared data and messaging, we ensured that collectively, this significant report was widely covered in the media and recognised by politicians.

In addition, this spring, we co-produced the BBC natural history series Wild Isles, alongside WWF and the Open University. The RSPB was involved in Wild Isles from its inception, helping to finance the series alongside the aforementioned partners and the BBC. We supported its production every step of the way, from filming, to scientific advice, to publicity and finally using the series to inspire action for nature at scale.

The TV series, with our support, was a huge success. It was among the most watched factual series on UK television in recent years. Our strategy was simple: work with our partners, including the BBC, to make the series as successful as possible. Then, use that success to drive the change we need through our 'Save Our Wild Isles' campaign, for which the National Trust joined us as partners alongside WWF.

This year we also collaborated with WWF and the National Trust to give thousands of people from across the UK an open platform to share their views on the nature crisis. The result is the People's Plan for Nature, a plan created by the people for the people, that sets out a vision for the future of nature and the actions we must all take to protect it.

Indeed, one of our six strategic shifts in our 2030 strategy is to deliver conservation at greater scale, through deeper collaborations. One example of practical collaboration at scale is Cairngorms Connect, a partnership of neighbouring land managers, including RSPB Scotland, on a 200-year vision to enhance habitats, species and ecological processes across 600 square kilometres of the Cairngorms National Park.

The RSPB regularly joins other conservation NGOs in advocating for stronger laws and policy to protect and restore our natural world and ensure that decision-makers address the nature and climate crises, meeting climate commitments to benefit both people and wildlife. We are a member of Greener UK (a coalition of 10 major environmental organisation, with a combined public

membership of over 8 million). The RSPB is a member of the Link networks in each of the UK Countries e.g. Scottish Environment Link and in England/Westminster Wildlife and Countryside Link (a unique coalition of charitable organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside)

The RSPB regularly collaborates with conservation NGOs on projects to revive endangered species. For example, this September £14.5m of funding by Natural England was awarded, including for one project, the Wiltshire Chalk Partnership, looking to restore 2,000 hectares of flower-rich grasslands, crucial for insects including butterflies. The partnership included the RSPB, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, National Trust and local Pewsey Downs Farmer Group.

Importantly, we recognise that there are moments when the RSPB is in the best position to lead, such as the State of Nature report and citizen science projects including our Big Garden Birdwatch, and when other NGOs are best placed to lead through their specific expertise, with our support, such as Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count.

Collaboration to increase impact - do you work with the Wildlife Trust and if so how?

The RSPB frequently works with The Wildlife Trusts, along with many other conservation NGOs. For example, the RSPB was the lead charity on the recently published State of Nature 2023 report, which was produced alongside partners including The Wildlife Trusts. The RSPB is a member of Link Networks in each of the 4 UK Countries e.g. in England - Wildlife and Countryside Link (a unique coalition of charitable organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside) and at Westminster - Greener UK (a coalition of 10 major environmental organisation, with a combined public membership of over 8 million) and are joined by The Wildlife Trusts in all these coalitions.

From our chief executives to our policy, campaigning and social media teams, the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts continue to urge decision makers to ensure nature and our environment are protected, as well as encouraging supporters and members to take part in initiatives such as The Climate Coalition (of which both NGOs are members) Great Big Green Week – the biggest event for climate and nature in the UK.

The RSPB regularly partners with conservation NGOs to revive endangered species. For example, this September £14.5m of funding by Natural England was awarded, including for one project, the Wiltshire Chalk Partnership, looking to restore 2,000 hectares of flower-rich grasslands, crucial for insects including butterflies. The partnership included the RSPB, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, National Trust and local Pewsey Downs Farmer Group.

Theme: Our Reserves and Retail

If RSPB can save tigers and antelopes and has a total income of 164 million, why can't it maintain its own nature reserves? RSPB Rainham Marshes has been 50% closed for over a year due to lack of funds to repair boardwalks.

