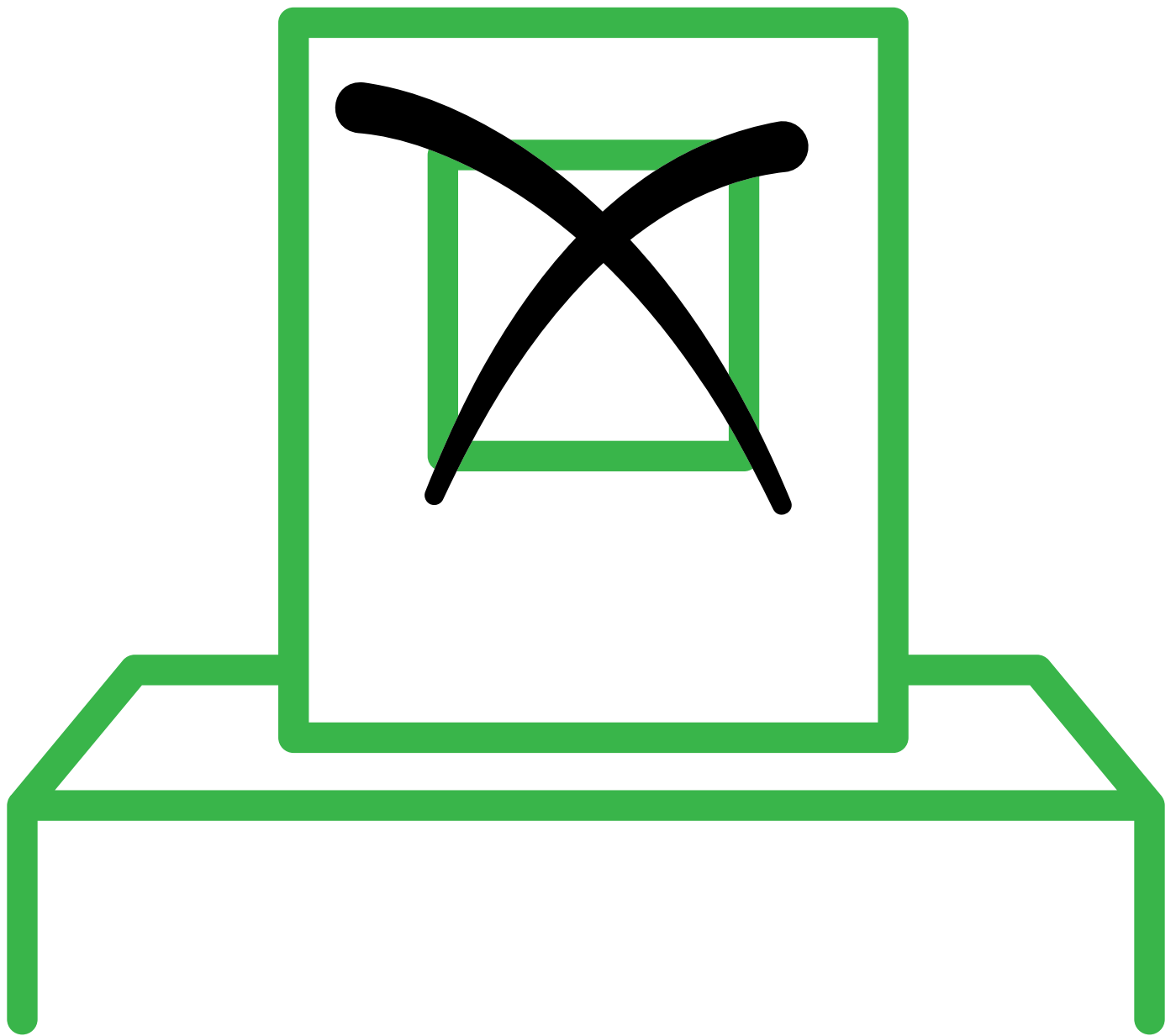


LET'S SAVE BRITAIN'S NATURE



Produced for the Labour Party by



The
Wildlife
Trusts

The Wildlife Trusts are a national federation of 47 charities, each of which is a place-based independent charity with its own legal identity, formed by groups of people getting together and working with others to make a positive difference to wildlife and future generations, starting where they live and work. Collectively we have nearly one million members and over 100 years of experience working towards the conservation of species and habitats in the UK, on Alderney, and the Isle of Man.

