

With your support

As 2025 draws to a close, Nick Bruce-White reviews a year in which your support has had big impacts for Devon's wildlife.



It's been two years since I had the honour of stepping through the doors of Devon Wildlife Trust, and it is moments such as these that afford me the opportunity to survey all the amazing work that has been achieved recently in the name of the Trust, with your support and that of our partners.

Having led the pioneering River Otter Beaver Trial, beavers are a species at the heart of DWT's mission. So, we were delighted, after all our hard work in east Devon demonstrating the benefits of living with this incredible 'ecosystem engineer', that the government announced licences for further wild beaver reintroductions across England this year. A wild release in Dorset swiftly followed and in Devon we now hope to secure licences to reinforce various existing populations on rivers in our county.

One of my wildlife missions this summer has been to see all of Devon's fritillary butterfly species. In recent years, we have been focusing management on our nature reserves for these special butterflies, so it has been a delight to see the response, with exceptional counts at sites including DWT's Dunsford and Emsworthy nature reserves. I was particularly pleased to see dozens of high brown fritillaries – Britain's most threatened butterfly – with my family one weekend in the Dart Valley. The first time I'd seen them in more than 20 years!

A few lucky supporters of our Collaven Moor appeal got to experience their own butterfly spectacle when they visited our newest nature reserve in June. The reserve near Sourton on the eastern edge of Dartmoor is a true gem, absolutely teeming with wildflowers and butterflies. Thanks so much to all of you who generously gave to this appeal – you helped save this precious site from an uncertain future.

One of the best things about my job is the inspiration I take from meeting our supporters. Hearing your stories, your reasons for caring and the actions you are taking – it is all fuel to my fire. DWT's membership has continued to grow this year and I detect a tangible tipping point, with more and more people showing their passion for nature through their support of movements like ours. It is thanks to your generosity – converting your care into action and support for DWT – that we can continue doing more to restore nature in the county, together.

My warmest thanks to you all.

N.B.W.

Nick Bruce-White
Chief Executive
Devon Wildlife Trust

Read on to find out more about the places, people and species where your support is making most difference.

Collaven Moor – secured forever

We had to move quickly when, early in the year, the chance came to purchase a wildlife-rich grassland on the eastern edges of Dartmoor.

As ever you responded magnificently to help us meet the challenge. Within weeks donations helped raise £60,000 – enough to buy the rare mix of wet grassland and meadows.

This is land which could have been lost to building development or unsympathetic management, but which now is safe forever. Good news for birds including grasshopper warblers, plants such as early purple orchids and insects like

the narrow-bordered bee hawkmoth and small blue butterfly.

With sympathetic management we aim to provide a new home to threatened Devon species including marsh fritillary butterflies and southern damselflies.

However, the good news for nature doesn't end at Collaven Moor's boundary. The site sits in a key position, right next door to our existing Sourton Quarry nature reserve. This purchase has now allowed us to double the space which we are managing for local wildlife.



Among Collaven Moor's rare residents is the narrow-bordered bee hawkmoth

Photo: Shutterstock Guio...55



Butterfly work completed



Our 'robo-flail' is helping butterflies including the silver-washed fritillary



Photo: Jim Higham

Our Devon Fritillary Recovery Project completed its work improving the homes of butterflies on our nature reserves. Supported by Natural England through its Species Recovery Programme, the project has provided two vital legacies: the training of volunteers who will help staff monitor the fortunes of butterflies in coming years, and the purchase of a robotic flail which will allow our team to continue to provide crucial bracken management across even the steepest slopes.

7,000 trees planted



DWT's Nick Bruce-White joined local people for tree planting at Bowden Pillars

Our ambitious plan to create a new temperate rainforest at Bowden Pillars nature reserve is beginning to take root.

Local people from the nearby town of Totnes, along with DWT volunteers and staff, planted more than 7,000 young trees over the past 12 months across what was former sheep-farmed grassland. Several more thousand trees are planned for the coming winter.

The mass tree planting is one of several temperate rainforest recreation schemes being undertaken by The Wildlife Trusts throughout the UK. All are supported by insurance giant Aviva, while Bowden Pillars has also received support from Forestry England through the England Woodland Creation Offer.

