



giving
nature
a home



Nature Positive Farming

Securing a food and
nature rich future

September 2022

Contents

Our Vision	3
What is Nature Positive?	4
What type of farming can deliver a Nature Positive future?	6
Fair To Nature	7
Six key actions of Farm Wildlife	8
The case for Positive Nature change	10
Case study East County Down, NI	11
Case study Lowriggs, Yorkshire	12
Case study Blaen Y Coed, Wales	13
A Nature Positive food system	14
Case study Strathspey, Scotland	15
Technology, innovation and change	16
Case study Mold, North Wales	17
Case study Knapwell, Cambridgeshire	18
Delivering Positive Nature	19

Our Vision

By 2030 the UK will be Nature Positive - meaning that we have more nature at the end of the decade than we started with and the majority of the land will be being managed in a nature friendly way.

Our farmed landscapes will be agriculturally productive but also bursting with nature with farmers using resources wisely, safeguarding adjacent wild areas where nature also thrives, whilst also playing a key role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and storing carbon.

This may sound overly hopeful but it is in fact an ideal which is within our gift. Many farmers and land managers are already actively driving this transition with many pursuing approaches that are helping nature rebound, contributing to climate change goals, producing great food, and providing better business and wellbeing outcomes for themselves. But farming needs help and now at a time of great change in all four countries of the UK we have the opportunity to put in place positive changes to food and farming which deliver for farmers, nature and wider society.

Nature Positive by 2030 requires a fundamental shift across society, including a radical reshape of our food and farming system. We need:

- a) people as food citizens, to be driving best practice
- b) food businesses taking steps to make their supply chains Nature Positive and
- c) governments supporting a transition which protects, conserves and restores land, allowing farmers to implement nature friendly farming which can help nature recover.

What is Nature Positive?

A Nature Positive approach will ensure we have more nature at the end of the decade than we started with, we will have halted declines and be driving recovery.

In 2010 the UK Government agreed to a set of targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity which aimed to halt biodiversity loss by 2020. Sadly, globally and in the UK, we failed to achieve these targets. We cannot let this happen again. The new global biodiversity framework for 2020-2030 must put us on the path for a Nature Positive world by 2030.

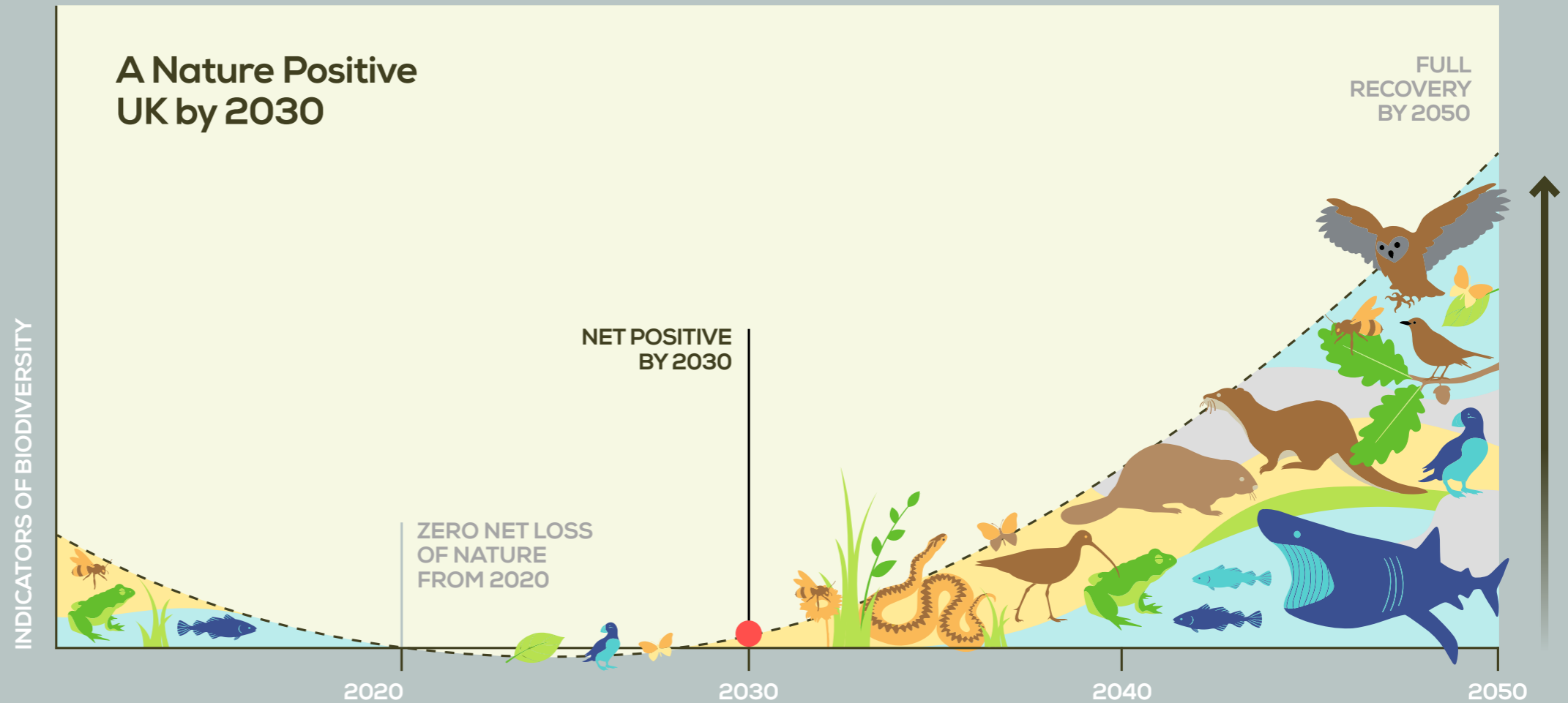
By aiming for Nature Positive we can drive ambition across the UK at the regional and local level.

