

A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, a large, mossy log is covered in vibrant green moss. A single, small, orange-brown mushroom with a white stem is growing from the moss. In the background, a person is visible walking through the trees. The sun is shining from the upper left, creating a bright starburst effect and illuminating the scene with warm, golden light. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

Building Partnerships for Nature's Recovery



Foreword by Tony Juniper and Marian Spain



The world we thought we knew is undergoing a more rapid transformation than any of us could have imagined a decade ago. Political landscapes and national economies have been dealt a severe shock. In such times it would be easy to fall into the trap of viewing Nature as a resource that can be ignored or, worse still, exploited in the name of recovery.

But if there is one thing we have learned in the last 12 months it is the extent to which our natural world is fundamental to our society. Not only is it at the very heart of public health – whether we consider the dangers of disease attached to the wildlife trade or the benefits of exercising in green space – but it also provides a host of other public goods. These public goods include flood risk management, carbon capture, healthy soils, crop pollination, natural beauty and thriving wildlife. Our prosperity and wellbeing are dependent upon our natural environment.

It is this greater connection between people and planet that we believe can be the catalyst to securing a better future for Nature. And not a moment too soon: our country is one of the most Nature-depleted nations on Earth. Sadly this means that we also have one of the lowest levels of connection with Nature in our everyday lives.

For example we have lost around 97% of our species-rich grasslands since the 1930s and 85% of heathlands

since the 19th century. More than 500 species have vanished from England and a further 15% could soon follow, including once common species like hedgehogs and house sparrows. Almost a quarter, 24%, of those living in the most deprived parts of the country spend time in Nature less than once a month or never. (MENE data 2009-2019).

The time for action is now. The ability to make a difference is within our grasp. The public's growing reconnection with Nature for health and wellbeing, our recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis and the government's commitment to a green recovery all create a unique opportunity. These galvanising forces are strengthened by the government's spending decisions, new legislation and the 25 Year Environment Plan.

We in Natural England are better equipped than we have been for many years to bring together organisations, industries and people who have the collective power to restore Nature. This will be at the heart of helping the nation to recover from coronavirus by Building Back Better. Our staff have the technical expertise, the legal authority, the relationships with partners and – crucially – the passion required.

This document sets out our ambitions to ensure progress over the next 5 years. It is a call to action, but also an invitation for you to engage with us in the conversations and partnerships which are essential for focused, effective deeds. Together we can really build the momentum needed to revive our natural world and bring it into everyone's daily life.

We very much look forward to working with you all so that Nature – and our country as a whole – can thrive once more.



About Us

Natural England's purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development. In carrying out this duty we provide advice to all public bodies and authorities, organisations and people with an interest in Nature.

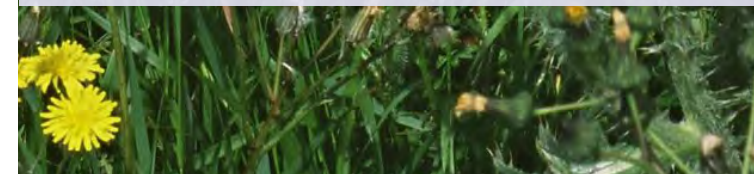
Since we were created by an Act of Parliament in 2006, Natural England has:

- designated or extended National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) including the South Downs National Park (NP), Yorkshire Dales NP, Lake District NP and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB
- boosted the survival of threatened species like bitterns, curlew, large blue butterflies, wartbiter crickets and short-haired bumblebees and enabled the reintroduction of white-tailed eagles and beavers
- led the designation of new 'Super' National Nature Reserves – the crown jewels of conservation – bringing Nature closer to people
- opened hundreds of miles of the England Coast Path – the longest continuous path of its kind in the world
- saved rare species and habitats – including the UK's largest population of nightingales – by designating and protecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- led the creation of a blue belt of marine protected areas around our coastline
- helped restore precious habitats including forest, fen, heath, river and peat bog
- pioneered a strategic approach to great crested newt conservation which improves their habitat and assists sustainable development
- worked with land managers to encourage environmentally-friendly farming across more than two-thirds of England
- secured Nature as one of the 4 key parts of the new national Social Prescribing model through working with partners, meaning nature-based prescriptions will play a role in improving the physical and mental health of thousands of people, growing to millions over the next few years



Our values guide the work of all of our 2,000 staff:

- *We are ambitious*
- *We act with integrity*
- *We are inclusive*
- *We are collaborative*





Our vision: Thriving Nature for People and Planet

Our promise is simple: we will protect and restore our natural world so that wildlife thrives, landscapes are beautiful and resilient and people can benefit from Nature in towns, cities, in the countryside and at sea.