The role of The Wildlife Trusts is to bring about nature's recovery, working with others to create a healthier and fairer society for all. To achieve this, we look after more than 2,600 nature reserves, restore and reconnect landscapes, provide advice and support to landowners and farmers, mobilise volunteers, and work with schools and young people to inspire and educate the next generation.

It has never been more evident that people care more about the state of their natural environment than ever before. Surveys of Wildlife Trust members and the wider public¹ demonstrate that, irrespective of voting choice, nature matters to voters across the electorate – with many calling out for political parties to offer bold plans ahead of the next election.

Nature is vital to us all – for the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the space to help us feel secure, happy, and healthy. Without an urgent mission to halt the decline of nature by the end of the next Parliament, communities across the UK risk bearing an unimaginable cost. The next UK Government has not only a challenge but an enormous opportunity to tackle these interlinked social, economic, and environmental crises, and in doing so, to improve the future and livelihoods for everyone across Britain.

1. Enabling healthy communities

Right now in the UK, poor quality living conditions are damaging people's health and cutting lives short. Those living in the most deprived areas are ten times less likely to live in the greenest areas. More than one third of the population – nearly 9.5 million households in England – are unable to access green places near their home. The landmark 2010 study 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives' by Professor Michael Marmot warned that the loss of green space is deepening existing health inequalities.

The current situation is unfair – but it does not have to be like this. Improving access to natural, wildlife-rich places where we live, learn and work will transform people's lives, improving health, happiness, and hope across communities. To bring about healthy and sustainable communities, the next UK Government should:

- **Build a planning system that benefits for people, nature, and climate:** Marmot's Review recommended that creating access to good-quality green space will lead to improvements in physical and mental health, and lower levels of obesity. Nature can help tackle the strain on public services of unhealthy lives cut short by inactivity, poor mental health, and poor-quality homes without access to nature. New development must allow people to enjoy the beauty of nature on their doorstep and give nature space to recover and thrive by delivering above 30% biodiversity net gain.
- **Grow community-based health services:** 'Social prescribing' must be integrated into health and social care services in the community. Independent economic analysis has found that just one of The Wildlife Trust's health and wellbeing programmes that tackled loneliness and isolation in older people could deliver cost savings to the NHS of £100 million while benefiting the health and wellbeing of 1.2 million people.
- **Make the school estate the equitable space for connecting to nature:** Every school should be a place where children can access nature and wildlife every day, regardless of where they live or their economic circumstances. Research shows that time spent in nature improves children's mental and physical health, which in turn leads to improvements in academic performance and attendance. To support this, teachers should receive training which allows them to embed nature across the curriculum. The delayed Natural History GCSE must also be delivered, ensuring nature recovery and climate change feature as central topics within the syllabus

¹ Polls show nature policies could affect outcome of general election, <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/polls-show-nature-policies-affect-general-election>

2. Restoring Britain's rivers

The state of our rivers is a national disgrace. The UK is ranked as one of the worst countries in Europe for water quality, with pollution beyond legal limits caused by a toxic cocktail of sewage and agricultural pollution. Currently, 40% of waters fail quality targets due to pollution from agriculture and land management and in 2022 alone, raw sewage was discharged into waterways over 300,000 times.

Our rivers are no longer suitable homes for wildlife, they are not fit for people to swim in, and thanks to climate change and growing demand, we are seeing water availability decrease before our eyes. This is a crisis – and one which the public wants to see urgently resolved. To address this crisis, the next UK Government should:

- **Create a Wildbelt to protect our rivers:** Investing in the creation of areas for wildlife alongside rivers would create new spaces for nature, improve water quality and protect productive farmland from devastating floods. A new Wildbelt designation would protect the space the rivers need to recover, creating places for people to enjoy and finally tackle the river pollution crisis.
- **Enforce the law:** Cuts to enforcement agencies and environmental protection budgets over the past decade have left our rivers defenceless against polluters. Regulators must be empowered and sufficiently resourced to ensure they can monitor and inspect polluters and enforce penalties upon those who break the law.
- **Halve nutrient pollution by 2030:** Sewage, wastewater and agriculture are all suffocating our rivers and the wildlife that depends on them. The public rightly want to see healthy, safe and clean rivers, lakes, wetlands and coasts.

