

Towards a *Wilder* DEVON

A ten-year strategy for
the Devon Wildlife Trust



Devon
Wildlife Trust

A decade to make a difference

The 2020s are a time of immense unpredictability as well as huge and rapid change. Amongst all the turbulence, one positive trend is clear – governments across the globe seem finally to be getting to grips with the seriousness of the threats to our natural world. And it's as well that they are because the calls from an increasingly concerned public, and the ever starker warnings of the scientists, demand nothing less.

Our new strategy, 'Towards a Wilder Devon', is Devon Wildlife Trust's response to the environmental challenge. We want to double the area of wildlife habitat on land and at sea. We want all Devon's soils, rivers, farmland and urban areas to be managed sustainably, so the air we breathe, the water we drink and the fields and streets we walk through make us healthier and happier. And we want at least a quarter of the population to be actively engaged in wildlife. We have

backed these calls up with stiff challenges for DWT itself, including becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

Some may think this is just a pipedream. But in a matter of a few years we have experienced Brexit, the Covid pandemic and we have declared ecological and climate emergencies. We now know that governments can take swift and radical action when they really need to - and that society can change.

Our vision for a wilder Devon is ambitious and we cannot achieve it alone. We need the help of our members, volunteers, partners, funders...our community of supporters and everyone who cares about wildlife. This is our moment. We need to grasp it.

Harry Barton
Chief Executive, Devon Wildlife Trust

Whose strategy is this?

This strategy is the vision of the whole of Devon Wildlife Trust: our Trustees, staff, volunteers, funders, partners, members and supporters. More than 1,500 people have helped us to shape this ten-year plan to create a wilder Devon.

Everyone can play a role in nature's recovery. We are a community of people who love Devon and its wildlife. We want to see this community grow. We want everyone to be inspired and empowered to act for nature.

Join us in this mission by making contact today.



Ideford Common - one of our 60 nature reserves. We want at least three more nature reserves, covering 200 hectares, over the next decade.



It's time to put nature into recovery

We have lost incredible amounts of our wildlife. Species which once thrived in Devon have gone; many others which were commonplace are now rare.

Abundance in nature – its 'everywhere and all the time' presence – has disappeared from our lives.

The rate of this loss is accelerating and its consequences are now affecting us in profound ways. Nature's loss adversely impacts our economy, our food and water, our health and our state of mind. Biodiversity – the web of life which supports our existence – is beginning to unravel.

Devon Wildlife Trust's mission stems from this need for urgent change. Conservation – holding on to the fragmented wildlife and wild places that remain – is no longer good enough. It is time to put nature into recovery. We need to restore what has been lost and we need to do this on a grand scale. This means being bold: restoring degraded landscapes and seas, recreating wildlife habitat, reintroducing key species that have become locally extinct and properly protecting what we still have.

We need to restore what has been lost and we need to do this on a grand scale.



Globally

• **In 2020 we passed the point where the artificial outweighs the natural.**

The mass of concrete, asphalt and bricks is now greater than the mass of plants, animals and humans.

• **60% of all wildlife has disappeared globally since the 1970s.**

One quarter of all plants and animals are threatened with extinction - around one million species.

• **One third of all the World's fisheries are pushed beyond their biological limit.**

By 2050 many scientists predict there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans.

• **41% of insects are threatened with extinction.** Insects account for more than half of all known species, and this rate of extinction is eight times that of more familiar groups such as mammals and birds.

• **A time of environmental extremes.**

The climate emergency is resulting in record-breaking temperatures, worsening wildfires, devastating extreme weather events, including rain deluges and hurricanes.

Each of these species are now either extinct, threatened with extinction or in decline in Devon.



Locally

While devastating droughts and wildfires, the loss of coral reefs and havoc brought by hurricanes may seem a world away, we need to bear in mind that much of the UK's and Devon's natural environment has already been lost. Much of what remains is poorly protected and in trouble.

• **We are one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth,** coming 189th in a list of 218 countries.

• **Devon's wild places are under threat.**

Despite a growing number of protected areas (including two National Parks, two World Heritage Sites, six Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 15 Marine Conservation Zones), only one third of our 200+ Sites of Special Scientific Interest are deemed to be in 'favourable condition'.

• **25% of our mammal species are on the 'red list'.** 11 of the UK's 47 native mammal species are now classified as being 'at imminent risk of extinction', while a further five are listed as 'near threatened'.

