

Our



Sussex

2024-2030



Sussex  
Wildlife Trust

Working together to create a Wilder Sussex



# Our *Wild* Sussex

A Sussex rich in wildlife, valued and protected by everyone.



Sussex is a special county with an unparalleled variety of dramatic landscapes and important habitats. Our coastline and seas, chalk downland, river valleys, ancient woodlands and lowland heathlands support a remarkable range of wildlife throughout the year.

As the seasons change, we can enjoy the spectacle of Bottle-nosed Dolphins patrolling the English Channel, orchids in abundance on chalky hillsides and great flocks of waders and wildfowl visiting our harbours in winter.

Many Sussex sites are so vital for wildlife that they are recognised as internationally important. This will come as no surprise if you have ever visited the shingle and marshes at Rye Harbour, the wetlands of the Arun Valley, or the iconic South Downs in full bloom.

Since our foundation in 1961, Sussex Wildlife Trust has focused on protecting these areas rich in natural life. For more than 60 years, our staff and volunteers have worked alongside local communities to support wildlife and create more places where nature can thrive. However, despite our collective best efforts, we have only managed to slow rather than stop the ongoing loss of nature, as we face the growing pressures of habitat loss, pollution, and the increasing impacts of the climate crisis.



Southerham Farm  
© Nigel Symington



Wild Coast Sussex  
© Miles Davies

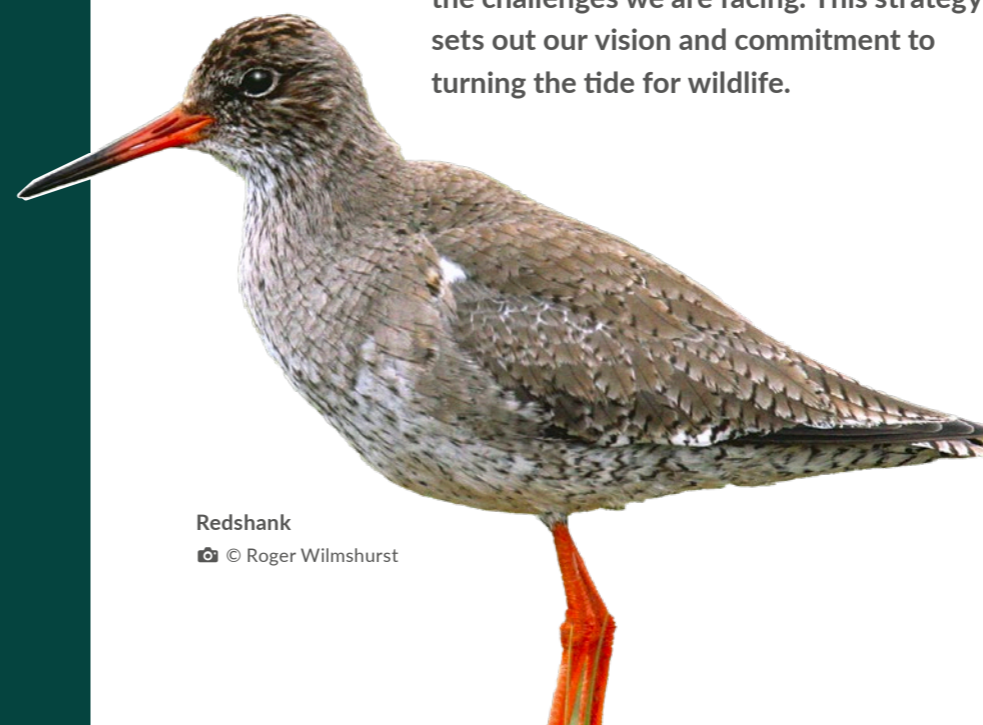
**We are now in a critical decade for change to bring wildlife back and create an inclusive society where nature matters.**

**Now is the time for an ambitious action plan to match the scale and urgency of the challenges we are facing. This strategy sets out our vision and commitment to turning the tide for wildlife.**

By 2030, we want nature in Sussex to be in recovery and for at least 30% of land and sea to be connected and protected for wildlife in line with national and global targets. To achieve this we will broaden our impact beyond the boundaries of our nature reserves to deliver innovative wildlife projects so that nature can recover and thrive right across Sussex.

Currently, less than 10% of our land and sea is in good ecological condition, so reaching 30% will be a significant – yet achievable – challenge. We will need to work in partnership with local communities, landowners, farmers, local authorities and businesses to influence and deliver change at a landscape scale.

We will build on the success of the innovative Sussex Kelp Recovery Project, which is widely recognised as one of the most inspirational and ambitious marine nature recovery projects in the UK. Partnerships like this illustrate the scale of what can be achieved when working with others.



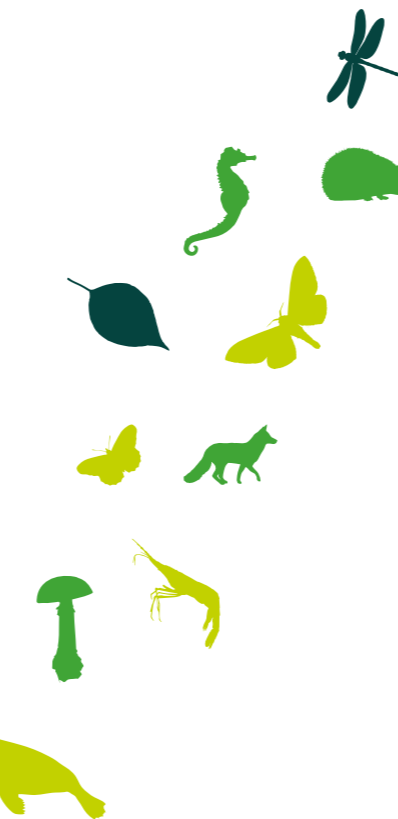
Redshank  
© Roger Wilmshurst

People have always been key to the Trust's success and we value the fantastic support of our members, volunteers and everyone who shares our vision for a wilder Sussex. People are a vital part of nature's recovery and a crucial element of this strategy. We will work to connect even more communities with nature. We will engage with people of all ages, identities, cultures, backgrounds and abilities to inspire, support and empower 1 in 4 people in Sussex to take meaningful action for wildlife and wild places. We will build on our successful and vibrant engagement and education work to provide immersive wildlife experiences to give people the skills, knowledge, and confidence to speak up and take action for nature. Extending our creative and varied approach in this way will help us connect with even more diverse communities, so that everyone is included and can feel a sense of ownership in shaping the future of the wildlife and wild places in our county.

We must also play our part in the urgent need to combat the climate crisis, with its profound implications for both wildlife and people. We will lead by example by becoming a 'net zero' organisation by 2030. We will deliver innovative, nature-based solutions to tackle the local impacts of the climate and biodiversity crises. We will work to ensure our nature reserves are resilient to the inevitable changes that are already becoming evident and use our learnings to inform action in the wider landscape.

By achieving these ambitious targets, we will reach an important tipping point where the decline of wildlife in Sussex will swing into recovery.

Our success will depend on all sectors of our Sussex community sharing our vision and working together to deliver *Our Wild Sussex*. There is no better gift we can give to our natural world and future generations.