This is a conservation project for the ages. It will take decades for the trees to become established temperate rainforest like those covering parts of nearby Dartmoor, but in the meantime, we expect our annual monitoring to show that wildlife in the shape of butterflies, bats and birds will soon colonise the site in greater numbers.

Meeting the challenge of dieback disease

Of all the issues faced by our dedicated nature reserves team and their dozens of volunteers, it's coping with the impacts of ash dieback disease which continues to be the most resource hungry.

The majority of our 60 nature reserves have felt the disease's devastating impact over the past decade. Our policy is to leave afflicted ash trees to decay naturally – after all, a rotting tree provides homes and food for dozens of species, from fungi to insects and woodland birds. But sometimes, either because a tree presents a danger to visitors or because it threatens roads and footpaths, we must intervene.

This year, our team has overseen the felling of large mature ash trees at our Marsland, Halsdon and New England Wood nature reserves. It's both a sad and time-consuming exercise for the staff involved.

Our recent woodlands fundraising appeal has raised a wonderful £24,000. While helping us meet the challenge of managing Devon's precious woodlands, it will boost the continuing job of replacing ash lost to the disease, planting a new generation of trees for local wildlife. If you missed the appeal, then there is still time to donate by going to devonwildlifetrust.org/appeals/save-our-precious-woodlands

Long term Dartmoor



We're working with Dartmoor landowners to provide a brighter future for species like cuckoos

Photo: Mark Caunt



The East Dartmoor Landscape Recovery Scheme is now operating throughout 5,000 hectares. Devon Wildlife Trust is leading an initiative of eight partners, and which involves local landowners and farmers across an area which spans the headwaters of three Dartmoor rivers: the Becka, the Bovey and the Wray.

In a period of so much uncertainty around support for nature-friendly farming, we're working together using funding and land management schemes to ensure the area's exceptionally rich working landscape thrives with nature for decades to come.

Better marine protection



We hope to make Wembury Bay a Marine Nature Reserve

Photo: Paul Naylor

2025 saw Devon Wildlife Trust begin the process to establish Wembury Bay, near Plymouth as a Marine Nature Reserve. Designation would give improved protection to what is a vulnerable, but still rich in wildlife, marine eco-system.

Securing protection for local marine environments is a complex process in which DWT is taking a leading role co-ordinating partners, seeking funding and, crucially, establishing community engagement. We'll update you on this initiative in a future edition of Wild Devon.

Meanwhile, more than 21,000 people visited our Wembury Marine Centre, while a further 2,000 took part in its spring and summer calendar of rockpool safaris and snorkel safaris. Wembury also co-ordinates the growing marine citizen science programmes, Shoresearch and the Devon Marine Strandings Network. Together these have recruited 130 volunteers who are playing key roles in adding to our knowledge about marine wildlife and its protection.

Behind nature's comeback



Water voles have felt beaver benefits

Photo: Neil Aldridge

Exmoor chapter in this comeback story on page 12 of this edition of Wild Devon, while the quest to bring back wildcats to the South West is explored on pages 14-19.

But the most talked about species reintroduction programme undertaken by DWT during the last decade has been our success in restoring beavers to Devon's rivers. The full impact of this pioneering effort was recognised earlier this year. In February the independent scientific evidence gathered during five years (2015-2020) of our River Otter Beaver Trial was cited as a primary reason by Natural England in its decision to allow further beaver releases under a new licensing scheme.

The first of these wild releases took place in Dorset during the spring, and the expectation is that others will follow. This will mean the benefits of beavers already being felt by people and wildlife in Devon, from flood alleviation, water conservation and wetland creation, should be about to spread across other river catchments in England.

At Devon Wildlife Trust we're proud of our record of not simply trying to conserve the species which remain but also bringing back wildlife which is either locally extinct or is perilously close to it.