Our work over the next 5 years will add up to significant and positive changes for everybody. Imagine for example that:

- new housing is surrounded by trees, ponds and greenspace
- children play in Nature-rich places near to home
- white-tailed eagles fly above England and beavers help manage our rivers
- more farmers grow wildflowers as well as wheat
- our National Parks are richer in wildlife, which everybody can visit
- peatbogs, saltmarsh and woodlands act as giant carbon sinks
- our seas and coastlines are protected by a 'blue belt'

Natural England is already making that happen. This document sets out how we will continue to achieve these ambitions.





We can no longer simply protect Nature from harm through special sites and reserves though they remain important. We must also create new spaces for Nature, where people can experience the benefits of a healthy environment. At the same time we must be able to assess the health of our natural environment on a large scale, not just at the very local level, so we make good strategic decisions.

We cannot and should not do this alone: Nature belongs to everyone, and everyone should contribute to its recovery. That's why our Mission is to **Build Partnerships for Nature's Recovery** - to work with a wide range of people and organisations to take the action required to rebuild a sustainable environment.

Our 5 year aims (below) bind our everyday work to the long-term vision, in support

of the 25 Year Environment Plan and government's net zero commitments:

- **a well managed Nature Recovery Network** across land, water and sea which creates and protects resilient ecosystems rich in wildlife and natural beauty, enjoyed by people and widely benefiting society
- **people connected to the natural environment** for their own and society's wellbeing, enjoyment and prosperity



- **Nature-based solutions** contributing fully to tackling the climate change challenge and wider environmental hazards and threats
- **improvements in the natural capital** that drives sustainable economic growth, healthy food systems and prospering communities
- **evidence and expertise** being used by a broad range of partnerships, organisations and communities to achieve Nature recovery and enable effective regulation and accreditation
- **being a values-led organisation** which delivers excellent service standards to all partners, organisations and communities engaged in achieving Nature's recovery

We will achieve these aims through our 4 strategic programmes:

- **Resilient Landscapes and Seas**
- **Sustainable Development**
- **Greener Farming and Fisheries**
- **Connecting People with Nature**

Our 4 programmes are all driven by **science**. We are an evidence-led organisation. The quality of our advice, actions and the legality of our decisions fundamentally depends on evidence. We gather data from Nature and people and make this available to everybody. We test and explore new approaches and initiatives to enhance the natural world. We strive to be leaders in applied conservation science, including by making the most of our National Nature Reserves as outdoor laboratories.

The image shows two individuals, likely researchers or students, working on a large, complex metal structure on the deck of a boat. They are both wearing bright yellow rain jackets, blue hard hats, and safety harnesses. The person on the left is wearing black gloves, while the person on the right is wearing blue gloves. They appear to be focused on adjusting or inspecting a component of the machinery. The background consists of a grey, overcast sky and a choppy sea. The overall scene suggests a practical, hands-on learning experience in a maritime or engineering context.

Programmes

Resilient Landscapes and Seas

Over recent decades, many of our ecosystems have become fragile and vulnerable to damage from a changing world. We believe that ecosystems that can flourish in challenging conditions, help us reach our net zero targets and create distinctive places for us all to enjoy are not just possible but within our reach. We want to create thriving, beautiful landscapes teeming with wildlife, and seas rich in plants and aquatic life.

We will:

- work with local authorities to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies in partnership with communities to promote action and target investment at the areas where it will achieve the most
- integrate Local Nature Recovery Strategies into a ground-breaking national Nature Recovery Network to ensure connected spaces and collaborative action across England
- ensure designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Marine Protected Areas, National Nature Reserves and Designated Landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks) will be at the heart of the Nature Recovery Network
- ensure that designations and management evolve to keep pace with 21st century requirements
- use our monitoring and evaluation programme to provide essential data about the character of our landscapes, seas and the health of our wildlife as they change over time