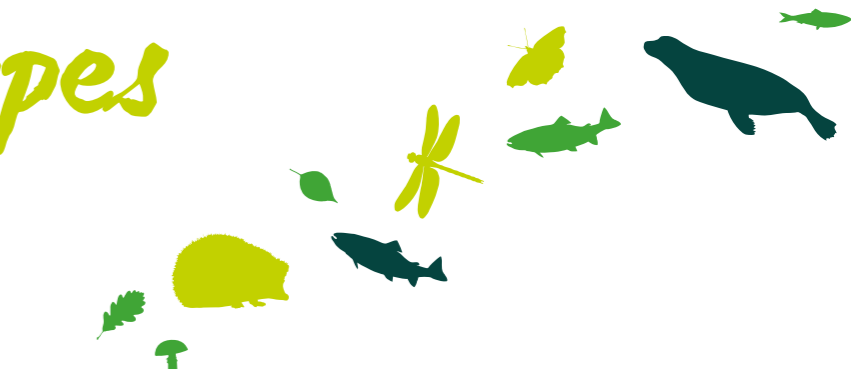


Top right: Marline Valley Ghyll  
© Sussex Wildlife Trust

Left: Seaford Head  
© Sarah Quantrill

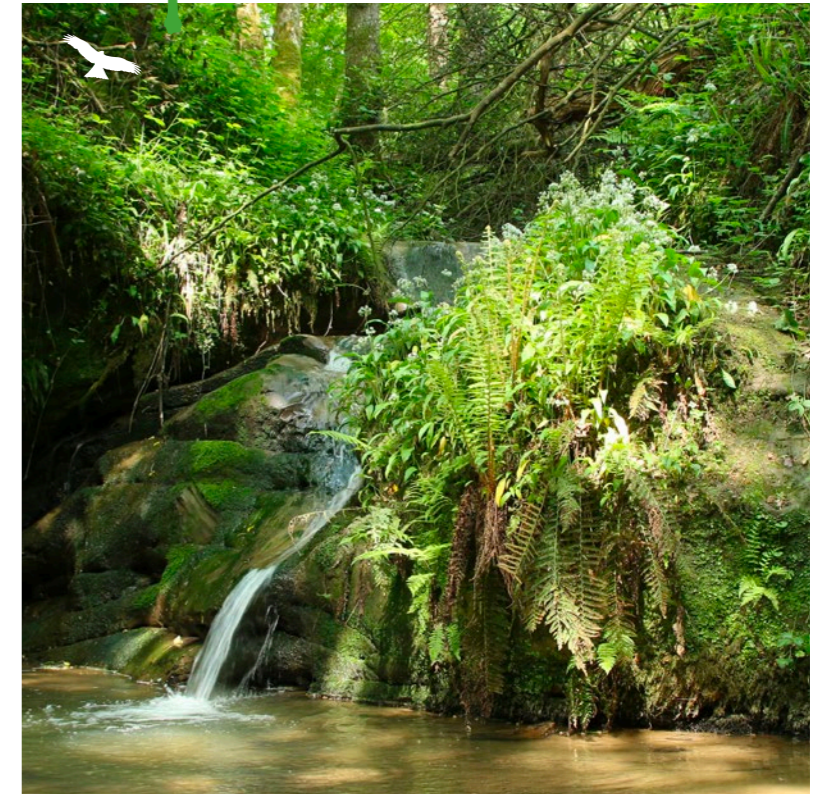
Right: Kingfisher  
© Bob Eade

# The *landscapes* of Sussex



Sussex is a remarkably diverse county with six distinct landscapes. They are defined by their geology and changes wrought over millions of years including recent human impacts. We can see this clearly on land but it's also reflected beneath the waves, creating a seabed that is equally diverse and unique.

The **High Weald** is a medieval landscape of rolling hills defined by its underlying sandstone and clays. Small fields are bounded by a network of hedgerows providing vital wildlife corridors, but the standout feature is the woodland. The High Weald is the most wooded landscape in England, with a coverage of nearly 28% – three times the national average. Much of this is ancient woodland and is at least 400 years old. The steep, wooded valleys of the High Weald host unique ghyll woodlands on stream banks rich in ferns and mosses. The highest mark the source springs of several Sussex rivers, which then flow through the clay and sand landscape of the less wooded **Low Weald**.



There are more than 4,000 km of rivers and streams in Sussex but wetland habitats are surprisingly rare. A history of straightening rivers, building up embankments, draining and ploughing floodplains, and urban development have taken their toll. Yet Sussex is still home to some stunning and unique wetland landscapes, from coastal saltmarsh to reedbeds, internationally recognised chalk streams, wet heathlands and sandstone ghylls.

In the west, the narrow strip of **Greensand** geology is perfect for rare and threatened lowland heathland habitat. The lightly scented heather dominating this environment is home to specialised species such as the Silver-studded Blue butterfly, Field Cricket, Sand Lizard, Dartford Warbler, Nightjar and Woodlark. Fragments of heathland habitat in West Sussex form a network of stepping-stones allowing these remarkable species to move across the landscape.



The chalklands of the **South Downs** form a stunning spine to the county, creating the shapes and contours that define our view of Sussex. The porous, nutrient-poor soils support the species-rich downland turf, much of which was lost due to post-war drives for food production. The little that remains is home to a rich array of wildflowers and butterflies, and declining ground nesting birds, such as the Skylark. Maintaining the richness of species found in these grassland habitats relies on the process of disturbance, traditionally created by grazing animals. Nationally, the loss of species-rich grassland is a staggering 97%, so it is a priority to protect and connect these precious pockets of Sussex grassland, on the South Downs and beyond.

To the west, the **South Downs** lead into the Sussex **Coastal Plain**. This area, defined by its open and fertile landscape, extends to the coast where our saltmarsh and seagrass habitats are still holding on, despite the increasing pressures they face. To the east, the **High Weald** landscape rolls down to the fascinating shingle ridges of the Rye coastline and the flat, ditched landscape of the **Romney Marshes**.

Out at sea, our once-vibrant marine wildlife has been impacted by decades of damaging fishing practices close to shore. Thankfully, areas like Bognor Rocks remain intact and provide breeding grounds for magnificent species like Stingray.



Above: Little Egret in saltmarsh

© Mike Read

Left: Bottlenose Dolphin

© Chris Gomersall/naturepl.com

Sussex has a range of marine protected areas, both coastal and far offshore, like the recently designated Dolphin Head Highly Protected Marine Area. And there is more hope for this important habitat, with the introduction of fisheries management byelaws and the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project, which is already seeing results.

In a changing climate, our location on the south coast often makes us first for sighting new species as they move north. Now, more than ever, it is critical that wildlife can move freely through the seascape and landscape. Yet our wildlife faces even more challenges due to the fragmentation of habitats caused by development and its associated noise, vibration, lighting, roads and damaging land use. This is exacerbated by ongoing issues with the quality of water in our rivers and the sedimentation and pollution in our sea.

With such a rich diversity of species and habitats in Sussex, each facing a variety of challenges, we're working to prevent extinctions and give nature the best possible opportunity to recover and thrive in our changing world.

## Networks for Nature

Reaching our target of at least 30% of land managed for nature by 2030 will be an incredible shared undertaking.

Following the landmark new Environment Act in 2021, we are working with the Sussex Nature Partnership and our Responsible Authorities to contribute to the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, ensuring that all sectors are working together to contribute to a vast nature recovery network for Sussex.

Our nature reserves will be vital elements of this network and our projects will deliver wildlife corridors throughout the landscape, initially within Horsham District and the Ouse catchment.

# Our Wild Sussex

## Our Vision...

A Sussex rich in wildlife, valued and protected by everyone.

## Our Strategic Goals 2030



Diverse groups and individuals take action for wildlife and wild places across Sussex.



Restore abundant wildlife across large scale landscapes and the sea.



Create climate resilient landscapes and thriving wildlife habitats.

## Our Strategic Transformations



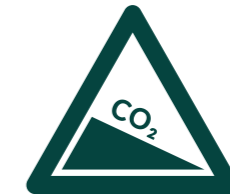
Build a stronger, more inclusive and diverse organisation.