In the past this has meant reintroducing species such as the southern damselfly to our Venn Ottery nature reserve. More recently we have led a partnership of conservation organisations which has pioneered the return of pine martens to Dartmoor. You can read more about the latest

Working the land



Wildflower seed harvesting and meadow making is a central part of what our Avon Valley Project does

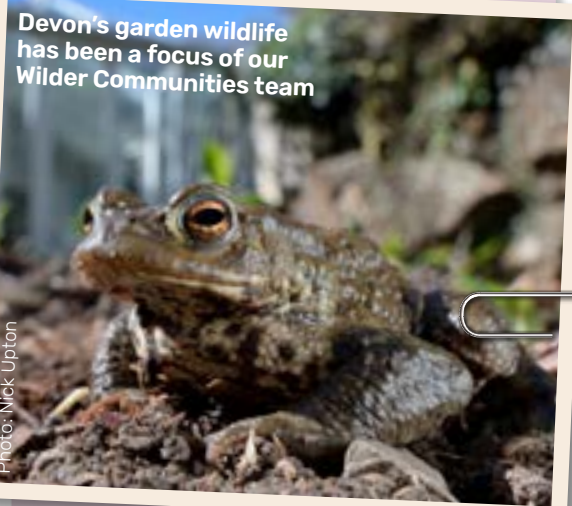
Devon Wildlife Trust has a large team dedicated to land advisory and restoration projects. Working with hundreds of landowners and farmers around the county allows us to tackle crucial issues facing people and nature including the poor state of our rivers and streams, flood risk, carbon storage and, of course, making space for wildlife. Here are just a few of the team's achievements:

- Our Northern Devon Natural Solutions project carried out almost 300 farm visits during the year, advising on land

which totalled nearly 2,500 hectares. Much of their effort concentrated on tree planting and improving soil health. The team were also able to help farmers and land managers access more than £3million from agri-environment schemes aimed at restoring local nature.

- The Working Wetlands project has now been established for 15 years, working alongside farmers and land managers to improve water quality in catchments across Devon. In the latest of its five-year cycles funded by South West Water through the Upstream Thinking Programme, the team achieved some truly impressive results, including 25,000 hectares of land in positive management, nearly 3,500 hectares in formal agreements to reduce pollutants including pesticides and herbicides, 135,000 young trees distributed ready for planting, and 380km of hedgerows restored.
- In south Devon our Avon Valley Project has now co-operated closely with 130 local farmers and landowners to increase the space dedicated to nature on their land. One special focus for the project has been meadow creation. The project has worked alongside land managers at 30 separate sites to enrich the numbers and diversity of wildflowers across 59 hectares of land.

Wilder Communities



Devon's garden wildlife has been a focus of our Wilder Communities team

Photo: Nick Upton

DWT's Wilder Communities team spent a hectic year supporting 97 communities to shape and deliver initiatives to recover local nature. In addition to this a further 799 people were reached and engaged through events, surgeries and webinars. 178 individuals and groups also gained the Wildlife Gardening Award, bringing the total number of awards to 1,000.

This year also saw the launch of a new youth initiative, Youth Pathways, funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The initiative is part of the Two Moors Pine Marten Project and is delivered in partnership with Young Devon and Space Youth Services. It aims to engage 15-24 year olds who are new to nature and who may be facing a range of life challenges. Youth Pathways has engaged 216 people so far in taster days, volunteering and residential.

Too many to mention

It's impossible for us to detail the full range of all Devon Wildlife Trust's many endeavours for nature, but here just a few other highlights in brief:

- DWT now has 769 registered volunteers helping us in almost every aspect of our work from practical jobs on our nature reserves through to proofreading this magazine!
- Nearly 90,000 people regularly hear the latest DWT news via our digital channels, an increase of 23% in the last 12 months. Meanwhile, two features on BBC1's Countryfile brought our work on pine martens and beavers to the attention of millions of viewers.
- More than 18,000 of you responded to our calls to campaign for nature. The issues you backed us on ranged from ending the use of peat in commercial gardening products to banning harmful pesticide use.

- DWT provided 36 responses to planning applications, including for large developments at Wolborough and Houghton Barton in Newton Abbot. We also gave a voice to wildlife by making our views known in local plans for Exeter, East Devon, Teignbridge and South Hams; and to the White Cross Floating Offshore Windfarm and Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project.
- Our membership and recruitment team were busy ensuring that DWT supporter numbers grew by 3.7% to nearly 38,000 people – thank you.

To read more about how Devon Wildlife Trust works to fulfil its mission for local nature and to see where we source support and spend our resources go to devonwildlifetrust.org/about-us



Volunteers help us in so many different ways - even building boardwalks!