At our own Hope Farm and our Haweswater reserve we have shown that changing management can boost nature. We are still on a journey of improvement, and we want to work with others to make this vision a reality, driving change at scale and pace to address the climate and nature crisis.

Nature Positive is about going further for nature, ensuring that all aspects of human impacts are accounted for and deliver more nature than where they started.

Nature needs dedicated space to enable it to thrive, but also sympathetic farming practices so that nature co-exists in the farmed landscape. Nature underpins production and provides vital ecosystem services which ensures our long-term food security. By redesigning our farming system so that it is sustainable and nature friendly we can help reverse the decline in nature and progress the agroecological transition that we need to make, to ensure we have a resilient food production system, keeping nature safe and us well fed.

Whilst everyone can play a part in addressing the nature and climate crises, land managers have a special role to play. Having the right management in the right place is essential to achieve the best balance of production, resilience and nature.



What does this mean for our food and farming sector?

- Protecting and restoring our remaining natural ecosystems such as wetlands and woodlands, increasing habitat cover across the countryside - more hedgerows, wildflowers, ponds and trees.
- Halting decline of genetic diversity, preventing further extinctions, and helping wildlife recover through increasing connectivity in our landscapes.

- Ensuring supply chains, transportation options and off-site impacts are Nature Positive, limiting the use of harmful pesticides, reducing carbon emissions, and only using sustainable methods of food processing and packaging.
- Embedding nature into all areas of the economy and society, ensuring financial decisions are working for nature, such as incentivising nature friendly farming practices and removing subsidies for practices that harm wildlife and their habitats.

Making change happen

The nature and climate crises loom large over every decision we make in the modern world. Despite repeated commitments to act, we have yet to turn the corner on either challenge.

The unsustainable approaches which prop up the way we currently eat and farm are undoubtedly contributing to a future of decreased food production, greater volatility and declining resilience.

Change can be hard and breaking old habits from within the constraints of outdated structures, food culture and policies can seem daunting. But there

are many networks and resources now available to help make this change.

To deliver a Nature Positive food and farming system we must all work together to deliver action at scale. It requires us to collaborate across sectors and disciplines, promote the best field-tested nature friendly practices, amplify the voice of farmers who are already leading the industry shift to sustainable practice, and ensure they are properly supported by 'public goods' payments and fair returns that make this transition financially viable.

What types of farming can deliver a Nature Positive future?

Reaching a nature positive future requires a nature friendly approach to farm management. What this looks like will depend on the location and properties of the land.

Making best use of our land

Key to tackling the global nature and climate crises is that the solutions we implement in one place should not make the situation worse elsewhere. We need nature friendly management which produces great food whilst recognising that a nature friendly approach to eating is also required - growing more food directly for people rather than for animal feed or large-scale biofuels.

Intensive approaches to farming have inadvertently squeezed nature out of the landscape to the detriment of wildlife, but also farming itself. The result is a less resilient system, over reliant on agrochemicals to replace the services nature provides free, at a cost to the bottom line and the environment.

By putting nature at the heart of farming we can reduce this over reliance on agrochemicals, improve the health of soil and build a more resilient farming sector. Getting nature to work hard on farm by adopting the six key actions of Farm Wildlife, enables land to remain productive whilst driving the recovery of wildlife. If all farms were managing at least 10% of the farm as well-managed semi-natural habitats as required by the Fair to Nature standard, we could turn the declines of nature on farmland around.



To be contributing to Nature Positive, farming systems need to be underpinned by sustainable resource management as well as managing land to benefit wildlife. This means excellent soil management, a cyclical approach to nutrient management and genuine integrated pest management.

High Nature Value farming

In some areas there are farming systems that are special by nature; where wildlife is dependent on the way land is farmed to thrive. We call these High Nature Value (HNV) farming and it often occurs the least agriculturally productive land where traditional farming provides ideal conditions for wildlife to coexist with the farming system. These farming systems maintain precious habitats such as uplands hay meadows bursting with wildflowers and the call of the curlew.

While these farming systems are often described as economically marginal and somehow disadvantaged, they are immensely productive for nature and the communities which work this land. They often provide a wide range of ecosystem services, contributing to the sense of place and local economy through flood alleviation, tourism, and carbon storage.

Regenerative farming

Organic and regenerative farming seek to work with, restore and mimic natural processes often referred to an 'agroecological approach'. These systems can provide benefits to wildlife, through restricted usage of chemicals, varied crop rotations and mixed farming (farms with crops and livestock). We encourage all farming types, whether conventional, organic, or regenerative, to implement the six key actions from the Farm Wildlife partnership on at least 10% of the farm to ensure nature can thrive.