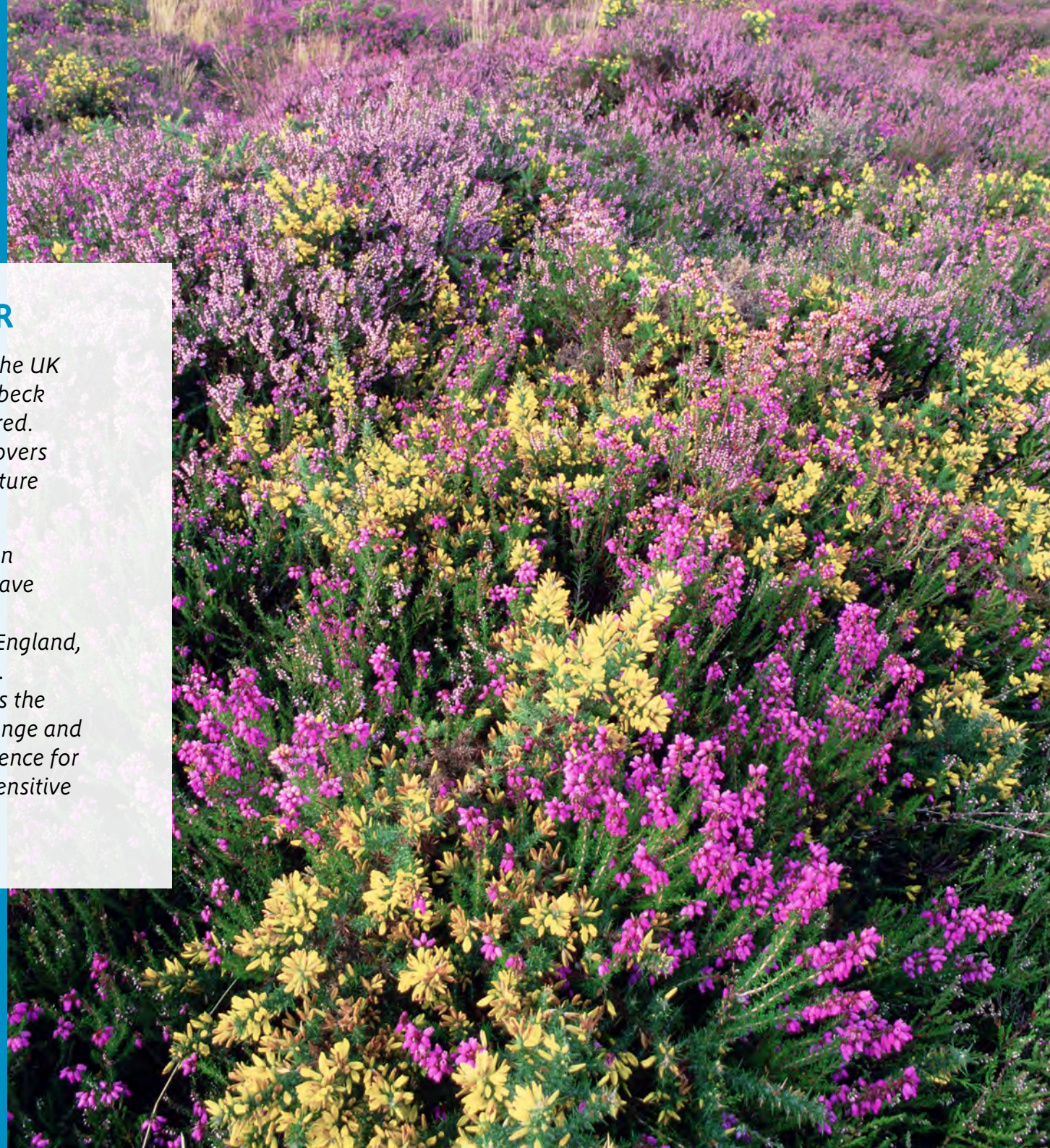
- use evidence alongside new tools and techniques to help all those who manage designated sites to become exemplars for Nature recovery
- use science, strong partnerships and local support to secure the future of lost and threatened species through programmes like our Species Recovery and Back from the Brink work, building the resilient ecosystems which provide for people, wildlife and landscapes in equal measure
- use our hands-on experience and scientific expertise to inform all our advice to government on how to be an international leader in Nature recovery



Case Study – Purbeck Heaths NNR

Purbeck is one of the most wildlife rich places in the UK and gained further recognition when the new Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve (NNR) was declared. Made up from 3 existing NNRs and new land, it covers 3,331 hectares, forming a new 'super' National Nature Reserve at landscape scale.

This is a product of collaboration and determination to make a real difference to Nature recovery. We have worked in partnership with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Forestry England, the National Trust, Rempstone Estate and the RSPB. Together we aim to restore natural processes across the whole NNR, making it more resilient to climate change and other pressures. We will also create a better experience for people enjoying the heathland, whilst protecting sensitive areas and providing a blueprint for future projects.





Sustainable Development

True sustainable development creates beautiful places to live and work in where Nature and people can both thrive. To build a future where every new development has trees, water and green space to enjoy, we must “...acknowledge that the human economy is embedded within – not external to – Nature...” (Interim Report of the Dasgupta Review)¹.