3. Funding wildlife-friendly farming

The destruction of nature and the impacts of climate change are the biggest threats to food security in the UK. Food production relies on healthy soils, clean water, and resilience to climate change. But farming is one of the main causes of wildlife declines, as well as the leading cause of river pollution in England. Restoring nature on farms will bring many benefits for wildlife and for farmers. Working with nature can increase farm profits and resilience, reduce costs, and maintain or even improve yields.

By supporting farmers to shift towards regenerative, nature-friendly methods, farming has huge potential to deliver a green rural renewal. The next UK Government should:

- **Increase the budget for wildlife-friendly farming:** To reverse the decline of nature by 2030, and secure the UK's long term food security, the budget to support wildlife-friendly farming should be increased to at least £4.4 billion a year. This will ensure the agricultural transition is fair to farmers and better for wildlife while providing healthier and more affordable food for all.
- **Halve pesticide use:** Insects are the canaries in the coal mine – their collapse is an alarm bell that must not be ignored. The next UK Government must halve pesticide use by 2030 and maintain all bans on of bee-killing and human-health-harming neonicotinoids.
- **Help farmers reduce emissions and adapt to climate change:** Recent heatwaves, wildfires, and droughts have provided a taste of what is to come. Farmers need much more support to adapt to climate change and to help meet the UK's climate goals while reducing their emissions. Adaptation and mitigation need to be embedded in farm payment schemes; farmers need better information about how farming with nature can increase their resilience; and a land use strategy is needed that considers how food production needs to change in the UK in response to climate change.

4. Bringing back the UK's lost wildlife

The UK is home to species found nowhere else on Earth. But immense pressure from decades of pollution and habitat loss has driven wildlife into catastrophic decline. Shockingly, 1 in 6 species in the UK is now at risk of extinction.

Nature is declining at a speed never previously seen and shows no sign of slowing. It is no longer enough to just protect the wildlife that remains. Any future UK Government must align across departments to put nature into recovery, on land and at sea, by the end of the next Parliament. The next UK Government should:

- **Make more space for nature:** Currently, just 3% of land and 8% of English waters are properly protected for nature – this is nowhere near enough. The next UK Government should launch an Olympic-style cross-government delivery project to protect and restore at least 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.
- **Stop damage to Marine Protected Areas:** The UK's seas are being poisoned by sewage discharges river pollution, and unsustainable fishing methods such as bottom trawling. Our Marine Protected Areas should be properly protected – with destructive practices banned and development avoided.
- **Bring wild beavers back to every county:** Beavers are nature's finest 'wetland engineers'. Returning beavers to the wild can be a game changer for restoring lost wetlands and benefitting all kinds of wildlife. Moreover, beavers can help to reduce the risk of wildfires and flooding which threaten people's homes. Bringing back wild beavers to every county in England is a critical part of addressing the climate and nature crises.

5. Tackling the climate emergency

The climate and nature emergencies are inextricably linked. Climate change is driving nature's decline, and the loss of wildlife and wild places leaves us ill-equipped to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to these changes. One crisis cannot be solved without the other.

The UK has a legal target of Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Nature can make a massive contribution to achieving this, or an even more ambitious target – but only if our damaged ecosystems are restored. Climate change is impacting wildlife in the UK now, and we need a much more ambitious strategy to help nature adapt and give wildlife room to move. The next UK Government should:

- **Upgrade energy efficiency for homes:** The greenest energy is the energy we don't use. To reduce emissions, costs, and energy bills, the next UK Government must help homes upgrade their energy efficiency urgently, by rapidly expanding home retrofit schemes to bring the entire UK housing stock to a good level of efficiency by 2030. Without serious action, heating and cooling is likely to stay unaffordable for millions of people while energy is wasted – leading to poor outcomes for people's health and for our environment.
- **Help nature and people adapt to climate change:** Progress on adaptation must be measured alongside progress on reducing carbon emissions. Adapting to climate change must be integrated across all UK Government policies. Ignoring this will put our natural carbon stores – such as peatlands and woodlands – at risk of extreme heat, fire, and drought, which will lead to massive releases of more carbon into the atmosphere. Habitats need to be connected together to make it easier for wildlife to move, and we need to transform land use and undertake widespread restoration in some areas, such as the Fens, to give them a chance of withstanding climate change impacts.
- **Protect our Blue Carbon:** The marine environment has a huge role to play in locking up and storing carbon. Destroying these 'Blue Carbon' sources will worsen climate change even further and could make Net Zero unachievable. It is essential that these important stores of Blue Carbon are recognised, monitored, and protected from damaging development and activities.