Saving special species

Some farms support iconic species of conservation concern, such as turtle dove, curl bunting or stone curlew which currently rely on bespoke management. They often depend on farmers going the extra mile tailoring the six key wildlife actions across at least 10% of their farm to put specialist management in place for their survival.



Fair to Nature is the only UK certification scheme to focus on biodiversity and the only one to promote and support the scale of land management needed for UK wildlife to thrive. By asking farmers to ensure 10% of their farmed land is managed for nature, we're enabling the re-emergence of richer, more diverse habitats – fuelling not only a return to the balance of nature, but to lasting sustainability, greater economic stability and long-term business resilience.

Working with people across the supply chain, we help to protect and restore nature on farmland while making it easier for people to recognise sustainable products and support businesses that are committed to making a genuine difference.

Six key actions of Farm Wildlife

100%

Management across the whole farm



The whole farm

Build upon the provision of habitats and farming practices beneficial to wildlife with a whole farm approach to progressive management of soil, nutrients and integrated pest management.

Embrace organic and regenerative farming techniques such as cover crops, inter cropping, herbal leys and agroforestry.

10%

Manage at least 10% of the farm as a range of wildlife habitats



Existing habitat

Protect and ensure good ecological condition of existing semi-natural habitats such as species-rich grassland, scrub, heath and wood pastures.



Flower-rich habitats

Create flower-rich habitats on at least 4% of the farm with wildflower and cultivated margins, legume rich grassland and existing semi-natural habitats. These provide valuable wildlife habitat and help improve populations of beneficial insects that can make farms more productive.

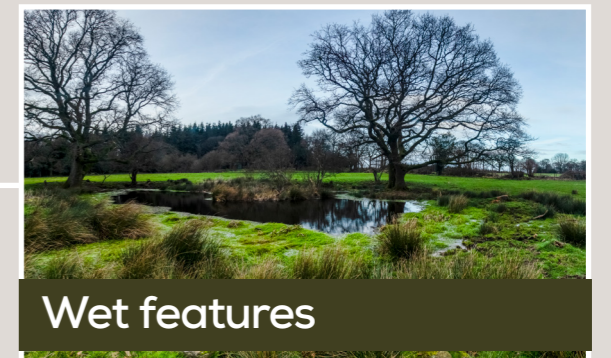
These 6 key actions will provide a simple recipe to help build resilient food webs for a diversity of farmland wildlife. It's promoted by conservation and farming organisations who work in partnership to provide a single source of best-practice advice for wildlife on farmland.

See Farm Wildlife's website for more information: <https://farmwildlife.info/>



Field boundaries

Maximise the value of field boundaries to develop dense, rotationally trimmed hedgerows that provide abundant nectar and berries. Field margins, corners and other habitat buffers also provide different opportunities for species.



Wet features

Create and enhance wet features like farm ponds, dew ponds, ephemeral water bodies and wader scrapes. As well as aquatic species, wetland habitats are important for other wildlife including pollinators and farmland birds.



Seed-rich habitats

Create seed-rich habitats on at least 2% of the farm. Sown wild bird mixes and weedy winter stubbles and root crops help farmland birds survive the hungry gap.



Farmed area

In-field habitats such as beetle banks, fallow plots and in-field trees bring the benefits of nature close to growing crops and can also help priority species.

The case for Nature Positive change

We are at a pivotal point in history where we have the opportunity to radically change the way we support farmers and land managers and reshape our food system. We need to bring consumption, production and space for nature back into balance in a way which will make our landscapes and our food system resilient going forward, underpinning our food security. Without nature and a stable climate there will be no food.

By aligning production with the optimum carrying capacity of the land some livestock farmers have found they can dramatically improve their profitability whilst also delivering more benefits for wider society including landscapes richer in nature, natural flood alleviation and climate change

mitigation and adaptation. A major study published in 2015¹ found that putting 8% of an arable farm into environmental measures and managing these for wildlife, led to a 25% increase in net yield for flowering crops with no net loss of yield for wind pollinated crops. This was due to the increase in pollinators and crop pest predators arising from the creation of habitats such as wildflower margins. By using cover crops and herbal leys the costs of artificial inputs can be reduced, while shelterbelts and hedgerows can provide protection from extreme weather events with animal health and welfare benefits.

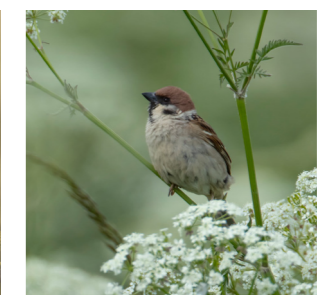
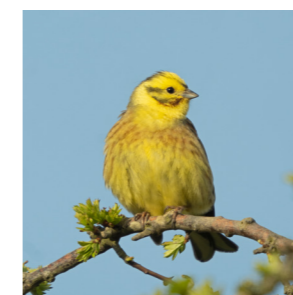