• **Just one in five of Devon's rivers are in a healthy condition.** Water extraction, run-off from farmland and pollution incidents are choking the life of our rivers and streams.

• **Devon's two coastlines and inshore waters are struggling.** Plastic pollution, regular sewage incidents, damaging fishing activities, invasive species and rising sea levels are among the most pressing concerns.



A wilder Devon

Our vision for Devon is bold:

Nature is everywhere:

Wildlife is no longer confined to small, isolated pockets. A network of wildlife rich spaces extends into every corner of our landscape and our seas, along with the many species it supports. The network includes larger, better connected and better protected nature rich areas.

Nature is normal:

Children everywhere have the chance to experience nature in schools, gardens, parks and the wider countryside. Everyone has better access to nature. Flower and tree-lined paths criss-cross the landscape.

Wilder cities:

Our cities have wildlife rich parks, roundabouts and waterways, and the roads are lined with trees. Our houses have green roofs, green walls and wildlife rich gardens, and they are designed to maximise energy efficiency.

Wildlife is abundant:

Our farmland is alive to the sound of birds, bees and other insects. Wildflower margins and wide, tree-lined hedges can be seen everywhere, and the widespread use of pesticides is a distant memory. Large areas of the landscape are semi-natural, with expanded areas of species rich grassland, hay meadow and heath.

Living seas:

Our reefs, seagrass beds, kelp forests and other marine habitats are all protected and recovering, and so are the many fish that thrive off them. Snorkelling in Devon will be as exciting as anywhere in Europe.

Whales and dolphins:

Whales, dolphins, seals, basking sharks, blue fin tuna....these and other species, once common around our coasts, can now be seen again regularly. So can the flocks of gannets and other sea birds that once graced our seas and skies.

Vibrant rivers:

Our rivers are clean, clear and full of fish and aquatic wildlife. Pollution from soil erosion, Victorian sewers and poor urban drainage is a thing of the past, and our bathing waters are pristine. Our river courses look natural again, and beavers and water voles are common sights across the county.

Uplands restored:

Dartmoor, Exmoor and other upland areas are rich in wildlife again, with wide expanses of woodland, heath, mires and peat bog in prime condition. Once common moorland birds like the curlew and dunlin have returned in large numbers, and the pine marten can be seen in our forests.

With your support, we have much to do to achieve this and the next decade will be crucial.