The northern boardwalk at RSPB Rainham Marshes has sadly closed due to the scale of repairs needed to the wooden structure being a significant concern, especially with regards to the safety of our visitors. We understand visitors were disappointed that they could no longer complete a circular walking route of the reserve, so the team have worked hard to open a new path along the edge of the wetland. Visitors can now complete a circular route once again. The new track offers extended views of the reserve, especially the popular Aveley pools, and we have received positive feedback from visitors.

Rest assured that ensuring our visitors enjoy a safe and pleasurable visit to our reserves is of paramount importance to us, and we are considering other options at Rainham Marshes for further boardwalk loops that could accommodate both the feel of walking “over” a wetland and be accessible to young families and people with limited mobility.

Meanwhile, our international work is often carried out through and with our partners at BirdLife International and local communities, and approximately 9% of our gross expenditure is spent on international work where the greatest conservation need has been identified. Whilst Sumatran tigers and Saiga antelopes maybe the “poster animals” for some big collaborations in Indonesia and Kazakhstan respectively, these projects are all about restoring and protecting ecosystems at scale which also provides habitats for many priority bird species.

Please could the RSPB consider providing only plant-based food at RSPB reserves and events, as the RSPCA has done recently. The food system in the UK does not help birds.

Along with a growing scientific, [environmental](#), [producer](#) and [public](#) consensus of the need for food system reform, we recognise that in order to achieve long-term food security, we need to change the demands we make of our land. This involves reducing the amount of meat and dairy we consume in the UK, making best use of our land and aligning what we consume with what we can sustainably produce within planetary and health boundaries. This also involves cutting out waste occurs all along the supply chain leading to unnecessary environmental impacts and wasted resources. Effective four-country Government policy is essential to achieving this.

RSPB recognise the power and influence we have by engaging with our members and supporters at our reserves, which is why we are committed to using this as an opportunity to drive positive changes in the food system. The RSPB believes that people can help nature by reducing the amount of meat and dairy in their diets in line with healthy eating recommendations. However, livestock production is important for some of our most cherished wildlife habitats, such as at RSPB Geltsdale reserve in Cumbria where thanks to sensitive farming and cattle grazing, Black Grouse, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe have all increased significantly. We need to support farmers who manage livestock in harmony with nature, for example as part of rotational mixed farming systems and pasture fed systems. This is one of example of what a better food system looks like in practice. We are always looking to implement these nature-friendly practices on our own reserves where possible. At our café's we are:

- Introducing new café menus packed with delicious, wildlife and climate friendly food

- Telling more stories about the food we serve, where it comes from and why that matters – including spotlighting incredible stories from our own reserves/land holdings
- Communicating to the public why nature friendly food production matters for wildlife and nature and suggesting ways they can make simple changes to their consumption that benefit nature e.g. buying local, swapping out mince for lentils.

Read more about what we are doing to create a more nature-friendly food system [here](#).

Have you found that the pandemic had a positive impact on various species; growth in the UK or has it not seemed to make much of a difference, or is it still too early to tell? I ask in regard to less human activity out and about and curious as to whether this had any type of impact.

We haven't carried out any specific surveys to answer this particular question, but as the Breeding Bird Survey data is analysed we may be able to see an effect (or not) in the longer term. It seems clear, however, that people became more aware of nature during the pandemic, especially during the first lockdown, and this may have led to more engagement and more nature being seen and reported.

RSPB animal pins--I love them!--are made in China. Perhaps manufacturing could be brought closer to home?

Thank you for taking the time to contact us regarding where our pin badges are made. We would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that across the organisation, where possible we source locally for our product range and merchandise requirements.

To generate vital income for our conservation work and produce the quantity our pin badge scheme requires, it does mean they are produced abroad. We work with a UK based company called Rocket Merchandise on the development and design of the pin badges, they are then produced by their SEDEX approved factory in China, and shipped to us via sea freight to minimise their carbon footprint. To ensure they are as sustainable as possible the backing cards used are made from FSC certified paper.