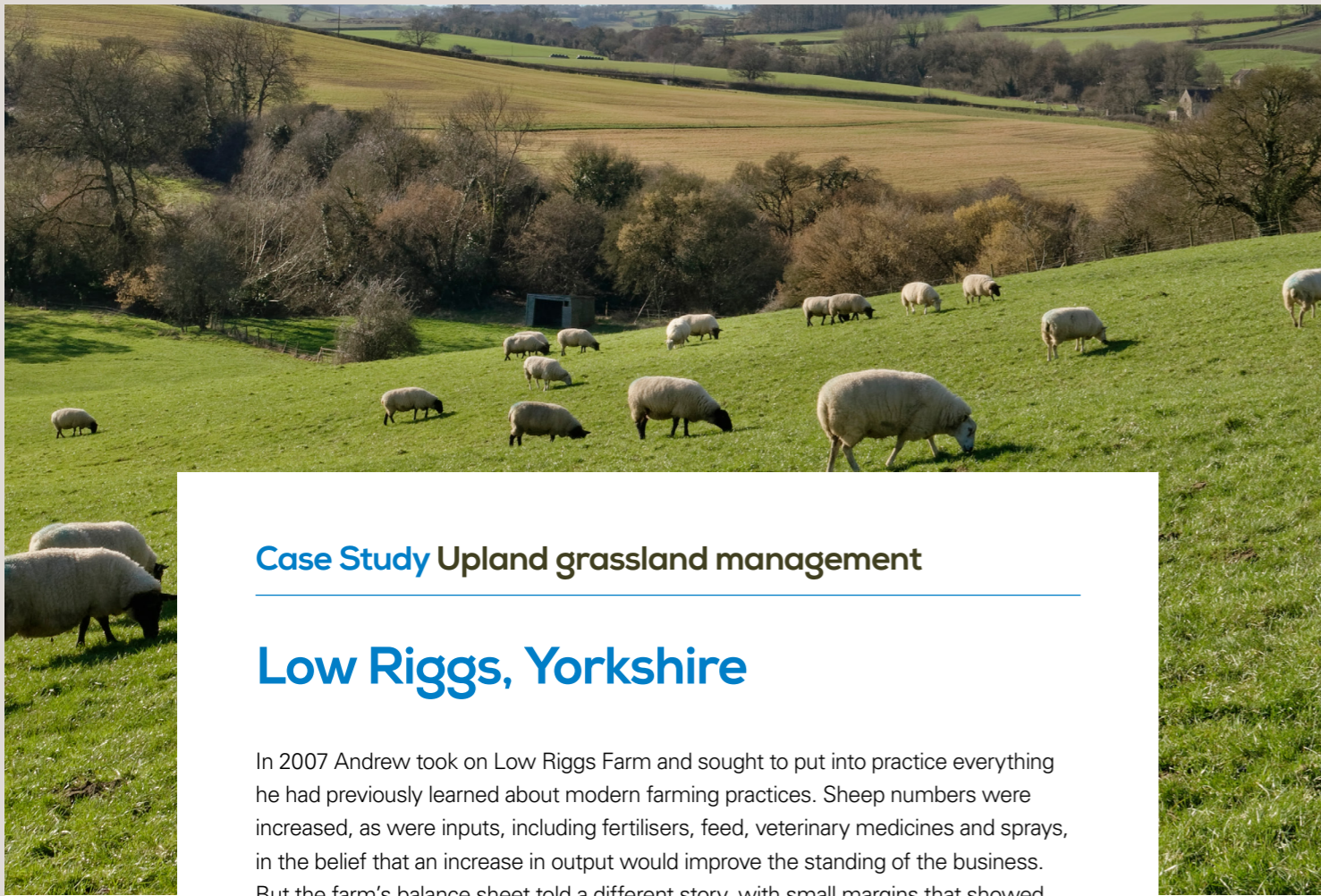
Case Study Arable farmland management

East County Down, NI

In Northern Ireland, seed eating birds such as yellowhammer, linnet and tree sparrow have seen widespread declines due to loss of food and habitat. Yellowhammers have been particularly badly affected, with possibly as few as 5,000 pairs left in Northern Ireland in 2005.

The farmland of East County Down is particularly important as it is one of the last strongholds for arable and mixed farming in NI. The RSPB began working with the farming community in this area in 2005 to help increase knowledge and uptake of wildlife-friendly farming. Now we have over 24 member farms who take part in a group farming scheme to protect the habitat of these priority farmland birds. More than 23 volunteers survey farms in the project annually, and it's looking positive. The application of targeted agri-environment options such as rough grass margins, and the retention of winter stubbles and feed crops in conjunction with advice provision really does deliver for our priority farmland bird species. When these options are carefully targeted, there are benefits for both nature and the farmer, making it easier to farm with nature in mind.