Restore and protect at least 30% of Sussex land and sea for nature.



Connect people with nature and inspire 1 in 4 to take meaningful action for wildlife.



Become a net zero and climate resilient organisation by 2030.

## Our Enabling Priorities



Maximise the wildlife value and resilience of our nature reserves.



Undergo a comprehensive digital transformation.



Retain and develop a strong evidence base to inform our work and influence others.



Strengthen and develop our organisation to deliver the scale of ambition.



Fund a better future: grow and diversify our supporter base and income streams.

## Our Values



### Innovative

Develop bold and courageous ways to restore wildlife and inspire people at scale.



### Passionate

Be the strongest advocate for nature in Sussex, informed by evidence and learning.



### Collaborative

Work in partnership to achieve our goals, to reach new audiences and work at scale.



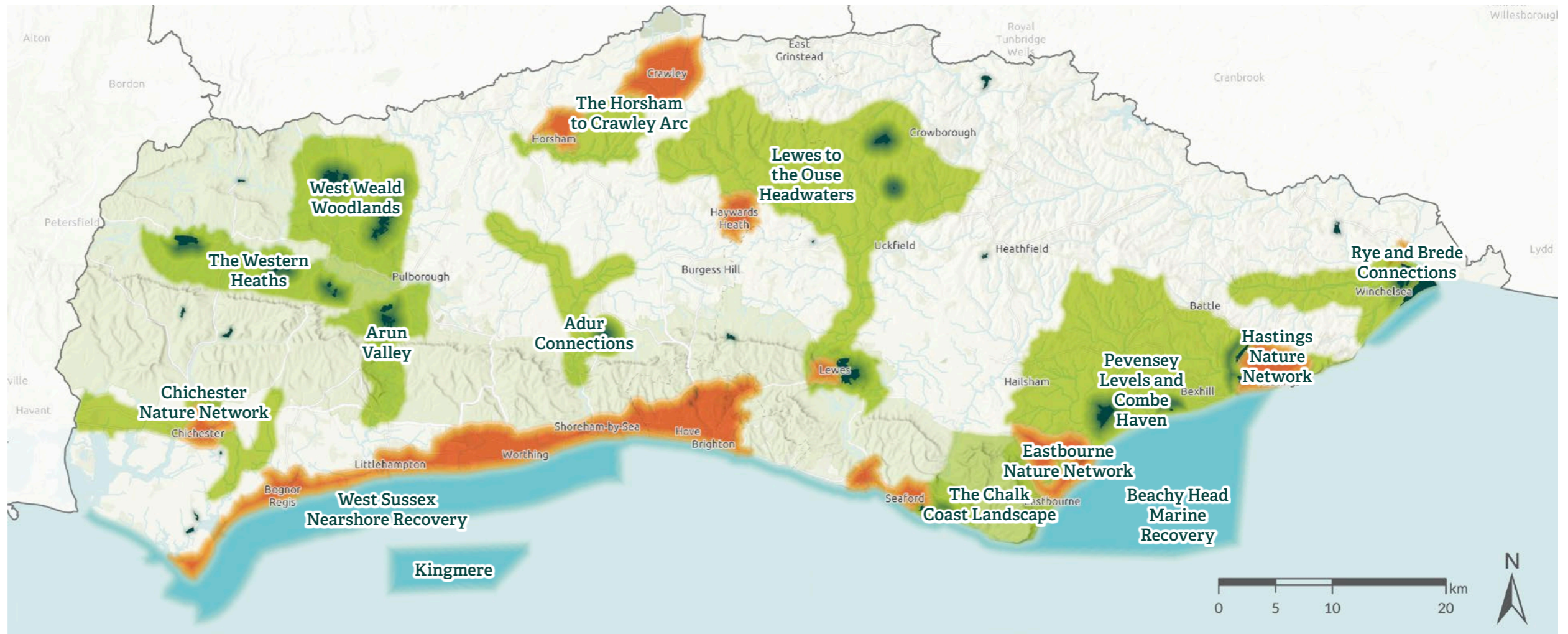
### Inclusive

Promote an inclusive culture where everyone is respected and able to contribute to their full potential.

# Priority Areas

Sussex is a large county spanning more than 380,000 hectares. Some of Sussex Wildlife Trust's activities are county-wide, including the important work of the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, our support for communities taking action for wildlife, the ongoing surveying of Local Wildlife Sites, and the management of our 33 nature reserves.

However, we have also identified priority areas where we will focus key activities over the next seven years to make the biggest impact for wildlife and wild places.



## Strategic Activities

### Key to areas

- SWT reserves
- Priority areas for nature recovery and defending nature
- Priority areas for community action

Data supplied by Sussex Wildlife Trust, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, Esri, Ordnance Survey, NASA, NGA, USGS. Contains public sector information licenced under the Open Government Licence v.3.0. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2023. Registered Charity No: 207005

Drawn by: millieb

### Marine Recovery

Rewilding is at the heart of our marine recovery ambitions. A network of Marine Protected Areas and a trawler exclusion zone are giving nature an opportunity to recover at scale. We will ensure that our protected areas are protected in more than just name, and share the exciting changes underway as we monitor the seabed's recovery.

### Youth Voice

Our Wild Future is a visionary youth-led initiative, aiming to give young people a voice and provide opportunities to gain valuable hands-on experience, empowering them to manage, maintain, and influence a local greenspace while developing a range of skills for the future.

### Gatwick Greenspace

This community project aims to benefit people, wildlife and the countryside at a variety of locally important sites. We are engaging with a diverse range of people from these communities and connecting them with their local wild places.

### Planning for Nature

We will continue to engage with the strategic planning process to influence Local Plans and policies so that they are nature-focused and climate resilient. We will push for a more joined-up approach to strategic planning that properly accounts for environmental limits and puts nature at the centre of decision making.

### Sussex Kelp Recovery

Sussex is leading the way for marine rewilding and recovery. More than 300 square kilometres of seabed off the Sussex coast have been protected from bottom-towed trawling after the introduction of the Sussex Nearshore Trawling Byelaw in 2021. We're already detecting an increase in biodiversity.

### Nature-based Solutions

Our Sussex rivers respond quickly to rainfall events and flooding is becoming more frequent as our climate changes. We will be working with landowners to create new habitats along the Adur floodplain to slow the flow, reducing flood risk and securing nature's recovery at a truly significant scale.

### Wilder Horsham District

We are creating a district-level nature recovery network, working with landowners and communities to form corridors for wildlife through the landscape. From small community ponds to entire floodplain restoration projects, we are creating meaningful change at a landscape scale.

### Wilder Schools

Through our work with local schools, we are committed to creating a generation of environmentally conscious and inspired individuals who actively contribute to the conservation of biodiversity in their communities and beyond.

### Coastal Communities

Our work in priority coastal areas will engage fishers, schools and young people to inspire and empower action for wildlife through education, outreach, collaboration and community-led initiatives focusing on the kelp habitat and marine life.