A Wilder Devon



Achieving our vision

Goal 1

Wildlife is in recovery on at least a third of Devon's landscape

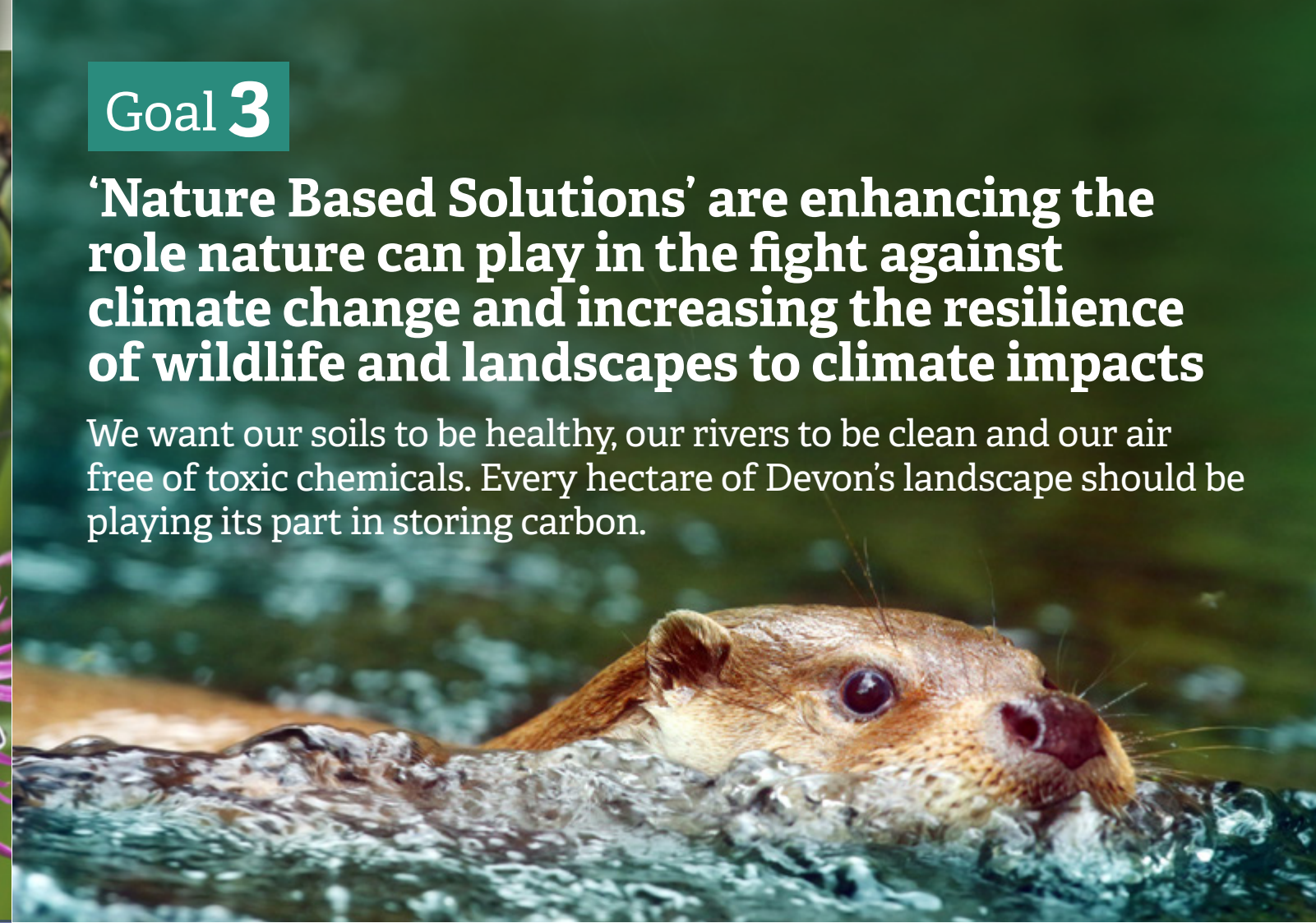
We want more, bigger, better protected and better connected nature rich areas where natural processes thrive on a grand scale, insects are in abundance and formerly native species flourish once again.



Goal 3

'Nature Based Solutions' are enhancing the role nature can play in the fight against climate change and increasing the resilience of wildlife and landscapes to climate impacts

We want our soils to be healthy, our rivers to be clean and our air free of toxic chemicals. Every hectare of Devon's landscape should be playing its part in storing carbon.



Goal 2

Marine wildlife is in recovery in at least a third of Devon's seas

We want to create a marine network of pollution-free, protected areas where dolphins and whales move freely. We want a coastline that is more resilient to climate change impacts.



Goal 4

One quarter of Devon's population is actively engaged in wildlife

We believe that nature is for everyone and that everyone has a role to play in its recovery. We want to enable individuals and communities of all backgrounds and abilities to connect with nature, and to take action for wildlife where they live, learn and work.



Goal 1

Wildlife is in recovery on at least a third of Devon’s landscape



	What we want to do	Priority actions	Why we want to do this
1	Devon Wildlife Trust secures a greater area and diversity of wildlife through its landholdings	Three new nature reserves of at least 200 hectares are established in areas where our presence is poor	Nature reserves are crucial havens for wildlife. We need to invest in larger and more varied sites, providing opportunities for wildlife to recover, diversify and adapt to change.
2	More high-quality habitat is identified, designated and protected in the wider landscape	Double the number and area of County Wildlife Sites and improve favourable condition from 33% to 66%	County Wildlife Sites are the best quality habitat we have that is not legally protected. Devon has more than 2,000 such sites on record, but the real number is probably more than twice that, and none of these sites are properly protected.
3	Rare and formerly native species populations are strengthened and reintroduced	Three locally extinct native species are reintroduced to Devon	We know that beavers have had a positive impact on our rivers and there are other formerly resident species that could transform the ecology of Devon.
4	Landscapes are restored for nature through concerted partnership action	<p>A rewilded zone of 10,000ha</p> <p>Re-naturalisation of 1,000km of watercourse</p>	<p>Few if any parts of Devon are in a near natural state. To restore wildlife on a grand scale, we need to be looking seriously at re-naturalising large areas. This does not have to mean reintroducing wolves, but it does mean allowing natural processes to operate with minimal human intervention.</p> <p>Most of our river courses have been highly modified over centuries. This limits their ability to trap sediment, accommodate flood water and provide homes for wildlife. Re-naturalising our rivers is as important as re-naturalising our landscapes.</p>

5

Insect and invertebrate populations are in recovery

A network of insect friendly habitat is established across Devon

Insect abundance is in free fall. Insect friendly habitat can be created in gardens, along roadsides, in public parks and across the farmed landscape.