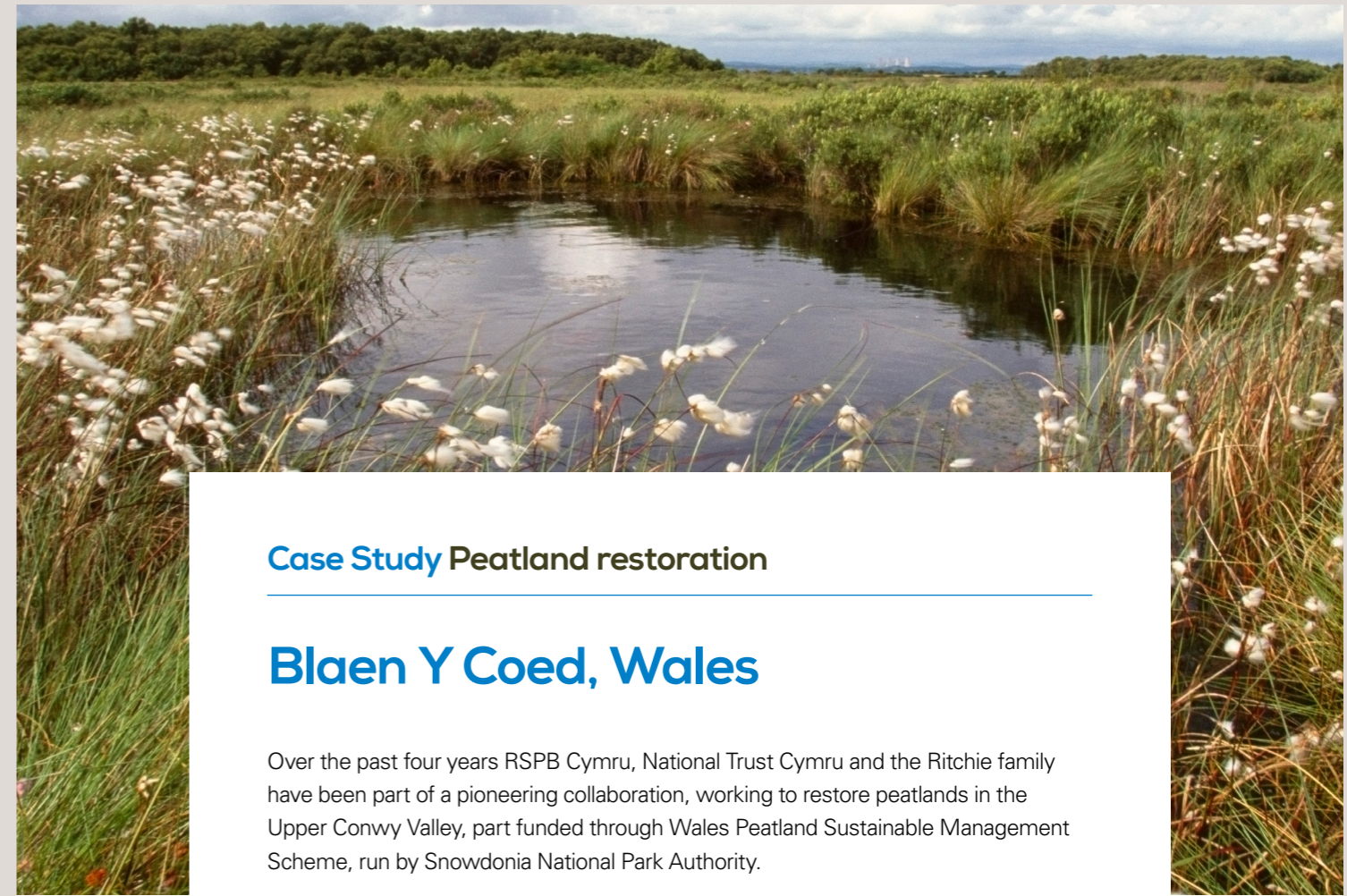
Case Study Upland grassland management

Low Riggs, Yorkshire

In 2007 Andrew took on Low Riggs Farm and sought to put into practice everything he had previously learned about modern farming practices. Sheep numbers were increased, as were inputs, including fertilisers, feed, veterinary medicines and sprays, in the belief that an increase in output would improve the standing of the business. But the farm's balance sheet told a different story, with small margins that showed little sign of improvement.

By 2012 it became apparent that the status quo was not a viable way forward; a major rethink was required. Since then, Andrew and his wife Sally have been implementing a long-term plan that aims to secure a better balance between business, nature and farming. Sheep numbers have been reduced from 450 to 80, cutting input costs dramatically, fertiliser use is at zero and feed costs are a fraction of what they were before; additionally a small herd of rare-breed native dairy cows has been established. Reduced grazing pressure has helped species-rich hay meadows to flourish, providing not only forage, but also a valuable income stream from agri-environment agreements, while cows' milk cheese secures a premium based on its nature friendly credentials. Wildlife is flourishing at the same time as attaining a more profitable, resilient business.

"Through the changes we've made our business is in a far better place, nature is recovering and our quality of life has improved significantly".



Case Study Peatland restoration

Blaen Y Coed, Wales

Over the past four years RSPB Cymru, National Trust Cymru and the Ritchie family have been part of a pioneering collaboration, working to restore peatlands in the Upper Conwy Valley, part funded through Wales Peatland Sustainable Management Scheme, run by Snowdonia National Park Authority.

The Ritchie family are National Trust tenants at Blaen Y Coed, an upland farm in the Ysbyty Ifan estate. Moorland on this estate falls within the Migneint Special area of Conservation: a large and internationally renowned expanse of upland heath and blanket bog, with huge potential for delivering public good, such as carbon storage, biodiversity, water filtration and flood protection – when in well managed and healthy condition.