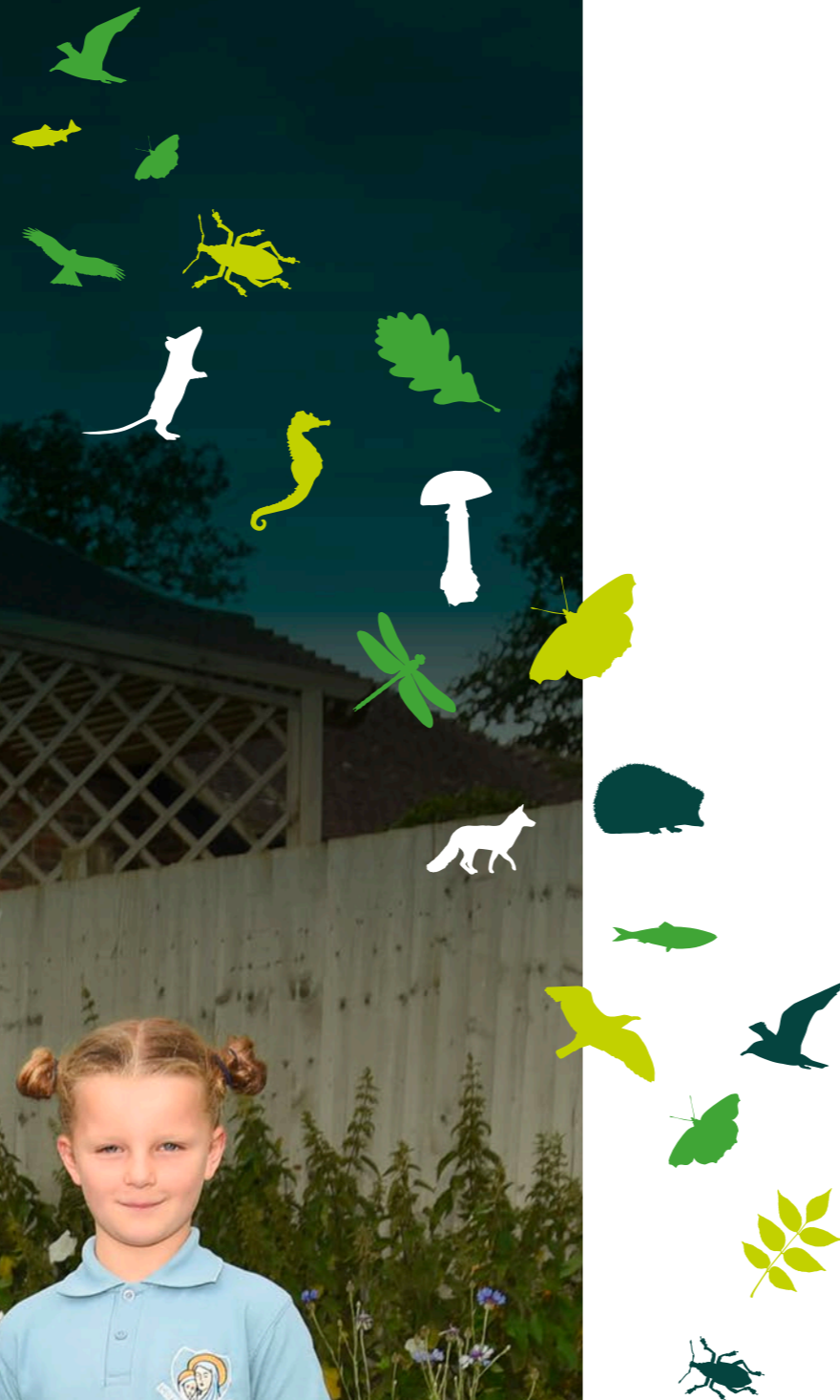
### Wetlands Boost

Habitat creation at Pevensey Levels nature reserve and beyond will store more water on site and reduce the impacts of drought. In time, the site will also store more carbon, helping to achieve our net zero target by optimising the ability of our nature reserves to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

# Our strategic transformations

## Including everyone Build a stronger, more inclusive and diverse organisation

We are committed to being an inclusive and diverse organisation that reflects our local communities. We appreciate the immense value that a full range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives bring. These principles will enrich our internal culture and enhance our effectiveness in safeguarding nature and driving its recovery.



### Youth Voice

Our Wild Future is a visionary youth-led initiative. It began with Deneway's Wild Future in Brighton, supporting young people to work with us to manage the nature reserve. We aim to give young people a voice and provide opportunities to gain valuable hands-on experience, empowering them to manage, maintain, and influence a local greenspace while developing a range of skills for the future.

In collaboration with experienced staff and local community groups, Deneway's Wild Future ensures that these young leaders actively contribute to conservation decisions, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. This promises to deliver positive change for both the local environment and in the hearts and minds of young conservationists.

*"I gained valuable skills in conservation and confidence volunteering as part of the youth-led project at the Deneway. I believe that volunteering and gaining experience outside of education has helped me secure my new job as an ecologist."*

**Lottie, Graduate/Ecologist**

We will embrace diversity to unlock innovative solutions, deepen our understanding of the natural world, and strengthen our collective resolve to protect it.

It is vital that we understand the barriers stopping people from connecting with nature, so we will reach out, engage with and listen to people of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, identities and abilities. We will build trust with people so that we can reconnect them with nature and nurture their sense of belonging in the wild places close to where they live, work, and play. Through this improved community engagement, we can give people the confidence to enjoy, value, speak up and take action for wildlife.

Our nature reserves present an exciting opportunity for people and communities to have a direct connection with nature. We will take learnings from our Rye Harbour Discovery Centre, to help improve visitor experience across our reserves, allowing more people to enjoy these special habitats and find out more about the wildlife that can be found there.

Strength lies in unity and, together with our staff, volunteers, members and supporters, we will create an organisation that reflects the diversity of the county we aim to protect and leave a lasting legacy for people and wildlife.

### Gatwick Greenspace Partnership (GGP)

This community project aims to benefit people, wildlife and the countryside at a variety of locally important sites in the Horsham and Crawley area.

We are engaging with a diverse range of people from these communities and connecting them with their local wild places. We are working in partnership with landowners and local authorities to ensure the landscape is managed sustainably and better connected for wildlife.

The project is helping to improve these areas for both wildlife and the local community to enjoy. It ensures volunteers, including an active Youth Rangers Group, are having fun, learning new skills and gaining valuable experience to enhance their career or other volunteering prospects.

*"Many children today have limited access to nature and working with GGP I can play my part to ensure the next generation grows up with nature at the centre of their lives."*

**Mrs Merete Langler, GGP Volunteer**

Left: © Miles Davies

Top: Rye Harbour Discovery Centre

© Kt Bruce

# Our strategic transformations

## Restoring nature “30 by 30” Restore and protect at least 30% of Sussex land and sea for nature by 2030

To deliver change at the pace and scale required to bring about nature’s recovery, we must ensure at least 30% of our land and sea is well-managed for nature and protected by 2030, an ambition that reflects the targets set by governments worldwide. We recognise our role in supporting this challenging target and we are committed to securing the future of Sussex wildlife.

Making more space for nature will give our struggling wildlife the chance to recover – but the benefits of restoring the natural world go much wider. Healthy ecosystems can store and sequester carbon, help prevent flooding, reduce soil erosion, improve soil fertility, provide pollination services, allow nature’s recovery at sea, and support improvements to people’s physical and mental wellbeing.

Our work will contribute to a county-wide nature recovery network. By working with landowners and managers we will create wildlife corridors and inspirational new areas of habitat. This will provide vital stepping stones for wildlife to move across our landscape. Our vision for the county’s recovery on land mirrors the spectacular marine success seen off our coastline, now that decades of trawling have been halted and a committed partnership is in place.



Left: Beaver  
© David Plummer

Top: Kelp in sunlight  
© Big Wave Productions



The *State of Nature 2023* report, highlighted, yet again, the desperate plight of our UK species. To address this, we have set out a series of priority areas (see page 10) to focus our work to improve habitats, implement nature-based solutions and connect wildlife, with our own nature reserves at the heart of this network.

We will focus our work on key species to bolster vulnerable populations and increase the vital contribution of natural engineers like Beavers, whose activity creates new ecosystems, to achieve our “30 by 30” target.

