

This manifesto outlines critical priorities which the next government must address to achieve nature's recovery. It is imperative that political parties heed these calls and take decisive action to secure a sustainable future for Devon and the UK.

## **Nature Restoration Manifesto: Priorities for Political Parties**

Nature is in urgent need of restoration – for the sake of wildlife, for our food security, and for our climate. This urgency now has resonance across all political persuasions. Surveys conducted by Devon Wildlife Trust and The Wildlife Trusts show that regardless of political affiliation, the protection and restoration of nature is a common, pressing concern among voters. Many people now want political parties to present bold plans to address this issue in the 2024 general election.

Devon Wildlife Trust is actively engaged in nature's recovery through landscape-scale programmes, including rainforest restoration, species reintroduction and expanding the protection of and restoration of wild spaces across Devon. We work with farmers, landowners, and local communities across Devon to take positive action. We are supported by 38,000 members, hundreds of volunteers and active alongside hundreds of schools, communities and businesses across the county. Together we provide a strong voice for nature.

Given the significance of the natural world to the people of Devon, it is incumbent on all political parties that their manifestos show that they understand the scale of the issues facing nature, that they listen to the growing calls for action and that they now demonstrate ambitious plans which will see wildlife's recovery.

## **Devon Wildlife Trust calls upon politicians of all parties to commit to the following:**

1. Bringing nature back to life: Restore Nature
  - Make more space for nature to halt its decline.
  - Protect 30% of land and sea by 2030.
  - Properly protect Marine Protected Areas and ban destructive practices.

**The challenge:** Devon is home to species found nowhere else in the country. But immense pressure from decades of pollution and habitat loss has driven wildlife into catastrophic decline. The pace of this problem is quickening and shows no sign of slowing. It is no longer enough to simply protect the wildlife which remains. Instead, our next Government should lead the way, implementing policies which will reverse the direction of decline, putting nature into recovery, both on land and in the sea. Without these policies and ambition risks not only our wildlife, but the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the green space which helps us feel happy and healthy.

**The solution:** We need politicians to commit to a clear delivery plan to protect at least 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. The current UK Government has committed to this target but has thus far only protected around 3% of land and 8% of our seas. No clear delivery plan is in place to make up these shortfalls. This needs to change.

We believe that the '30 by 30' target can be met but only by committing to ambitious nature-based solutions to the problems that society faces. A range of proven tools exist which will combat the worst impacts of the climate crisis. From expanding tree cover and green spaces to cool our towns and cities, to re-naturalising our rivers, creating wetlands and reintroducing beavers to alleviate floods and droughts. Natural solutions exist. What is missing is political ambition to make these happen.

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Devon is the only county in England with two separate coasts, and our coastal waters are some of the UK's most diverse. But our seas are under threat - pollution, development, overfishing, and a lack of protected areas are putting our seas and the wildlife within them at risk. We need better protection and management of our seas before it's too late. We are campaigning for large areas of our seas here in Devon to be designated as Highly Protected Marine Areas. These areas will not only provide better protection for large marine animals, including dolphins, whales and basking sharks, but will also enable more carbon to be stored by giving our seas time to recover. Highly Protected Marine Areas are effectively 'no take' zones where no destructive practices are allowed.

**Achieving 30 by 30 on land and at sea means we can give Devon and the UK a secure future with greater safety and prosperity.**

## 2. Turning the tide on dirty rivers: Protect and Clean Up our Rivers

- Empower environmental watchdogs to enforce laws.
- Halve nutrient pollution by 2030.

**The challenge.** The state of our rivers is a national disgrace and damaging to our international reputation. The UK is ranked as one of the worst countries in Europe for water quality due to the levels of agricultural run-off contamination and sewage. There are no rivers in Devon that are considered to be in good ecological condition. The impact of this on the health and welfare of people and wildlife is intolerable. The public wants politicians to act.

**The solution.** As a place to live in or visit Devon's economy relies on its exceptional environment. To begin to clean up this mess we want to see support for farmers to use nature friendly farming practices to improve soils and stop agricultural pollution from running into rivers and streams and greater protection for riverside areas to help tackle the river pollution crisis. Alongside this we also want environmental watchdogs to have teeth (and to use them!). They must be properly resourced and empowered to ensure they can monitor, inspect and enforce penalties on the polluters who break the law.

**Proper protection and restoration of our rivers will see our rivers become healthy, clean, clear and full of fish and aquatic wildlife.**

## 3. Farming with nature: Feed Our Nation Sustainably

- Increase funds for wildlife-friendly farming.
- Halve pesticide use and maintain bans on harmful substances.
- Help farmers adapt to climate change and farm with nature.

**The challenge.** The overuse of herbicides and pesticides is killing our wildlife and impoverishing our landscapes. Despite growing understanding of the harm they cause, the number of pesticide applications on our farmland has doubled over the last 25 years. This has been the key cause of the catastrophic collapse in our insect populations, including bees and other vital pollinating species.

How we farm is a key issue for Devon. The destruction of nature and the impacts of climate change are the biggest long-term threats to food security in the UK and globally. Long term food production relies on healthy soils, clean water, and a stable climate. But farming is too often unsustainable.



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**The solution.** By supporting farmers to shift towards regenerative, nature-friendly methods, farming has huge potential to deliver a green rural renewal. Working with nature can increase farm profits and resilience, reduce costs, and maintain or even improve yields. Many farmers and land managers have gone to great lengths to support wildlife but without being adequately rewarded there is no incentive for others to follow their lead.

The real terms value of the budget for environmental farming has already fallen by a third since 2010. Not investing properly means everyone loses.

**Farmers deserve to secure their future by accessing well-funded, nature-positive farming schemes that restore nature. Through high quality advice, robust and fair rules to protect nature on all farms, we can drive innovation and secure the future of a resilient rural economy.**