Through our work as adviser to the planning system, and regulator for protected species, we will ensure that the value that Nature provides is recognised as a vital element of our economic and social needs, not just a ‘nice-to-have’. A true green recovery must allow Nature to thrive in places where people live, work and travel, provide green space for health and wellbeing and mitigate the effects of climate change.

We will:

- ensure that all developments provide measurably more biodiversity than before they were built by taking a Biodiversity Net Gain approach to all our advice, creating a framework for this important national initiative
- change our planning advice so that Nature is considered at the earliest design phase of developments, providing high environmental quality development and greater clarity and certainty for developers
- work creatively and constructively in partnership to prevent breaches of environmental limits (for example of water or air pollution) at our most important protected habitats, whilst enabling sustainable development
- change our approach to wildlife licensing, making it more streamlined for businesses while safeguarding our most vulnerable species and increasing conservation benefits at a strategic level



- help people and businesses deal with complexity by ensuring that our advice brings together different policy objectives such as carbon, floods, trees, biodiversity and place-making
- bring Nature to everyone’s doorstep, build resilience to climate change and create better places to live, work and play by embedding green infrastructure standards into all development planning
- help to level up the social inequality underlined by coronavirus by using green space and Nature to build back greener

Case Study

The landscape-scale **Thames Basin Heaths Partnership** is a collaboration of 26 organisations including local councils, land managers and Nature conservation bodies working together to conserve the heathland of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire.

Hosted by Natural England, the partnership is part of a mitigation strategy that makes sustainable development possible while protecting the wildlife and habitats of this internationally important site for ground-nesting birds. Levy payments received from developers fund the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace and a team of wardens to manage recreational pressure on the heaths.





Greener Farming and Fisheries

Feeding the nation sustainably requires a healthy natural environment, whether on land or at sea. Healthy soil, biodiversity, clean and plentiful water are essential to our farming and fishing industries and are deeply affected by how well we manage them. We must also protect these natural resources from the effects of by-products of land use such as pollution or carbon emissions.

We have a unique opportunity as we leave the EU to introduce sustainable farming and fisheries systems that recognise the importance of a healthy natural environment to these industries. By making our evidence and expert advice central to policy and delivery, we will ensure that improving natural capital is at the heart of farm and fishing business decisions.



We will:

- create a modern, innovative and customer-focused on-farm environmental advice service that delivers better results for Nature, building on decades of experience and successes such as the Catchment Sensitive Farming Scheme
- help policy makers and fishery managers establish world-class fisheries management regimes through our expert technical advice and collaborative working relationships
- advise Defra as they develop new legislation and reward systems based on public payments for public goods for farmers and fishers, the basis for much of the vital contribution they will make to the Nature Recovery Network and the government's 25 Year Environment Plan targets
- help Defra make the new Environmental Land Management System (ELMS) ambitious in scope and scale, evidence-based and simple for customers and advisers
- continue to improve air and water quality by working with water companies, the Environment Agency and Defra to establish common monitoring standards
- establish marine by-laws which protect and improve the environment in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by working with marine regulating authorities, and advise Defra on how to reach Good Environmental Status for waters

Case Study: Martin Down Farm Cluster

The Martin Down National Nature Reserve is one of the largest areas of high-quality chalk downland habitat remaining in southern England. The Martin Down Farmer Cluster was formed in the Cranborne Chase area of Dorset and Hampshire in 2016 with landowners brought together by a common appreciation of, and concern for, this important landscape. The Farmer Cluster concept was developed by GWCT and Natural England to empower farmers to join forces to deliver greater wildlife benefits at a landscape scale.

Natural England has played a key role in supporting, setting up and funding The Martin Down Farmer Cluster, and the project continues to grow. The Martin Down Farm Cluster is now working with other farmer groups - the Allenford Farmer Cluster and the Chalke Valley Farmer Cluster - to form a Martin Down 'Supercluster' area covering some 236 km² involving 36 farmers. This group will be working to help turtle dove, hedgehog, adder, lapwing, barn owl, harvest mouse, corn bunting, grey partridge, bumblebees, Duke of Burgundy, small blue butterflies, arable flora, soil health, and improving habitat links and connections.





Connecting People with Nature

Spending time in Nature is essential for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. It should be accessible to every single person, no matter what their circumstances.

To engage everyone in the fight against the climate and biodiversity crises, we need to foster deep connections with Nature. Evidence shows a positive relationship between Nature connectedness and mental wellbeing as well as positive environmental behaviours.²

This means scaling up our work to connect the public with Nature: using evidence to increase its reach, making sure it is inclusive, and ensuring that there are accessible, Nature-rich places close to where people live as well as further afield.