Despite a clear vision for recovery, multiple threats to nature continue, and we will dedicate resources to defend species and habitats where they are most at risk. We will deliver projects, influence policy and decision-makers, and support partner organisations and local communities to defend and champion nature.

### Defending nature in action

Alongside our proactive work to restore nature in Sussex, we must also take action to defend nature from multiple ongoing threats.

Locally, one of the greatest pressures comes from development. We will continue to engage with the strategic planning process to influence Local Plans and policies so that they are nature-focused and climate resilient. We will push for a more joined-up approach to strategic planning that properly accounts for environmental limits and puts nature at the centre of decision making. We will strengthen our relationships with Sussex decision-makers to deepen their understanding and maximise their ability to advocate for nature at this critical time.

We will also increase our provision of advice and support to empower people to engage effectively with the planning system directly, amplifying the voice for nature and calling for truly sustainable development.

### Sussex Kelp Recovery

Sussex is leading the way for marine rewilding and recovery. More than 300 square kilometres of seabed off the Sussex coast have been protected from bottom-towed trawling after the introduction of the Sussex Nearshore Trawling Byelaw in 2021.

This is facilitating the recovery of the vast kelp forest that once grew here, which had dwindled to a shocking 4% of its former extent. With the pressure of trawling removed, our seabed is already changing and we are seeing more diverse and abundant marine wildlife as the habitats recover.

This regeneration will continue, and we are committed to working in partnership to ensure this incredible opportunity for nature’s recovery is fully supported. We will ensure that the monitoring and benchmarking of the byelaw’s impact are followed and, where possible, reduce or remove further threats to the recovering marine ecosystems.

*“The partnership between Sussex Underwater and Sussex Wildlife Trust has been instrumental in bringing the story of the Sussex kelp forest and its sea creatures into the public’s consciousness. The support, knowledge and assistance given to us from the professional and friendly staff working in the marine team has been invaluable.”*  
Catrine Smith, Sussex Underwater

### Wilder Horsham District

This project is creating a district-level nature recovery network, working with landowners and communities to form corridors for wildlife through the landscape. Funding from Horsham District Council means that the project can support community and landowner led projects throughout the district, each one providing a stepping stone for nature.

This network for nature is developing well and interventions range from small community ponds to entire floodplain restoration projects. This is an example of a strategic partnership creating meaningful change at a landscape scale.

*“We are now committed to a form of land management that focuses on nature with a realistic business plan to make our project feasible and sustainable, thanks to support from the Wilder Horsham District team.”*  
James Clapshaw, Landowner/Estate Manager

# Our strategic transformations

## Taking action

### Connect people with nature and inspire 1 in 4 to take meaningful action for wildlife

People are the key to nature's recovery, and we all have a part to play. Restoring wildlife depends upon the strength of connection between communities and nature, yet people are increasingly disconnected from the natural world around them.

We will inspire communities to develop a deeper relationship with nature across our diverse landscapes. This is an important foundation, as studies have shown that when people feel part of nature, they are more likely to make pro-environmental decisions and take action to protect it.



Our mission is to inspire 1 in 4 people in Sussex to take meaningful action for wildlife. Research has shown that engaging 1 in 4 people causes a ripple effect, tipping the balance and creating a change in behaviour affecting the majority. Imagine the benefits to wildlife if 1 in 4 people planted wildlife-friendly flowers, whether on a window sill or in their garden, school or community green space, and then consider the further impact if this action inspired others to join the cause.

To achieve this target, we will reach out further into our communities. We will give a voice to young people, inspire children, and provide training and support to teachers through our Wilder Schools programme. We will train volunteers in a diverse range of roles, empower communities, provide practical advice and lead campaigns to promote action for wildlife locally.

The Trust values the crucial role played by our dedicated network of volunteers and we are committed to diversifying our volunteering opportunities. We believe that volunteering not only benefits nature's recovery but is rewarding and fulfilling for people taking part. To support volunteers on their journey with us, we will provide comprehensive training and support, user-friendly systems and celebration events. Through these initiatives, we will create a vibrant and interconnected community of volunteers dedicated to nature's recovery in Sussex.

By recognising the importance and contribution of these individual and community actions for nature, whether in our reserves or in gardens, parks or along the coastline, we will support people in contributing to nature's recovery. And, by sharing stories and celebrating success, we will create a powerful movement for change.

Left: Youth Rangers

© Tamara Jewell

Top: © Miles Davies

## Wilder Schools

Our work with local schools aims to create a generation of environmentally conscious and inspired individuals who actively contribute to the conservation of biodiversity in their communities and beyond.

We will continue to collaborate with schools across Sussex to enhance school grounds for wildlife and actively engage students in wildlife conservation within local greenspaces and nature reserves. Through our Forest School and Wild Beach training, we will provide teachers with the skills and confidence to lead groups in natural settings, supporting them to become stewards of outdoor education. By cultivating a sense of wonder and responsibility in their students, the aim is to create a lifelong connection to nature leading to meaningful action for wildlife.

*"With the support of the Trust, we have trained our own teachers to deliver Forest School. All of our 600 children now have the opportunity to engage with their outdoor environment, gain a greater understanding of sustainability and develop a love and respect for the plants and animals within their community and beyond."*

Ross Farndon, Co-Headteacher,  
Hilltop Primary School

## Coastal Communities

Building upon the achievements of our successful Wild Coast Sussex project, we will create and develop the relationships between coastal communities and the rich marine wildlife living along our shores.

We will work with fishers, schools and young people to inspire and support action for wildlife, through education, outreach, collaborative action and community-led initiatives focusing on the kelp habitat and marine life. We will encourage communities to get involved with local marine conservation efforts, including recording wildlife through citizen science programmes.

*"Being part of this project really gave me a sense of the children becoming more inspired by and deeply connected to their local beaches. I trained as a Wild Beach leader myself with the project, and I can't wait to continue sharing the joy and importance of the coast with the next generation."*

Ruby Stothard, Volunteer

# Our strategic transformations

## Net zero by 2030 Become a net zero and climate resilient organisation

The scale of the challenge we all face due to the climate crisis is immense. Despite the Paris Climate Summit (2015) goal to stabilise global temperatures at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by 2050, we are likely to pass 2°C by that date based on current policies and actions.

Currently, the average global temperature has increased by 1.2°C and we are already experiencing record temperatures, increased flooding and wildfires. These bring additional threats to nature including invasive species, storm damage, drought, and habitat degradation. These risks increase tenfold at 3°C compared to 1.5°C.

To lessen these impacts, we must act urgently both as individuals and collectively.



Left: Building a leaky dam  
© © Sophie Atkinson

Top: Hairy Dragonfly  
© © Bob Eade

Right: Turtle Dove  
© © Mike Read



Not only will the site hold more water but in time it will also store more carbon, helping to achieve our net zero target by optimising the ability of our nature reserves to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

*“Our cattle graze part of the Trust’s Pevensey Levels reserve, providing a conservation grazing service to maintain the traditional grazed habitat. The Trust has exciting plans for the reserve and we are pleased that this has also involved assisting in plans for habitat improvement beyond the boundary of the nature reserve, including extending a reedbed area on our own holding.”*

