



**Ulster
Wildlife**

Corporate Strategy
2013 - 2020

**WILDLIFE
IN TRUST**



part of
The Wildlife Trusts





“The Wildlife Trusts play a very important part in protecting our natural heritage. I would encourage anyone who cares about wildlife to join them.”

Sir David Attenborough
President Emeritus of
The Wildlife Trusts

The Strategic Plan, Wildlife in Trust 2013 – 2020, is intended to set the direction of travel for the next seven years. It:

- Takes stock of current performance and future challenges
- Shows how we contribute to achieving Northern Ireland’s shared vision and priorities
- Gives clear direction on how the organisation will operate and manage its resources
- Informs the project planning process and guides collaboration with partners
- Helps us hold ourselves to account and ensure we deliver for nature
- Brings key information together in one place – particularly for members, staff, volunteers and partners

This document does not include the detailed operational plans and key performance indicators that will be used to ensure delivery of environmental outcomes and maximise the difference that the charity will make.

Progress will be reported by publishing achievements and outcomes in our annual report which can found on our website.

CONTENTS

1. Foreword
2. Vision, Mission, Goals
3. Values and principles
4. The story so far
5. Where do we want to be by 2020?
- outlining our goals
6. Conclusion and Glossary



www.ulsterwildlife.org

FOREWORD

For the past 35 years, we have been driven and supported by people who share a belief that wildlife and wild places are important, and we are proud to continue to serve our expanding membership base as we look forward to 2020.

The vision, drive and expertise of our staff, volunteers, members, supporters, advocates, and partner organisations give us a breadth and depth of collective knowledge, voice and impact. This new strategic plan comes at a challenging time for the environment, the economy and the charity sector. It is important that we have a firm basis upon which to move forward and look for new opportunities to extend our reach. This strategic plan puts our people centre stage - it is through working together and bringing people with us, that we can deliver for the natural environment.

One of the strengths of The Wildlife Trusts movement across the UK is the individuality and autonomy of its members to reflect regional needs and priorities through a powerful local mandate. One development for this planning period is the adoption of a new logo and the shortening of our operational name to *Ulster Wildlife* to differentiate us from other

conservation organisations operating within the sector and give us a broader appeal to all ages. *Ulster Wildlife Trust* will remain the legal name of the organisation and we can assure all our supporters that although we will no longer be using the word 'Trust' in our logo, we remain a committed and proud member of the Wildlife Trusts movement, which brings so much in terms of support and influence across the UK.

Another significant development is our new Strategic Partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and we look forward to collaborative working over the next 5 years to address key environmental challenges. Our central aims of protecting and restoring quality habitats, landscape-scale conservation, coastal and marine protection, and engaging people in societal change to protect our natural assets will continue to drive our work until 2020.



Underpinning this strategic plan will be key principles and annual operational action plans which will direct our resources to ensure we have maximum impact in all that we do. We hope that you will be able to join us for the AGM each September to hear about progress. Updates will be published on our website in the Annual Report.

We recognise that nature doesn't work in seven year cycles, and that our vision is much longer term; however by providing a plan with strong direction and goals for *Ulster Wildlife's* achievements in the coming years, we will continue to lead the way in achieving our vision by inspiring people and communities to value and take action for nature.

Joe Furphy OBE
Chairman

Jennifer Fulton
Chief Executive

ULSTER WILDLIFE'S VISION, MISSION AND GOALS

STRATEGIC THEMES

Our work will be delivered through the themes of Living Landscapes & Living Seas.

MISSION

We are a local charity that champions native wildlife. We work with local people to secure space for nature in our countryside, towns, coastlines and seas.

VISION

A healthy, well cared for natural environment which contributes to enjoyment, quality of life, prosperity, health and well-being.

Living Landscapes is about conservation of natural spaces that is bigger, better and more joined up.

Living Seas is about ensuring that we protect the seas so that marine life can thrive, from the depths of the ocean to the coastal shallows.

Living Landscapes and *Living Seas* aim to secure environments that are: resilient and adapting well to the changing climate; support sustainable food production; promote biodiversity within healthy functioning ecosystems; and build places where people understand, value, respect and work with nature.

STRATEGIC GOALS

1. **Inspire people** to champion wildlife and value nature
2. **Protect and restore habitats and ecosystems** through practical action and research
3. **Stand up for nature** by influencing government policy
4. **Promote health and well-being** through enjoyment of the natural environment
5. **Grow our success** and extend our reach



Investment in re-engaging people with nature and biodiversity is investment in our future health, well-being and economy.