In 2017, the partnership started working to restore areas of damaged peatland, with the goal of creating healthier habitat for declining birds. They spent four winters blocking drainage ditches and deep erosion gulleys in the peatlands; creating mini peat dams which in turn allowed small pools to form and rewet the landscape. All the work in the very challenging wet peat-bog habitat was carried out by the Ritchie family themselves, using their own farm machinery.

Close monitoring of the habitat has shown it has improved dramatically since the work has been done. Pools are re-forming and specialist bog plants such as sphagnum mosses, cotton grasses and sundews are thriving once again. Wet peatland is an ideal habitat for golden plover and curlew and over the summer of 2021 both species returned to the site to breed successfully within the re-wetted habitats with chicks of both species being seen. This proved to be the first successful breeding on this site since the 1990s.



A Nature Positive food system

There are some amazing examples of nature friendly farming but to achieve a Nature Positive food and farming system we need to do much more. This includes good regulation and enforcement to prevent poor practice across the sector alongside guaranteed long-term public payments for public goods to reward farm business that adopt Nature Positive land management practices. Getting public policies right, including transferring public investment in agriculture to ambitious public goods schemes is crucial for land managers to ensure a just transition from the current system to a Nature Positive future. We also urgently need to encourage innovation and knowledge exchange to raise best practice.

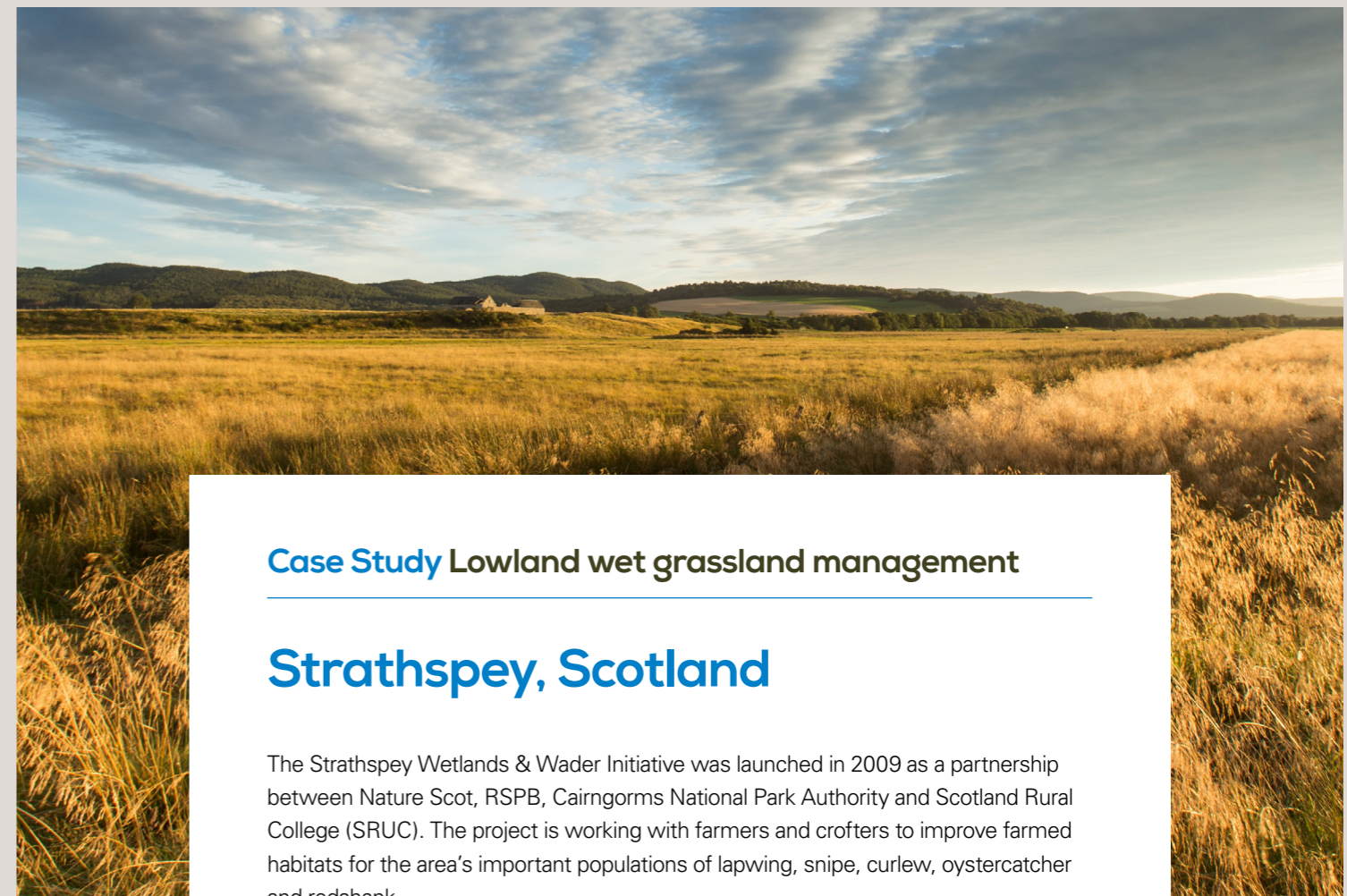
All this will fail however if our farming system is not supported by parallel change in the food system. The agri-food sector is currently worth £128bn in the UK. A Nature Positive food system not only needs to have nature friendly practices embedded within its supply chains it must promote nature friendly eating - sustainable and healthy diets to align demand with the land capacity to sustainable supply. What we choose to eat is driven by many factors, availability, tradition and taste but increasingly

global supply chains and huge marketing budgets nudge us towards choices which may excite our taste buds but which are bad for us, bad for nature and long term, bad for farming. What we produce on our farmed land is of course driven by the market for produce, but the way we currently live and eat is outstripping the planet's capacity to provide for us. The UK's overseas footprint is currently over 88% of the total UK land area².