As the largest nature conservation charity in the country, we are always striving to be the best we can be when it comes to sustainability and creating planet-friendly products. We work to make our products as eco-friendly as possible, and we continuously review the pin badge product to make sure that we are doing all that we can. For more information on RSPB's approach to sustainability please see the following: <https://shopping.rspb.org.uk/page/sustainability>

Is packaging of RSPB products gonna be completely plastic free soon?

The RSPB is targeting having all its products in reusable or kerbside recyclable packaging by 2025. As of April 2023, we are pleased to say that we have achieved 71% of this target. As you will have seen in our stores, we have begun the process of rebranding our products. We made the decision to sell through the old stock before we update the packaging to reduce unnecessary waste, so a few more lines will be changing to recyclable packaging in the coming months.

One of the biggest barriers we have faced is with our bird seed due to the naturally high oil content which renders most paper packaging unsuitable. Solutions to this problem are not widely available but we are continuing to work with our suppliers to find solutions. There have been some promising results in our trials but the quality is not yet where we need it to be. Other suppliers will claim to

have 100% paper packaging, but fail to declare the plastic lining which is thin enough to make it recyclable as if it were paper. Rest assured, finding a suitable solution for this area of our product range is a top priority.

We are fully committed to becoming 'single-use plastic-free' but it is important to make the distinction that some plastic may still be present in our product range, at least for the near future. As mentioned, a recyclable plastic lining may have to exist in our current bird food ranges. In addition, products that are likely to become damaged in transit, such as greetings cards and wrapping paper, are all packaged in home-compostable certified bio-plastic films. While these are the best options available to us at this time, we are constantly researching and staying on top of developments in the packaging industry, and our sourcing guidelines and strategy will change accordingly.

To summarise, we are committed to 'single-use plastic-free' across all our product ranges, but we have to acknowledge that some plastic packaging may exist in the near future. Where this is the case, such as our bird food, we will ensure that the plastic is home-recyclable or home-compostable. As soon as plastic-free alternatives become available for those products, we will revisit the situation, but our priority is to ensure 100% recyclability to promote the circular economy, reduce our carbon emissions and reduce landfill waste. We are on track to meet this target by 2025. For more on our sustainability journey: Sustainability - RSPB Shop.

Theme: Our People

As a Fellow of RSPB, I am interested in the current status of this membership category. I can find no reference to Fellow membership in the new RSPB website. I can also not find any reference to the Life Fellow membership category. Can you advise whether the Fellow membership category has been suspended? Very many thanks

Life membership is very much still available and continues to remain a valued membership category. The Life Fellowship category has simply been renamed to Life Membership to better reflect the characteristics of this membership type and to consider the preferences of our life members, whose views were established in a recent Life Member survey. This membership type remains the same as it has always been, and Life Members will see no change in the benefits they receive or in their valued relationship with the RSPB. We are currently working to update all membership cards for Life Members and are aiming to start sharing new cards with our Life Members by mid-2024. Current life members can continue to use their Life Fellow membership cards to gain free entry to RSPB reserves until this time.

Information on our Life Membership offer is currently unavailable online whilst we are in the process of launching our brand-new website. Several pages are temporarily unavailable as they are being updated, but we hope to have them reinstated as soon as possible. For any questions about Life Membership in the meantime, please contact the Supporter Services team, who will be able to answer any queries or sign supporters up for Life Membership.

My local reserve Marshside ran a Just Giving fund to pay for refurb work. Yet as a Local Group we could not make our donation towards this. I found it a bit embarrassing that as a Local Group we had to donate to HQ rather than locally and that the RSPB staff had to use Just Giving to try to raise 6k when the RSPB nationally has millions. I am just very glad they that the reserve staff are so motivated along with volunteers to have done most of the work themselves and only needed to raise money for materials and specialist items skills. They are still looking for funds to replace a viewing screen which looks in a bad way. They have done brilliant work in improving the visitor facilities. Hope at some point they will be able to move onto improving facilities at Hesketh Out Marsh, where a shelter blew down years ago and has never been replaced.