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

Our core values will remain central in all that we do:

We have **passion** for what we do, act with **integrity**, and seek **creative** solutions to conservation problems.

We are a catalyst for **action** through partnership and innovation. We **influence** decision makers, individuals and communities to value and protect Northern Ireland's natural capital, for the benefit of everyone.

Our principles are important in guiding our work:

Knowledge is central to ensuring good decision making. We make our decisions and plan our actions using the best available science and information.

Nature is intrinsically valuable and also brings benefits for society. The natural environment is fundamental to human well-being and underpins a sustainable economy.

Protecting, restoring and connecting spaces for nature to thrive is a key part of securing healthy and resilient landscapes and seas.

Investment in **re-engaging people with nature** and educating our society to value biodiversity and eco-system services is a vital investment in our future health, well-being and economy.

We all have a **responsibility to make sure that future generations can live prosperous and healthy lives** within a natural environment that functions well and provides for the needs of our population.

Working in partnership with local people and other organisations delivers better outcomes for wildlife and people - the more people we inspire to become involved in local conservation action, the more we achieve.

THE STORY SO FAR..

Examples of Ulster Wildlife's achievements and areas of activity during the last five years are outlined over the next few pages, providing the foundation upon which we will move forward.

Our Places for Nature

Protecting places for nature is one of the founding principles of *Ulster Wildlife*. Over the past 35 years we have built a strong presence through the ownership and management of nature reserves across Northern Ireland.

Our 19 nature reserves are home to a diverse range of native habitats and protected species.

Many have special designations due to their environmental importance and require specialist management. From Ballynahone Bog near Maghera, one of the largest lowland raised bogs in NI, to species-rich grassland at Slievenacloy in the Belfast Hills, the ancient woodlands of Straidkilly on the Antrim coast, and Bog Meadows, one of the last remaining wetlands in Belfast - they are all very different, with one main thing in common – that local people took action to protect the sites for wildlife.

Right: Ulster Wildlife's Bog Meadows nature reserve in Belfast, an oasis of calm in the city.



We manage our nature reserves as best practice examples, work with neighbours to increase land being managed in a wildlife-friendly way, and acquire new sites where land needs protection.

THE STORY SO FAR..

Our Partnerships

Partnerships and innovation have been central to our work for many years. We have worked closely with government departments, particularly with the Department of the Environment, delivering positive outcomes for nature both on land and sea.

Between 2004 and 2010 we played a major role in an initiative to protect biodiversity by working in five district council areas delivering Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Today there are eleven Biodiversity Officers working in Northern Ireland covering almost all of the council areas.

Our partnership with Translink has seen Northern Ireland's bus and rail provider become one of the first companies to develop its own Biodiversity Action Plan. Through our collaborative project, Translink is committed to taking real action to increase the nature value of the rail network as wildlife corridors, to promote biodiversity at their bus stations and other landholdings, and raise awareness with staff and passengers.

We have also delivered a health and well-being project in partnership with Caring Breaks called the 'Natural World Challenge' where our two organisations work with adults with learning difficulties to increase their access to, and enjoyment of, the natural environment.

We have developed strong relationships with the private sector in Northern Ireland – attracting support through Corporate Membership, and investment in education through sponsorship of our community engagement work.

Right: A volunteer taking part in nature reserve management training.



Our connections with The Wildlife Trusts increases our collective knowledge, influence and positive impact for wildlife.

THE STORY SO FAR..

Our Volunteers

Volunteers have always been essential to our work – enabling us to have a broader reach, but also offering positive learning experiences for others. Volunteers help us across all the functions of our organisation, from fundraising at events, to clearing scrub on nature reserves, helping with policy work, or assisting at rockpool rambles – there is no doubt that the dedication of our volunteers multiplies the impact we have!

Our Members

Ulster Wildlife has experienced continued growth in membership and supporters – which shows that more and more people are realising how important it is to them that wildlife and wild places are looked after. The support of our members, donors and corporate members provides the finance we need to carry out our work. Our members and supporters also increase our influence when it comes to effecting change with politicians and decision makers.

Our Connections

Ulster Wildlife is a member of The Wildlife Trusts. The Wildlife Trusts is a well established movement, within which *Ulster Wildlife* is locally owned, independent and responsive to our own regional priorities, whilst independent and responsive to our own regional priorities whilst benefiting from the collective knowledge and influence of all 47 Wildlife Trusts across the UK.

Our strong links with other Wildlife Trusts enable us to keep up to date with best practice in conservation and education, as well as developments with central and devolved governments. We also work with our colleagues in the Irish Wildlife Trust, sharing areas of common interest and will continue to build upon this relationship into the future.