Meat and dairy consumption are a leading cause of global habitat and species loss³, with agriculture being responsible for one third of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions⁴. We could feed more people from the same land areas if we reduced meat and dairy consumption and reduce waste. However, livestock farming can play an important role in recycling nutrients and managing our landscapes. By aligning our meat and dairy intake to healthy eating guidelines and choosing food products which support sustainable and nature friendly farming we can help support a Nature Positive food and farming system. At the same time, we must ensure that everyone has access to affordable nature friendly food.



1 Wildlife-friendly farming increases crop yield: evidence for ecological intensification - PubMed (nih.gov)
 2 risky-business-report-summary.pdf (rspb.org.uk)
 3 Wildlife-friendly farming benefits rare birds, bees and plants - PubMed (nih.gov)
 4 Food agriculture are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions | Nature Food



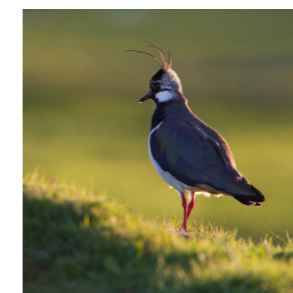
Case Study Lowland wet grassland management

Strathspey, Scotland

The Strathspey Wetlands & Wader Initiative was launched in 2009 as a partnership between Nature Scot, RSPB, Cairngorms National Park Authority and Scotland Rural College (SRUC). The project is working with farmers and crofters to improve farmed habitats for the area's important populations of lapwing, snipe, curlew, oystercatcher and redshank.

These species have suffered alarming declines across the UK but in Strathspey the picture is not nearly so bleak, thanks largely to the farming systems there. The work is guided by a comprehensive survey of breeding waders every five years on over 100 farms.

Whether a farm is HNV or a high yielding enterprise, all farms have habitats and thus potential to help deliver a Nature Positive landscape. It is crucial that we support these farms through payments for the public goods they deliver - nature, carbon, water management, pollination and pest control so they deliver as much benefit as possible for nature, climate and farming.



Technology, innovation and change

A Nature Positive landscape is not a step back to the past. It is working with nature to make the best use of our land, ensuring we get the right balance of outputs, food, fibre, and public goods to meet society's needs now and in the future. Farmers are, first and foremost, running businesses and we need to ensure that it is profitable for them to deliver the right suite of outputs.

Innovation and technology are key elements of the transition to a Nature Positive food and farming system but we need to avoid solutions which treat the symptoms rather than the causes of problems within the food and farming system. For example, many farmers have taken the decision to step off the pesticide treadmill which has driven an arms race in pesticide use and left us with herbicide resistant weeds and soils contaminated by insecticides.

Farmers are also embracing an agroecological approach to farming reducing nutrients, increasing the diversity of their rotations and considering how what they produce aligns with society's needs. We need to support farmers and land managers on this transition with payments for public goods, recognising the crucial role this will play in meeting our nature targets and our future food security.

The scale of the challenge on climate change means it is inevitable that there will be land use change at a landscape scale. Restoring our peatlands is the most effective action we can take to protect a vast carbon store and reduce emissions. Healthy peatlands also plays a vital role in adapting to the impacts of climate change, like droughts and floods, by slowing and absorbing water as it filters down from the hills and across landscapes.

We also need to plant more trees to expand and reconnect our woodlands, to sequester carbon, support declining wildlife and deliver benefits such as flood management, improved air quality and soil stability. As one of the least wooded countries in Europe, there is an urgent need to deliver woodland expansion in a way that helps wildlife to recover. There is however inevitably a trade off with food production. In some instance trees can be integrated into productive systems through hedgerows and agroforestry. There will though be some impact on productive land which means it is even more important that we manage this farmed land well and ensure it meets the needs of people and nature.



Case Study Multi-species grassland management

Mold, North Wales

Multi-species grasslands containing a diverse mix of legumes, herbs and grasses are helping livestock farmers achieve good production levels alongside reducing costs and impacts on the environment. As the costs of inorganic fertiliser rise and farming looks to reduce its carbon footprint, more farmers are looking to exploit the natural fixation of nitrogen from legumes.

North Wales dairy farmer Stuart Taylor's system is based on the good quality forage and healthy livestock that species diverse grasslands deliver. For him, adopting a lower input approach across the whole farm not only allows more space for nature to thrive, it's also a more cost-effective way of farming.

A variety of wildlife conservation measures have been undertaken at the dairy farm, including hedgerow restoration and pond creation. The farm was part of the Pasture for Pollinators project, which was run by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and the RSPB, with support from Calon Wen and funding through EIP Wales. This project trialled simple grassland management changes, such as cutting alternate headlands when making silage, with the result that the semi-improved fields have increased in wildlife, especially insects: all of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's "Big 7" have been found on the farm. The combination of actions has resulted in a diversity of habitats, including semi-natural grassland, which include yarrow, vetches, trefoils and black knapweed, multi-species hedges, which are cut rotationally, three ponds, and a small traditional orchard.