To restore wildlife on a grand scale, we need to re-naturalise large areas, creating landscapes where natural processes can operate with minimal human intervention. A rewilded zone of 10,000ha is just one of our ambitions.

Goal 2

Marine wildlife is in recovery in at least a third of Devon's seas



	What we want to do	Priority actions	Why we want to do this
1	More marine wildlife habitat is protected more effectively	10% of our seas are in No Take Zones or Highly Protected Marine Areas	Marine Special Areas of Conservation, and the proposed network of Marine Conservation Zones, will be a big step forward in protecting our marine habitats. But we need to go further. Much of our marine environment is unmapped and little understood, and levels of protection are poor, even for those areas with some designation.
		At least 2,000km sq. protected for mobile marine species such as whales and dolphins	We need to protect more than just the best marine habitats. We need to protect mobile species that visit our waters at certain times of year, and species that are of particular importance to Devon's coastal habitats.
2	Natural habitat recovers along Devon's coastline with space to adapt to sea level rise	A coastal wetland creation (realignment) project of at least 500ha	Devon's coast will face increasing pressure from sea level rise and storms. Soft flood and coastal defences have major advantages over hard defences in many cases. Moreover, our precious coastal habitats have been squeezed over time and their wildlife depleted.

One of our priority actions is to establish 10% of our seas as protected areas for wildlife.

3

Fishing, pollution and other pressures on the marine environment are reduced

A plan to manage Devon's fisheries sustainably is agreed and properly enforced

The UK is one of Europe's worst offenders for overfishing – in 2019 our catch was 24.3% in excess of limits advised by scientists.

All offshore and coastal renewable energy developments bring net benefits to marine wildlife

Our seas face many pressures, just as land does, and an activity in one place can have a big impact miles away. Maritime economic activities need to be properly planned and zoned so that 'developments' such as aggregate extraction and renewable energy developments do not impact on wildlife.

A multi-sector plan to tackle marine pollution across the South West peninsula is in place

Agricultural run-off, sewage, industrial pollution, plastics and ghost fishing gear are among the many pollutants affecting our waters. 500 areas globally are now regarded as dead zones, covering an area the size of the UK. Plastic pollution kills 100 million marine animals each year.

Goal 3

‘Nature Based Solutions’ are enhancing the role nature can play in the fight against climate change and increasing the resilience of wildlife and landscapes to climate impacts.



	What we want to do	Priority actions	Why we want to do this
1	All new development incorporates green principles and high-quality green infrastructure	Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) leads on a showcase of sustainable urban development and associated wildlife rich greenspace	The towns and cities of the future need to have environmental principles at their core. We need green cities. For every new house built, we need to see habitat created. And we need new development to pay for the costs of managing this new habitat in the long term.
2	The majority of Devon farms have embedded good soil and habitat management	DWT sets up a network of demonstration farms and small holdings to showcase a variety of farming approaches	Across much of Devon soils are compacted and topsoil is lost every year, flowing into the rivers. DWT's advisory work helps protect soils and rivers, benefitting farmers as well as wildlife. This approach helps farmers restore and create vital wildlife habitat as well.
3	Significant investment is secured for Devon's nature through facilitating natural solutions	DWT plays a leading role in a successful carbon and biodiversity offset platform	Carbon offsetting will be a key tool in the plan to reach net zero emissions as well as in the recreation of habitat and restoration of soils. But it needs to be ethical, transparent and carefully targeted.
4	The majority of Devon's rivers are in recovery, with water flow and quality improving	All Devon's main river catchments are provided with sustainable catchment management support	Devon is a county of rivers, but many of them are in moderate ecological condition at best, with impoverished wildlife and fish populations. Reversing this is a must.