We collaborate on policy and influencing work with our sector colleagues; for example we share expertise with NI Environment Link, NI Marine Taskforce, and NI Freshwater Taskforce, and drive species action through groups such as Red Squirrel Forum, and the Barn Owl and Marsh Fritillary Action Plan groups.

THE STORY SO FAR..

Our Community Impact

We have long been innovators in delivering environmental education and continue to develop new and interactive ways of delivering our messages – working with thousands of children each year to inspire them about the natural world.

'Watch This Space', our Belfast City Council Parks engagement project has worked with over 3000 young people, parents and teachers over the years - helping them discover nature on their doorstep throughout the seasons and promoting the health and learning benefits of schools using parks as 'Outdoor Classrooms' throughout the city. Through this project we also train teachers and Belfast City Council staff to deliver interactive outdoor learning activities.

Wildlife Watch, our junior membership initiative continues to grow, with magazines, clubs and awards that offer young nature enthusiasts ways to get more involved with nature and learn new things about wildlife.

We work in partnership with district councils to distribute Landfill Communities Fund, and to date, we have helped over 500 projects across NI to make a difference in their local area, supporting community-led action to improve their environment and increase access to, and enjoyment of, community spaces.

We engage hundreds of people of all ages every year through wildlife events and interactive workshops, from fungus forays, wildlife detective trails, minibeast hunts and rockpool rambles, to learning about colour and design in nature. We make learning about nature fun!



WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE BY 2020?

Ulster Wildlife has already made significant strides in putting nature conservation on the map in NI.

Now we must continue to lead the way to promote nature's recovery, engaging society as a whole through positive partnerships and practical action. There is still a great deal to do to achieve a healthy, well cared for natural environment.

We will achieve our vision through delivering on the strategic themes of *Living Landscapes* and *Living Seas*.

Our Living Landscapes work is about:

- Working with people and communities to restore damaged and fragmented habitats, reconnecting these and linking them to the green space in our cities, towns and villages.
- Securing a society where people are inspired by, and engaged in, protecting wildlife and where they recognise the economic and social value of nature, and the many ways in which it improves their quality of life.

Our Living Seas work is about:

- Helping wildlife and habitats to recover from past decline as our use of the seas' resources becomes environmentally sustainable.
- Inspiring people about marine wildlife and to value the sea for the many ways in which it supports our quality of life.
- Creating a network of marine protected areas as part of a long-term solution to the management of healthy seas.

Our work will be delivered through five goals, each contributing to the Themes of *Living Landscapes* and *Living Seas*. Under each section overleaf we have set out some of the key areas of activity.



Learning about nature is fun and we want to create budding naturalists of all ages!

(GOAL 1) INSPIRE PEOPLE TO CHAMPION WILDLIFE BY UNDERSTANDING AND VALUING NATURE

We believe that in order to protect NI's diverse landscapes and seas, and secure a future rich in wildlife, we must invest resources into re-engaging people with nature and educating our society to value the environment as a vital investment in our future health, well-being and economy.

We will work with partners, members and volunteers to further the understanding of wildlife and natural processes, and we will do this in engaging and interactive ways – learning about nature is fun and we want to create budding naturalists of all ages!

- **Education** – We will develop a lifelong learning strategy for the organisation and develop and deliver innovative programmes to inspire people of all ages about nature through both schools-based and community-based learning. We'll continue to promote Outdoor Classrooms and learning about nature through Eco Clubs and Wildlife Watch.
- **Training** – We will increase our capacity to deliver training in natural heritage skills, developing accredited training courses in areas such as ecological monitoring skills, habitat and species identification skills, and practical conservation skills both land-based and sea-based.
- **Volunteering** – We will continue to engage people in their local natural environment through providing high quality volunteering opportunities across our organisation, inspiring action and increasing volunteers' employability.
- **Events and Advice** – We will continue to deliver a programme of public events, offering innovative ways for people to get active and learn about wildlife. We will provide advice on how people can do their bit for nature through our website, publications and encourage our supporters to take action in their local communities.

(GOAL 2) PROTECT AND REBUILD BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS BY INVESTING IN PRACTICAL ACTION AND RESEARCH

We will work to promote the restoration of natural systems to provide maximum benefit for native species, habitats and people. This work will centre around the protection and good management of core high nature value sites, and will seek to promote habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors to form the basis of ecological networks within our landscapes and seas. We will use our local presence and knowledge to carry out practical habitat management work, and assist others in doing so.