Visit the [Farm Wildlife](#) website to read the full case study.



Case Study Profitable nature-friendly farming

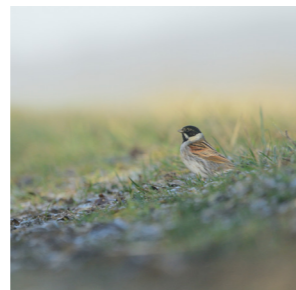
Knapwell, Cambridgeshire

In 2000, the RSPB purchased Hope Farm, a 181ha arable farm in south Cambridgeshire, with the aim to showcase how farmers can run a viable business while also helping wildlife. Between 2000 and 2011, Hope Farm demonstrated its core purpose as a profitable nature friendly farm by monitoring the changes in wildlife resulting from changing farming practices.

The farmland bird index (a measure of change in the number of farmland breeding bird territories) increased three-fold since the baseline set in 2000. The winter farmland index has increased even more sharply than the breeding bird index, nearly 15 times higher, due to management changes that the RSPB adopted from the Farm Wildlife six-point plan. The butterfly index is also continually increasing, already four times higher in 2019 than the 2000 baseline.

In 2019, the farm undertook a benchmarking exercise with other local farm businesses to see how costs, operations and yields compared. Hope Farm sat in the average range of profitability amongst some of the most innovative farmers in the area.

Despite taking over 15% of the farmland area out of conventional production for nature since time of purchase, including research trial areas, we still maintain similar profit (not including our profit from conservation areas). Additionally, in 2019 Hope Farm went insecticide free and saw no reduction in yields compared to previous years.



Delivering Nature Positive

There is much to do but the solutions are within our reach. We want to work with farmers, government, businesses and the public to inspire action to turn the fortunes of nature around and ensure that by 2030 the majority of UK land is being managed so that it is helping nature to recover and is supporting our net-zero targets, as part of a vibrant domestic food economy.

Our manifesto to change

Nature Positive by 2030 requires us to radically reshape our food and farming system.

For people this means:

- Demanding nature friendly products from their retailers
- Adopting nature friendly eating practices which lower their impact on nature and support nature friendly farmers
- Demanding their countries government implements policy that supports nature friendly farming practices.



For food businesses this means:

- Embedding the concept of Nature Positive in their business ethos
- Ensuring fair prices are paid to producers
- Working toward 100% nature friendly products within their supply chains
- Aligning marketing and product ranges to support sustainable and healthy diets.

For Government this means:

- Setting out a clear roadmap for the farming sector that is Nature Positive by 2030, and putting in place policies to ensure a safe and just transition.

This should include measures to halt the conversion of natural habitats at home and abroad. To protect, conserve and restore at least 30% of land, inland waters, coasts and oceans **and** progress restoration of ecosystems on the other 70% too Including:

- Effective regulation and enforcement
- Ambitious public goods schemes to reward nature friendly land management
- Market measures to improve supply chains.

For farmers and land managers this means:

- Implementing nature friendly management on their land
- Leading on identifying innovative ways to produce food that benefit nature and climate and improve sustainability
- Championing nature friendly farming and encouraging peer to peer learning.

rspb.org.uk

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.
The RSPB is a registered charity in England and Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654.

Cover: barn owl by Nigel Blake, page 3: barley by Kevin Sawford, page 6: harvest mouse by Paul Sawyer, page 7: grey partridge by Chris Knights, page 8: the whole farm by Colin Wilkinson, existing habitat by Mike Read, Flower-rich habitats by Patrick Cashman, page 9: field boundaries by Ian Francis, wet features by David Broadbent, seed-rich habitats (goldfinch) by Paul Sawyer, farmed area by Colin Wilkinson, page 10: bee by Andy Hay, page 11: top by David Sandford, bottom left yellowhammer by David Tipling, bottom middle linnets by Paul Sawyer, bottom right tree sparrow by Kevin Sawford, page 12: top domestic sheep by Nick Upton, bottom left yellowhammer by Mike Lane, bottom middle meadow brown by Patrick Cashman, bottom right wood cranesbill by Erine Janes, page 13: top peatland by Andy Hay, bottom left golden plover by Ben Andrew, bottom middle sphagnum moss by Drew Buckley, bottom right curlew by Ray Kennedy, page 14: seed by Andy Hay, page 15: top Ballinluggan Marsh by Mark Hamblin, bottom left lapwing by Mark Hamblin, bottom middle oystercatcher by Ian Francis, bottom right common redshank by Mike Read, page 16: farmland by Rosemary Despres, page 17: top grassland by Anna Hobbs, bottom left sheep's sorrel by Nick Upton, bottom middle white dead-nettle by David Norton, bottom right green-veined white butterfly by Oliver Smart, page 18: top yellowhammers by Ben Andrew, bottom left hoverfly by Kevin Sawford, bottom middle small white butterfly by Ernie Janes, bottom right reed bunting by Ben Andrew, page 19 family by Ben Andrew (all images except top images on page 11 and 17 rspb-images.com).