5	One quarter of Devon's farms have eliminated or significantly reduced their pesticide and synthetic nutrient use with DWT's support	A comprehensive advisory service is offered to help farmers across Devon improve habitat and soils and reduce agrochemical inputs	Three quarters of Devon is farmed and the area, frequency of application and toxicity of pesticides has increased dramatically. Reducing this is vital for insects, river and soil health, and in tackling carbon emissions.
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Working with farmers, partners, businesses and communities, we will deliver a range of initiatives to restore Devon's rivers. Bringing back beavers is just one way that we are transforming Devon's wetlands.

Goal 4

One quarter of Devon’s population is actively engaged in wildlife



	What we want to do	Priority actions	Why we want to do this
1	Higher numbers and a greater diversity of people discover wildlife through Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT)	<p>There are welcoming and accessible nature reserves or visitor assets in or close to key Devon communities.</p> <p>Exeter Valley Parks offers a high quality and inclusive visitor experience for thousands of people every year.</p> <p>Natural learning is embedded across school curriculums with one trained wildlife teacher/ champion in every school community.</p>	<p>Regular contact with high quality green space helps people to care about nature and makes them feel better.</p> <p>The six Valley Parks are a huge asset to Exeter and a fantastic opportunity to engage tens of thousands of people in nature. But they could be far better for wildlife and for public enjoyment and, as the green heart of a growing city, they have huge potential to improve the lives of local people.</p> <p>DWT works with many schools, but it is mainly at the primary level and is rarely integral to the curriculum. We want to see schools of all types embrace nature as core to the learning experience.</p>
2	Higher numbers and a greater diversity of communities act for wildlife	<p>At least half of Devon towns and villages achieve ‘wilder’ status as our communities take tangible action for wildlife.</p>	<p>Enabling communities to transform where they live for wildlife is a vital part of creating a network for nature’s recovery in Devon.</p>

3

Higher numbers and a greater diversity of individuals act for wildlife and for DWT

We establish a network of conservation leaders and advocates across Devon.

We can’t do it alone. We need people from across Devon to use their passion, skills and knowledge to support nature’s recovery where they live, learn and work.

At least ten thousand people every year participate in DWT campaigns to transform the fortunes of wildlife and take individual action for wildlife.

Things change when our voice is strong. Supporting our campaigns, writing to MPs, becoming wildlife champions – these are some of the most effective ways people can make a difference.

A priority action is to establish a network of wildlife champions across Devon, because we cannot do it alone.

Achieving our vision means leading by example and living our values

We lead by example

- Equality, diversity and inclusion are properly embedded at all levels. We have removed barriers to participation, actively seek new and more diverse audiences and challenge any behaviours that are discriminatory

- We become carbon negative by 2030 through implementing an ambitious carbon reduction plan

- Our income, investments and use of charitable resources meet high ethical standards and support our values

We are financially resilient, with the people and the resources we need to achieve our vision

- We want to increase our unrestricted income by at least 50%, double our membership, and secure significant new grants

- Our volunteers and our Trustees have the right skills and are valued and enabled to fulfil their roles

- We have a happy, motivated and appropriately skilled staff team and a great working culture

Our work is guided by unrivalled knowledge & evidence about all aspects of Devon's natural environment

- A Nature Recovery Network map is agreed for Devon and its seas, guiding how and where DWT and our partners focus conservation effort

- We will develop an unrivalled wildlife information base through a programme of surveying and recording which involves a range of communities, organisations and individuals

Our Exeter base contains an urban wildflower meadow created by volunteers



Become part of our **wilder vision** for Devon

Nature's recovery in Devon is not something we can achieve alone. We need the support of individuals, communities, businesses and schools.

Everyone can play a role.

Want to get involved?

May of your questions will be answered at:
devonwildlifetrust.org

You can contact us at:

Email contactus@devonwildlifetrust.org

Tel 01392 254439

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We're part of something bigger

Devon Wildlife Trust is part of The Wildlife Trusts - a national movement of independent charities with a mission to restore a third of the UK's land and seas for nature by 2030. No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about nature and standing up for wildlife and wild places.

Wildlife Trusts are led by local people working together to make a positive difference to wildlife, climate and future generations. Together we have more than 850,000 members, over 42,500 volunteers, 2,000 staff and 600 trustees.



Devon Wildlife Trust

Devon Wildlife Trust is a registered charity, no 213224

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