- **Nature Reserves and Protected Areas** – we will manage our nature reserves as exemplars of best practice, increasing our engagement with neighbouring landowners to encourage more connectivity within the landscape and increase the area of land being managed in a wildlife-friendly way. We will also continue to acquire nature reserves where there is a need for the land to be protected. We will work towards establishing both voluntary and statutory marine protected areas on our coastlines and in our seas.
- **Landscape-scale Projects** – We will scope out and develop landscape-scale nature conservation projects, particularly focusing on grasslands. We will invest in the restoration of peatlands and develop landscape-scale projects in our towns and cities, promoting wildlife corridors and ecological urbanism.
- **Species Action** – We will develop and deliver practical species-focused projects, for example for the barn owl, Irish hare, and red squirrel, and support projects for other threatened native species. We will remove invasive alien species from our sites, and advise on, and contribute to, research and understanding of the impacts of invasive alien species.
- **Research and Monitoring** – We will develop scientific and data collection projects for key marine species for example sharks, skates and rays, as well as promoting citizen science through the Shore Thing and Seasearch initiatives. On land, we will further develop monitoring of key species on our nature reserves, and contribute to research and scientific studies to further knowledge of biodiversity, ecosystems, and the life supporting services nature provides.



We deliver practical conservation action for the barn owl, working with landowners and volunteers to monitor nests and increase suitable habitat.



Marine Protected Areas are a key part in achieving a healthy and resilient natural environment.

(GOAL 3) STAND UP FOR NATURE BY INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT POLICY

To achieve *Living Landscapes* and *Living Seas* we need to demonstrate how nature can work for both people and wildlife: how to restore the health of our ecosystems and provide the conditions for wildlife to recover. We already inspire and support landowners to manage their land for nature; and we play an advisory and advocacy role to demonstrate how the marine environment can be managed. With the reorganisation of local government, our local presence and advice will be ever more important.

We believe that there is great urgency in achieving sustainability in how we use natural resources, and in safeguarding biodiversity. Our work with politicians and decision makers is about getting a better deal for nature. We will contribute to emerging government policy, raising awareness of biodiversity, ecosystem services and natural capital.

- **Land-use Policy** – We will continue to advocate for sustainable use of our natural resources. We will advocate for a land use strategy for NI and planning policies that address the need for protection of high nature value sites, and the importance of connecting our landscape to allow nature to cope with the pressures of climate change and human demands.
- **Marine Spatial Planning** – We will work to influence the emerging plan for how our seas are managed, seeking to ensure that enough space is protected for sealife and important habitats under water. By advocating for Marine Protected Areas, and monitoring their implementation e.g. the new Strangford Lough protection zone, we can secure space for nature in our seas.
- **Reform of Local Government** – We will seek to embed the environment within the community planning process for the new super councils.
- **Agriculture and Fishing** – We will continue to strengthen our relationships with the agri-food sector, finding areas of common interest and influencing agri-environment policies to get a better deal for nature and promote sustainable farming and fishing practices.
- **Biodiversity Strategy** – We will contribute to the delivery of Northern Ireland's Biodiversity Strategy and advocate for investment in biodiversity as an insurance policy for our future health and well-being. By providing both practical action for protected sites and species, and also by providing advice and support and raising awareness, we will support the achievement of the government target to halt biodiversity loss by 2020.
- **Climate Change** – We will promote the need to understand and monitor both the biodiversity threats and opportunities brought about by our changing climate, advocating for policies that protect and mitigate for threatened species and solutions that work with nature.

(GOAL 4) PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING THROUGH ENJOYMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Access to, and enjoyment of, wild places and wildlife has been shown to have a positive impact on our physical and emotional well-being and is important for people of all ages both in terms of preventing illness, and managing health conditions. Providing opportunities to engage with nature is an important factor in achieving a healthy society.

- **Improving Access to the Natural Environment** - We will continue to provide and improve access on our own nature reserves through provision of paths and signage on sites and through running public events. We will also promote access to nature through engaging with bodies such as AONB Management Organisations, Outdoor Recreation NI and NITB.
- **Promoting Nature as a Tool to Improve Health** - We will work with partners to remove barriers to accessing and understanding wildlife and natural spaces and continue to collaborate with our partners, such as Caring Breaks, to develop and deliver projects to engage with underrepresented and disadvantaged groups and reduce social exclusion.



Providing opportunities to engage with nature is important to achieving a healthy society

(GOAL 5) GROW OUR SUCCESS AND EXTEND OUR REACH

As a locally governed charity, we will employ committed, skilled and knowledgeable staff and volunteers. We will invest in action for nature and ensure that our activities deliver maximum impact and make the most efficient and effective use of our resources.