David and Marian Harding, Court Lodge Farm

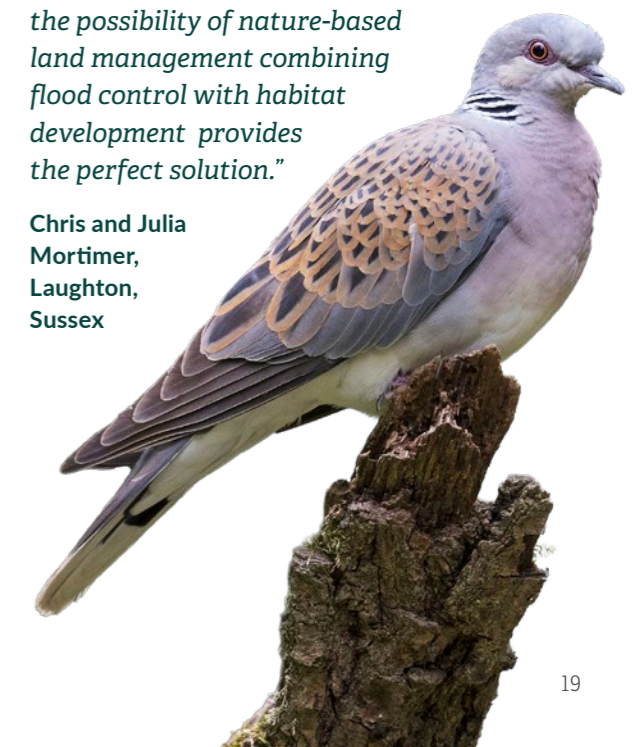
### Nature-based Solutions

Our Sussex rivers respond quickly to rainfall events and flooding is becoming more frequent as our climate changes. Holding back water in the floodplain helps reduce the volume of water flowing downstream, protecting homes, businesses and infrastructure.

We are creating new wetland habitats on the Adur floodplain in partnership with 27 landholdings covering more than 700 hectares. This forms one of the first Landscape Recovery Schemes in the UK and by restoring this stretch of degraded river, we will witness nature’s recovery at a truly significant scale.

*“Our paddocks form part of a catchment for runoff from surrounding farmland and flood regularly throughout the year. Thanks to the Wilder Ouse Project, the possibility of nature-based land management combining flood control with habitat development provides the perfect solution.”*

Chris and Julia Mortimer, Laughton, Sussex



We are committed to becoming a net zero organisation by 2030 whilst increasing our organisational resilience to climate change. We will reduce greenhouse gas emissions across our estate and operations to the lowest possible level, and offset any residual emissions. We already measure our greenhouse gas emissions annually and have prioritised actions to reduce our carbon footprint significantly.

We will continue to be creative in our approach to nature-based solutions and we will work to increase the climate resilience of nature in Sussex. Natural flood management initiatives and the recovery of kelp and saltmarsh habitats all have an important part to play in mitigating the worst impacts of climate change. And, by ensuring we improve the climate resilience of our nature reserves, we can support the adaptation of habitats and wildlife and share our learnings with other landowners.

The scale of the climate emergency requires effective partnership working, across the Wildlife Trust movement and with other organisations, to influence central and local government policies and incentives. This work, together with practical action to increase the resilience of local habitats, landscapes and ecosystems, can only be achieved with the support of our members, volunteers and local communities.

### Networks for Nature

We are embarking on an ambitious project with our neighbours to improve the wetland habitat of our Pevensey Levels nature reserve and the surrounding area. A series of wetland features will be developed to ensure the site will hold water for longer, reducing the impact of drought and benefiting over 100 hectares of habitat and the wildlife that depend on it.

# Enabling Priorities

## Maximise the wildlife value and resilience of our nature reserves

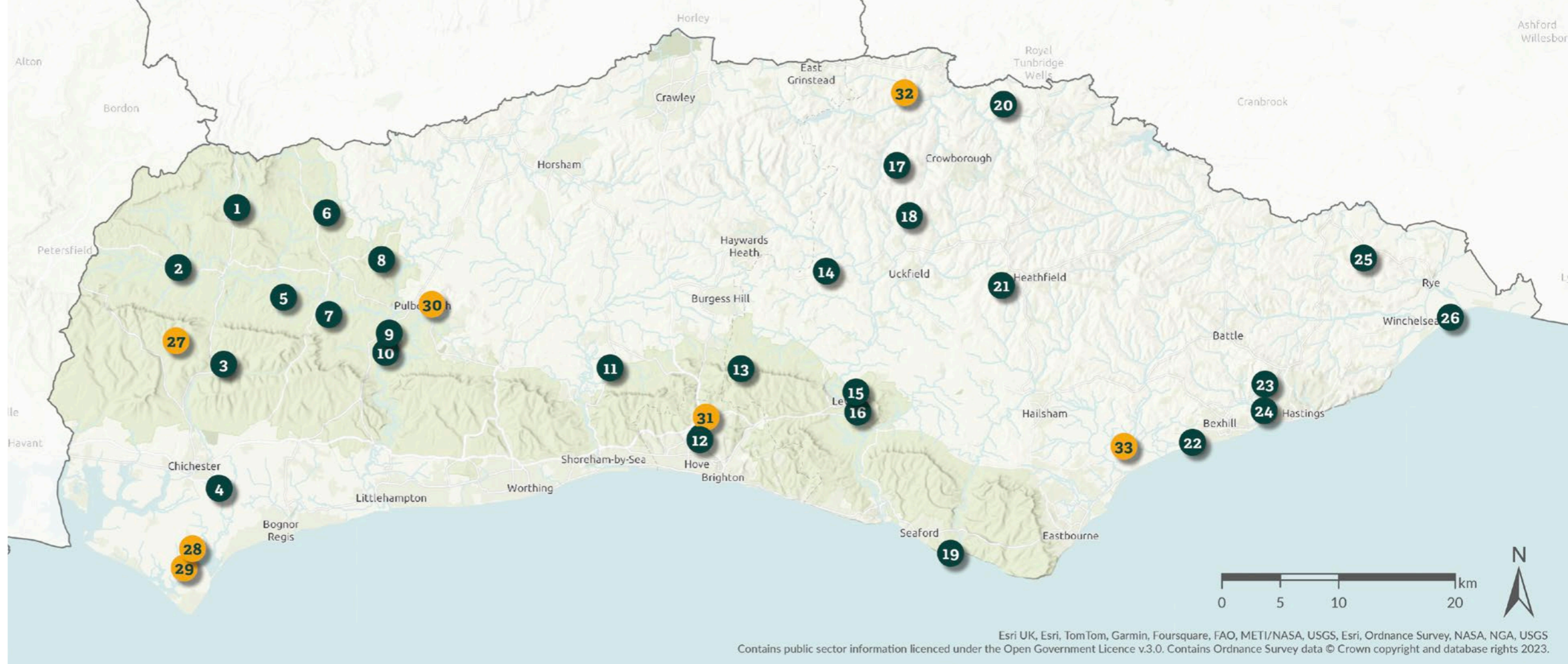
Our 33 nature reserves are at the heart of a county-wide ecological network, enjoyed by countless visitors across the year. They also play a key role in the wider landscape by providing outstanding examples of key habitats and species diversity.

We will review options to expand our land holdings, potentially acquiring land of low wildlife value that can be enhanced and used to demonstrate nature's recovery. We will work to restore natural processes to create functional ecosystems capable of delivering the ecosystem services we all depend on.

As an evidence-based organisation, decisions on the management of our nature reserves will continue to be centred on our detailed ecological monitoring programme.

Conservation grazing is critical to reserve management and we will continue to develop our own grazing operation to service the requirements of our diverse and dispersed estate of more than 2,000 hectares. Our grazing animals provide the natural disturbance needed to balance the ongoing process of vegetation succession, which in turn drives the richness in biodiversity at our sites.

Our grazing operation will provide suitable natural grazing, produce ethical, high quality food, and ensure we comply with agricultural grants, animal movement restrictions and specific species requirements.



Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, Esri, Ordnance Survey, NASA, NGA, USGS  
Contains public sector information licenced under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database rights 2023.