We will:

- enable 'environmentally deprived' communities to access Nature on their doorstep through a Nature Recovery Network and other initiatives such as improvements to National Trails
- embed green infrastructure standards into local authority planning strategies, particularly focusing on areas of deprivation and where coronavirus has had most impact



- partner with the National Academy for Social Prescribing to test the effectiveness of Nature-based solutions for people with mild to moderate mental and physical health conditions
- gather evidence on the barriers to access that prevent people from enjoying Nature, as well as of how enabling access for those who would benefit most will improve the quality of people's lives, meet health targets and reduce costs for the health service
- use our in-depth People and Nature survey data to understand exactly how people use, and want to use, the natural world to help government shape better policies to reduce inequality and deprivation



Case Study – children and Nature

2020 is the first year of a 3-year programme of intervention to improve children's life chances in some of the most deprived areas of England. The additional impact of coronavirus on education and learning means we are at risk of a 'lost generation' of children. Led by Natural England and financed by Department for Education, the programme has a critical role to play in supporting recovery from the pandemic and helping those whose health and wellbeing has been disproportionately affected by coronavirus. Taking learning outside the classroom – supporting schools to use outside spaces and alternative venues - is a vital tool to ensuring children can keep learning and teachers can deliver the curriculum safely and effectively.

The programme is working with:

- *375 schools involved in the Nature Friendly Schools Project*
- *107 schools involved in the Community Forest & Woodland Outreach Project*

And will:

- *increase the number of Care Farm places to 1.3 million*





Endnotes

- 1 Treasury, H.M., 2020. The Dasgupta Review–Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity Interim Report. April. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/interim-report-the-dasgupta-review-independent-review-on-the-economics-of-biodiversity> on 15 September 2020
- 2 Martin, L., White, M.P., Hunt, A., Richardson, M., Pahlb, S., Burt, J. (2020) Nature contact, nature connectedness and associations with health, wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 68, 101389

Image credits

- 1 Fungi grows amongst mosses on the bough of an ancient oak tree in autumn, Moccas Park NNR, Herefordshire. Neil Aldridge/Back from the Brink
- 2 Children laughing in a huddle outdoors. Jacob Lund/Shutterstock
- 3 Man and small child by sand dunes. Pixabay
- 4 Tony Juniper and Marian Spain. Natural England
- 5 Wildflowers on edge of field. Natural England
- 6 Student thinning hazel. Chris Gomersall/Natural England
- 7 White-tailed eagle G3-24 released on the Isle of Wight in 2019 takes flight along the Solent coast in

the winter sun
Ainsley Bennett

- 8 Queen scallop (*Aquipecten opercularis*) colonised by red algae and hydroids on Ballard Point maerl grounds. Studland to Portland SAC. Natural England/Ross Bullimore
- 9 Cator Park at Berkeley Homes' Kidbrooke Village in 2018, two years after landscape enhancements carried out in partnership with London Wildlife Trust. Catherine Cullen/London Wildlife Trust
- 10 Natural England and Environment Agency working together on a baseline survey for Holderness Inshore Marine Conservation Zone. Nick Meaton/Environment Agency
- 11 Assessing transition to heathland from conifer plantation, Dendles

Wood SSSI, Dendles Wood NNR, Devon
Natural England/Paul Glendell

- 12 Purbeck Heaths NNR. Bob Gibbons
- 13 A family relax on Redcar beach. Bruce Cutts/Natural England
- 14 Designed for wildlife: the banks of the A354 Weymouth Relief Road, Dorset. Constructed in 2009, they now support 140 plant and 30 butterfly species. Phil Sterling/Butterfly Conservation
- 15 Responsible dog walking on Thames Basin Heath. Thames Basin Heath Partnership/Natural England
- 16 Farm advice delivered by Catchment Sensitive Farming and South East Water working in partnership. South East Water

- 17 Yorkshire Dales National Park - fishing in River Ure Hawes. Jenny Wheeldon/Natural England
- 18 Walking on Martin Down National Nature Reserve. Dagmar Junghanns/Natural England
- 19 Natural England Deputy Diving Officer Trudy Russell busy surveying a rocky reef. Matt Slater
- 20 Having fun wheelchair racing. Natural England
- 21 Mums with buggies. Solstock/Getty
- 22 Hide and seek. Paul Bradbury/Getty
- 23 Beaver kit on the lower reaches of the River Otter in Devon. Mike Symes/Devon Wildlife Trust



Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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