There is much work to do if we are to achieve our vision and mission, and in order to increase the delivery of practical action for wildlife, we will develop a targeted fundraising strategy to increase income and support. This will not only boost the amount of funding devoted to practical conservation work, but will increase our influence and ability to draw additional grant funding into Northern Ireland.

- **Increasing Membership** - The support of our members is vital. We will focus our attention on recruitment of new members and the retention of existing members, ensuring we provide an excellent service and that we communicate our collective successes so that our members and supporters value the work we do.
- **Diversify our Income** - We will increase investment in conservation through building partnerships with the private sector, increasing our community fundraising capacity and promoting giving through legacies. We will also seek to attract funding from EU sources into conservation projects on both land and sea.
- **Landfill Communities Fund** - We will continue to act as Distributive Environmental Body, promoting the use of this grant funding scheme to community environmental projects.
- **Developing our Staff** - We will invest in developing our staff, sharing our knowledge and skills, and monitoring and improving our performance so that we maximise our impact for wildlife.
- **Managing our Charity** - We will continue to build upon our good governance practice and adapt as necessary to meet the new requirements of the Charity Commission. We will also seek to move to new premises, a location that is more accessible and able to house our growing team and equipment.

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS AND NATURE CHAMPIONS

The success of Ulster Wildlife relies upon our collective efforts -

Our Council, members and supporters, staff and volunteers, partners and funders.

We are a talented, enthusiastic and hard working team united by our shared passion for a healthy environment. **We are each a champion for nature.**

IN CONCLUSION

We look forward with an expectation that by the 2020 horizon, significant progress will have been made in managing and valuing Northern Ireland's environment, and that we will look back and be proud of Ulster Wildlife's role. We hope that you will join us on this journey as a member, volunteer, partner, funder or corporate sponsor.

Right: Ulster Wildlife's Umbra Nature Reserve, Magilligan dunes





“The Wildlife Trusts’ vision of A Living Landscape and Living Seas is not just that the wild world will exist in isolation but that we will all benefit from being reconnected to the real world; the blossom, the bugs, the birds, the beasts! We will be the healthier and the richer for it. And, once we are reconnected with the natural world, we will respect it more, care for it more and appreciate the central role it plays in our very existence.”

Simon King OBE
President of The Wildlife Trusts



GLOSSARY

Biodiversity - biological diversity is the variety of life and its processes; and it includes the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences among them, and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur.

Sustainable Development - meeting the needs of the present and local population without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Ecosystem - a community of living organisms (plants, animals and microbes) in conjunction with the non living things like air, water and mineral soil, interacting as a system.

Ecosystem Approach - a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

Ecosystem Services - the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as flood and disease control; cultural services such as spiritual, recreational, and cultural benefits; and supporting services such as nutrient cycling that maintain the conditions for life on Earth.

Natural Capital - the economic value of ecosystem services, and the organisms and habitats providing them, estimated by the UK National Ecosystem Assessment in 2011 to amount to billions of pounds in the UK alone.

Ecological Networks - the connections between different habitats and species in an ecosystem or across the landscape. Creating and extending ecological networks that improve connectivity between habitat patches will allow species to disperse over larger areas and will encourage larger, more diverse populations, thereby increasing ecological resilience and the probability of species surviving.

Ecological Urbanism - is a term used to describe integration of nature based solutions into the making and remaking of cities and towns. It views human use of urban environments through the eyes of ecology.

Habitat Connectivity - the interconnection of different habitats to allow species movement. This includes creating and managing habitat corridors and buffers, as well as preventing further fragmentation of habitats by development and other unsympathetic land-uses.

LBAP - Local Biodiversity Action Plans - are a way of encouraging people to work together and deliver a programme of continuing action for biodiversity. They set out practical steps to promote, protect, enhance and improve biodiversity at a local level.

AONB - an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is an area of countryside considered to have significant landscape value. The primary purposes of the AONB designation are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and cultural features of the landscape.

Marine Protected Area - MPAs are zones of the seas and coasts where wildlife, cultural and historical features are protected from damage and disturbance. Marine Protected Areas are essential for healthy, functioning and resilient ecosystems.

NIEA - Northern Ireland Environment Agency is an agency within the Department of the Environment, and is the body responsible for protecting, conserving and promoting the environment and heritage in Northern Ireland.



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Ulster Wildlife

3 New Line
Crossgar
Northern Ireland
BT30 9EP

T 028 4483 0282
F 028 4483 0888

info@ulsterwildlife.org
www.ulsterwildlife.org

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