### Ebernoe Land Purchase

Following a successful fundraising campaign in 2023, and thanks to the generosity of our members and supporters, we were able to purchase an important parcel of land next to Ebernoe Common nature reserve. We aim to maximise the ecological potential of this land, so that the ancient woodland that once stood here will regenerate alongside a diverse mosaic of scrubland and grassland.



In the past we have taken on land that is already of high biodiversity value, with the aim of protecting it. But this purchase of land, of a lower ecological value, follows the model demonstrated by the transformation of arable fields at Butcherlands, which after 20 years is now a recognised Nightingale hotspot.

This land purchase presents an exciting opportunity to demonstrate and document nature's recovery, and by sharing the stories of this new land's transformation we aim to inspire others to take similar action.

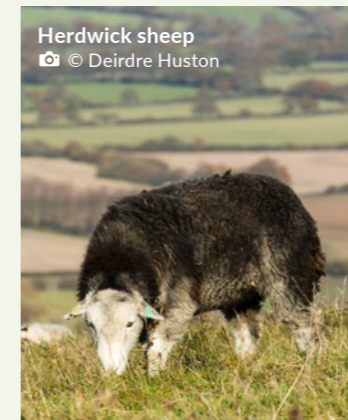
Nightingale  
© Roger Wilmschurst

### Grazing

The most natural and effective way to manage the habitats on our nature reserves is through grazing animals. The natural process of grazing can increase the diversity of plant species and the variety in vegetation structure on site, and this diversity is key to ensuring that our nature reserves are havens for species living in or travelling through Sussex.

We graze our sites with a herd of native Sussex cattle and Romney and Herdwick sheep. We also have a small number of ponies and are investing in pigs and goats, as we trial different types of conservation grazing across our estate.

We are now using No Fence Collar technology on our nature reserves to control and manage our vital conservation



Herdwick sheep  
© Deirdre Huston

grazing which, we hope, will ultimately lead to streamlining our livestock numbers. Early findings show that simply being able to locate livestock across a complex site saves a great deal of time, travel and resources.

Grazing 2,000 hectares across the length of Sussex is complex and challenging, but we will continue to develop an increasingly effective and innovative approach.

### Nature Reserves

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1 Cooksbridge Meadow       | 17 Old Lodge                                  |
| 2 Iping and Stedham Common | 18 Brickfield Meadow                          |
| 3 Levin Down               | 19 Seaford Head                               |
| 4 Leythorne Meadow         | 20 Eridge Rocks                               |
| 5 Graffham Common          | 21 Selwyns Wood                               |
| 6 Ebernoe Common           | 22 Gillham Wood                               |
| 7 Burton Pond              | 23 Marline Valley                             |
| 8 The Mens                 | 24 Filsham Reedbed                            |
| 9 Waltham Brooks           | 25 Flatropers Wood                            |
| 10 Amberley Wildbrooks     | 26 Rye Harbour Reserves without public access |
| 11 Woods Mill              | 27 West Dean Woods                            |
| 12 Withdean Woods          | 28 Mill Pond Marsh                            |
| 13 Ditchling Beacon        | 29 Ferry Field                                |
| 14 Chailey Warren          | 30 Marehill Quarry                            |
| 15 Malling Down            | 31 Deneway                                    |
| 16 Southerham Farm         | 32 Leysdown                                   |
|                            | 33 Pevensey Marshes                           |

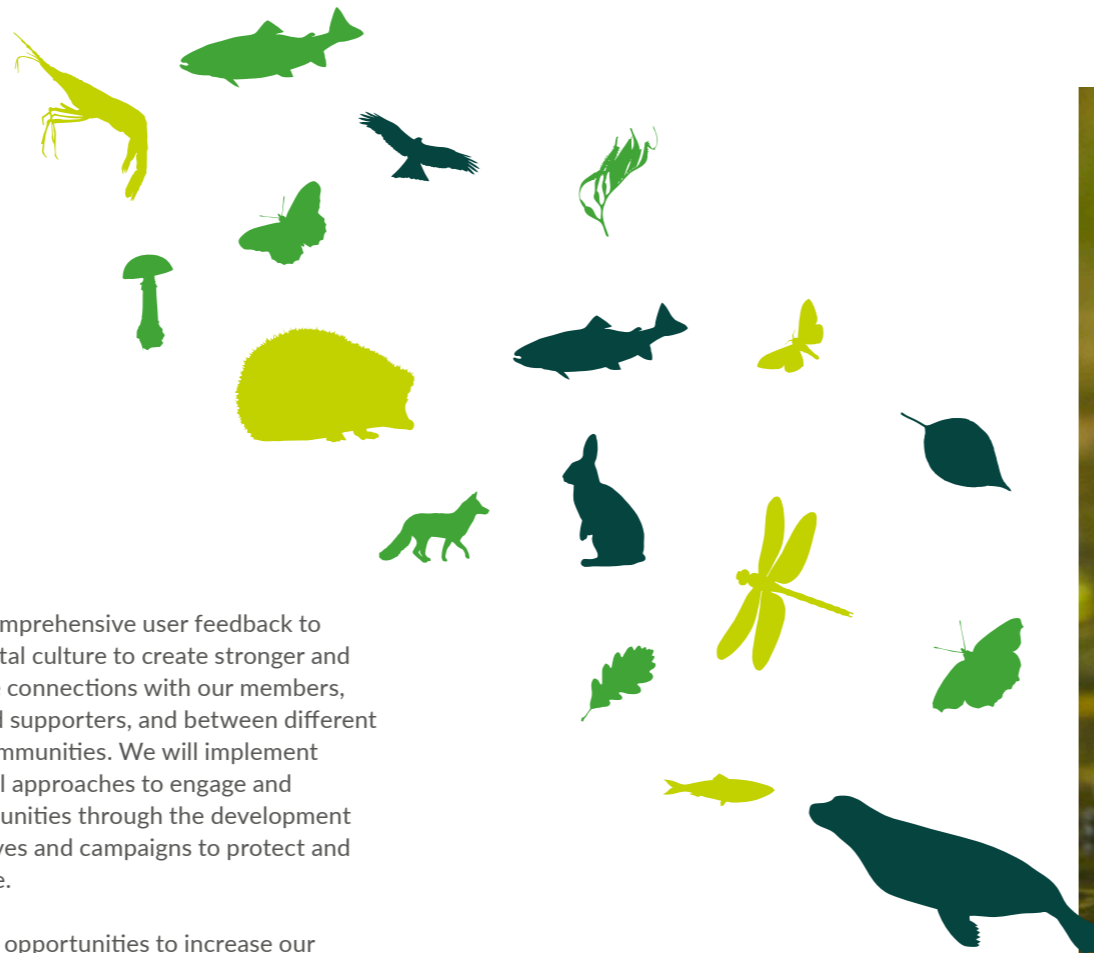
# Enabling Priorities

## Undergo a comprehensive digital transformation

The digital world is rapidly evolving with new and innovative methods of engagement, meaning the way that people connect, organise and take action for nature is constantly changing. Digital technologies offer huge opportunities to enhance our engagement activities and share our knowledge. We will transform our existing systems and infrastructure so that we can store, handle and use data effectively and safely across everything that we do.

We will use comprehensive user feedback to promote a digital culture to create stronger and more effective connections with our members, volunteers and supporters, and between different groups and communities. We will implement evolving digital approaches to engage and support communities through the development of new initiatives and campaigns to protect and restore wildlife.

By maximising opportunities to increase our digital capability, we will extend our reach across Sussex, improve our engagement with communities and ultimately enable the Trust to work more effectively for nature.



