Making the Environment Bill deliver for wildlife

Species Champions MPs have a unique opportunity to ensure that the government’s draft Environment Bill lays the legal foundations for nature’s recovery. Touted as the first such bill for 20 years, it has some heavy lifting to do as we prepare to leave the EU. The draft Bill aims to underpin the Government’s ambitions to leave the environment in a better state than inherited, secure environmental principles and set up a new green governance body. Whilst only a draft, there is much to be done to improve it to ensure it reverses declines in species and habitats and puts nature on a path to recovery.

The principles only apply to Ministers of the Crown via a weak duty on a policy statement. The draft contains several get-out clauses regarding the application of the principles which ultimately undermines them.

Independence of the new body is in question as the draft proposes that it is appointed and funded by Government, not Parliament. The body may not have enough teeth as its ultimate enforcement powers are via judicial review which has serious limitations.

The draft contains welcome clauses requiring the production of and reporting on plans to improve the environment. And the associated policy document points to more to come on targets for nature’s recovery. However, there is much work to do on the draft bill if it is to become world leading legislation to recover nature.

Project update

Welcome to our three latest recruits: Matt Hancock (hazel dormouse), Robert Goodwill (sandeel) and Matthew Offord (Sandwich tern).

Thank you to Victoria Prentis and Rebecca Pow for mentioning their species (corn bunting and snipe) in the Agriculture Bill’s second reading and to Angela Smith for expressing her frustration at the continued persecution of hen harriers in an EFRA Committee inquiry. It’s been great to see PQs focused on the following threatened species: barn owls, water voles, skylark, bittern, curlew, and spreading bellflower.

Sarah Wollaston went on a cirl bunting safari at the National Trust English Riviera in Devon and Philip Dunne visited woodlands in his Ludlow constituency with the Forestry Commission and Butterfly Conservation to learn about the wood white’s needs. Kerry McCarthy has installed a swift brick in a new build at one of Barratt’s housing developments and is supporting their installation on the Parliamentary estate.

Action for MPs to take:
- Work with Greener UK and the Species Champions project partners to push for a stronger Environment Bill
- Press the government to commit to species recovery funding to replace EU sources such as LIFE and BEST
- Support Greener UK’s amendments to the Agriculture Bill
- Join the Nature Friendly Farming Network
Terning the Tide – Species Recovery Funding At Risk

To replace EU funding after Brexit, new government funding streams are vital for the survival of our threatened wildlife.

Individual species recovery projects such as the UK Little Tern Project brought together partners and funding to improve conservation for this small seabird. Traditional nesting beaches are being lost to erosion, disturbance, climate change and “coastal squeeze”. During the 5-year project over 60 seasonal wardens were recruited to monitor and protect nests. Results show a slowing of the population decline over the 5 years, with two-thirds of sites fledging more chicks per breeding pair.

The key factor in the project’s success was the vital work done by local community volunteers at tern colonies, talking to visitors about the threats beach nesting birds face and so improving understanding. This also provides a great opportunity for people to get close to nature, learn new skills and enhance wellbeing.

Over £1m provided by EU LIFE was matched by the partners and the project’s legacy includes a long-term species recovery plan.

Nature Means Business: green farming is the future

The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) represents over 675 farmers and 1,440 members of the public who want to champion a way of farming that is sustainable and good for nature. Farming members come from a range of backgrounds, big and small, organic and conventional. They work hard to protect the diverse species that live on their land.

This work includes specific species projects, such as the RSPB-led cirl bunting project in south Devon, involvement in agri-environment schemes, re-establishing lost habitats through tree planting and hedge laying, and nature friendly practices, such as establishing skylark plots on fields. Restoring and creating wildflower meadows creates habitats for butterflies, bees and other pollinators but can also increase crop yields and reduce pests.

Parliamentary support for nature-friendly farming is critical as we exit the CAP and create new farming policy for England. MPs can join the NFFN (www.nffn.org.uk) and play their part in enacting an Agriculture Bill that rewards farmers for working with nature.

Who are the Species Champion MPs?

Debbie Abrahams • Harriett Baldwin • Hilary Benn • Richard Benyon • Jake Berry • Steve Brine • James Cartlidge • Jenny Chapman • Thérèse Coffey • Tracey Crouch • Jon Cruddas • Thangam Debbonaire • Mark Garnier • John Glen • Robert Goodwill • Chris Grayling • Matt Hancock • Helen Hayes • Peter Heaton-Jones • Nick Herbert • Kevin Hollinrake • Norman Lamb • Tim Loughton • Caroline Lucas • Scott Mann • Rachael Maskell • Kerry McCarthy • Alison McGovern • Huw Merriman • Damien Moore • Layla Moran • Caroline Nokes • Neil Parish • Claire Perry • Matthew Offord • Jess Phillips • Rebecca Pow • Victoria Prentis • Barry Sheerman • Angela Smith • Caroline Spelman • Gary Streeter • Desmond Swayne • Derek Thomas • Kelly Tolhurst • Anna Turley • Charles Walker • Matt Warman • Bill Wiggin • Gavin Williamson • Sarah Wollaston • Daniel Zeichner

For more information on the Species Champions project visit our microsite at: www.buglife.org.uk/specieschampions

Species Champions in England is coordinated by the Rethink Nature partnership

Working in partnership with: The Angling Trust, The People’s Trust for Endangered Species and The British Hedgehog Preservation Society

Sunset over Wetlands by Phil Barnes (rspb-images.com), Anna Turley by Tim Melling, monitoring Bats by Emma Allen, Farmers of the Nature Friendly Farming Network by Tim Ireland/PA Wire.

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