The most valuable donation we, or any charity can have, is one that is 'unrestricted' – meaning it can be spent when and where it is needed most. With nature facing so many threats, we need to prioritise where we work and make difficult but informed decisions around conservation priorities – where can we make the biggest difference. In his video for Local Groups in April this year, England Director Michael Copleston set out the priority work planned in England for this financial year. It is your donations that are supporting and enabling this invaluable work to happen across the country.

We do understand that Local Groups often want to raise money for a particular project or reserve, and so this year we set up a scheme where they could donate to selected projects in England. This was restricted to five projects simply because of the amount of administration involved in assigning and tracking donations. It would not be achievable to expand this approach to cover all projects if each of the 130 Local Groups in the UK wanted to make a specific donation.

At RSPB Marshside, a Just Giving fundraising page was set up after one of our hides was broken into and vandalised. Central funding for this type of maintenance and repair work is heavily oversubscribed and, of course, it was not something we had budgeted for. Thanks to supporters' generosity we managed to raise £2,000 to complete the repairs, as well as a further £2,000 to

replace the out-of-hours viewing screens either side of the hide which are accessible for all. Nearly all of the work was completed by the site team and volunteers, with a contractor carrying out groundwork for the screens. The Just Giving page will shortly be updated with photos and a story update showing the new screens. Improving the visitor facilities at Hesketh Out Marsh and replacing the shelter is also part of our plans but as always there is a need to prioritise projects that will make the biggest difference for nature and our supporters.

Why was there no mention of the volunteer work of local group volunteers in the awards? It gave the impression that the only awards go to reserve volunteers.

Please be assured how much we value Local Groups and the contributions made by the volunteers and members. Robert Cubbage's speech celebrated and thanked all volunteers and Local Groups were specifically acknowledged in the RSPB Annual Report. While it is unfortunate that no Local Group volunteers won in the President's Awards this year, we always include a category for a group and last year this was awarded to a Local Group. We have also changed the awards process to allow volunteers to nominate other volunteers so would very much welcome a nomination recognising and celebrating John Attiwell's amazing contribution.

Why is there so little about Local Groups in the magazine. What there is tends to be on the most active Groups, but all Local Groups could do with a publicity boost. The recent website update does help in finding Local Groups, but the more general publicity about them the better.

Thanks for your question and enthusiasm for local groups. We know our local groups do amazing work and are always looking for opportunities to share these stories within our overall organisational communications frameworks. Over the last two years we have hugely increased the amount of promotion we do for our groups. This has included more than 20 pieces in 2023 in social media, Notes on Nature Newsletter and even in the RSPB Magazine, we had an article or mention in each one of them. Together these have reached an audience in excess of one million. We agree it's great to share more general publicity for local groups and will absolutely continue to find opportunities.

Is it possible to sign up for alerts for new volunteering opportunities as they become available? I can't see a way to do it on the website (but don't have a login for Assemble, so can't check there).

Thanks for your interest in volunteering with us. Unfortunately we don't currently have a system you can sign up to for alerts about new volunteering opportunities. The best way to keep updated is to regularly look at the volunteering opportunities we have on our website. This is updated each day and you can search for opportunities close to you by simply putting in your postcode or town. Good luck and we look forward to welcoming you as a volunteer!

How do I get involved in being an RSPB volunteer?

Thanks for your interest in joining us as a volunteer. The best way to get involved and find the opportunity that is just right for you is have a look at the volunteering opportunities we have on our website. This is updated each day and you can search for opportunities close to you by simply putting in your postcode or town. Good luck and we look forward to welcoming you as a volunteer.

We received a small number of questions around the incident in August surrounding our tweet about nutrient neutrality.

We are currently conducting a series of investigations and reviews in line with our internal policies and procedures around the incident. To protect the integrity of these reviews, and ensure fairness for all involved, it is important that they are all allowed to run their course. We won't be able to comment until the matter has concluded and will update this page in due course.