Water Vole  
© Elliott Neep



Marbled White  
© Bob Eade

## Retain and develop a strong evidence-base to inform our work and influence others

**Our work is driven by evidence and there are two main areas that we will focus on.**

Firstly, the evidence that underpins and empowers nature conservation in Sussex. This is embedded into the work of the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, which provides the authoritative source of wildlife information for our county. This partnership project, hosted by the Trust, provides detailed environmental information to inform decision making and makes biodiversity data accessible to all. We will continue working with the vibrant and energetic biological recording community in Sussex to help supply this critical data.

Secondly, we will be using evidence to monitor the impact of our work. This will require excellent systems for collecting, storing, and sharing data, while ensuring the highest standards of data protection. We will focus on our own biodiversity and spatial data, as well as measuring the impact of our work with communities and in the wider environment. This will include measuring behaviour change, as people across Sussex take meaningful action for nature and we will use, the Greenhouse Gas Protocol to measure our progress towards net zero.



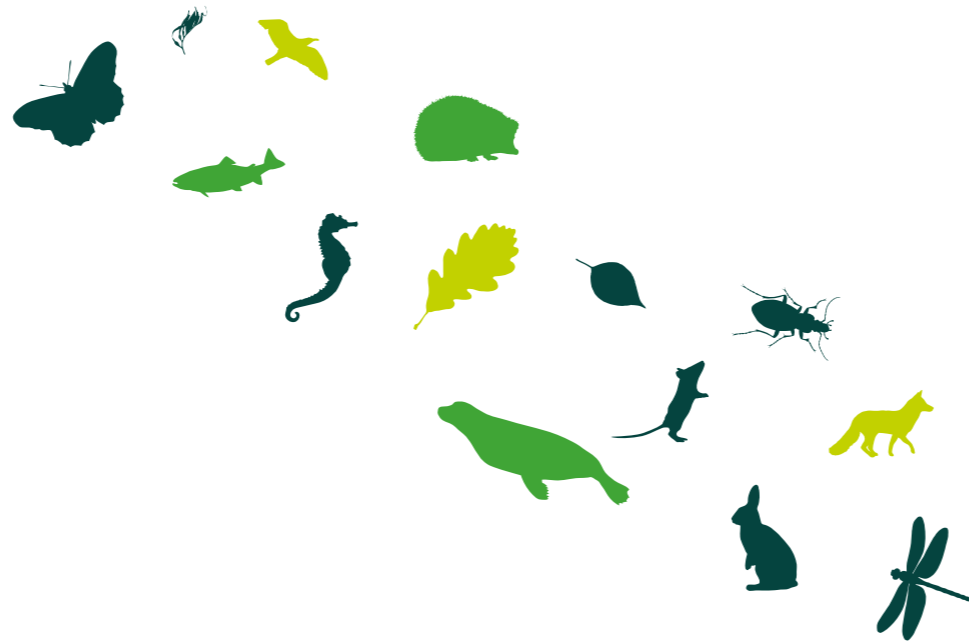
# Enabling Priorities

## Strengthen and develop our organisation to deliver the scale of ambition

To deliver this strategy, our staff and volunteers need to be excited, prepared and supported for the challenges ahead. We will invest in our people and equip them with the skills, knowledge and capabilities to deliver against the scale of our ambition and respond to the ever-changing external environment.

We will support our staff as we create exciting new projects and develop new partnerships to promote collaboration with colleagues, external organisations and diverse communities to deliver for wildlife across our county.

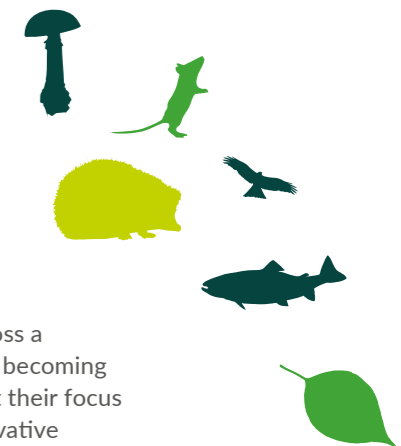
We will ensure Sussex Wildlife Trust is a competitive employer of choice, by embedding a culture based upon our strategic values of Innovation, Inclusion, Passion and Collaboration.



Right: Dormouse  
© © Hugh Clark

Left: Kelp recording  
© © Sam Roberts

## Grow and diversify our supporter base and income streams



The Trust is supported through a variety of income sources. This diversity of support is key to securing a stable financial position that can weather the often unpredictable economic situation, changes to environmental funding, government policy or the focus of grant provision.

As one of the largest Wildlife Trusts in the UK, a major source of funding comes from our loyal members. They provide valued financial income but are also a movement of more than 38,000 people, all deeply committed to our county's wildlife. Our members and local communities support our campaigns and drive change for nature by taking direct action, donating to our appeals, or leaving much appreciated legacy gifts.

We will continue to develop strong relationships with key funders including major donors, grant givers, statutory bodies, and the business sector.

These funders support our projects across a range of activities but opportunities are becoming increasingly competitive as funders shift their focus or tighten criteria. We will develop innovative projects delivering sustainable change for wildlife to attract their ongoing support.

Agri-environment grants are key to supporting our network of nature reserves. Emerging green finance and biodiversity credit schemes present new income opportunities for the Trust and could be an important new mechanism to support the creation and restoration of habitats, but each will require consideration to ensure they fit with our values and strategic aims.

Against this shifting and competitive funding environment, we must be agile and adaptable to utilise emerging opportunities while maintaining our focus on existing supporters and partnerships. This will allow us to continue to secure diverse funding for our work and most importantly deliver significant improvements for wildlife and wild places across Sussex.

# Our Values

We will be **Innovative, Passionate, Collaborative** and **Inclusive** in all aspects of our work. These values will be at our core and clearly visible in everything that we do.

## Innovative

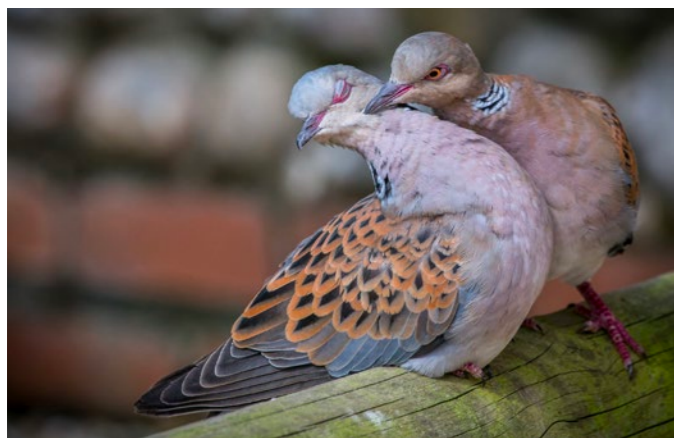
Develop bold and courageous ways to restore wildlife and inspire people at scale.



Lapwing © Derek Middleton

## Passionate

Be the strongest advocate for nature in Sussex, informed by evidence and learning.



Turtle Doves © Andrew Morffew

## Collaborative

Work in partnership to achieve our goals, to reach new audiences and work at scale.



Adonis Blue © Graeme Lyons

## Inclusive

Promote an inclusive culture where everyone feels respected and able to contribute to their full potential.



Six-spot Burnets © Barry Yates



Brown Hare © Damian Waters




# Sussex Wildlife Trust

Sussex Wildlife Trust  
Woods Mill, Henfield  
West Sussex BN5 9SD

Tel: 01273 492630  
Email: [enquiries@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sussexwt.org.uk)  
Website: [sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Registered Charity No: 207005

 **Cover images:**

Pine Marten © Mark Hamblin/2020VISION / Meadow Pipit © Hugh Clark FRPS / Cowslip © Mike Read / Grey Seal © Alexander Mustard/2020VISION