

LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND WILDLIFE TRUST

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2015 - 2020

Our Vision

A Living Landscape rich in wildlife, valued and enjoyed by all.

Our Mission

To protect and enhance the wildlife and wild places of Leicestershire and Rutland, and to engage people with nature.

Strategic Objectives

We will achieve our Vision and Mission through actions linked with two main strategic objectives:

1. *Safeguarding wildlife and wild places*

- Ensure our nature reserves are in good ecological condition to protect the wildlife living there.
- Further develop priority Living Landscape projects to create biodiversity networks – more, bigger, better and joined-up areas of wildlife value.
- Work in partnership to promote and support Local Wildlife Sites, Regionally Important Geological Sites and other designated sites.
- Survey and record flora and fauna to help safeguard special places and important species and to inform land management.
- Be an effective voice for wildlife and champion a resilient and healthy environment that is valued and accessible.

2. *Inspiring people*

- Encourage more people to engage with nature through volunteering – for the intrinsic benefits it brings and to help protect wildlife and wild places.
- Create innovative and imaginative learning and outreach opportunities that explore our natural heritage and the need to safeguard its future.
- Provide a wide range of activities so that people of all ages and backgrounds can experience, enjoy and benefit from our wildlife and wild places.
- Reach out to new audiences to broaden the support base for the Trust's work.
- Ensure that our nature reserves are enjoyable, informative and safe places to visit.
- Develop the new Volunteer Training Centre into a centre of excellence that will enable skilled volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to safeguard the precious wildlife at Rutland Water and other nature reserves into the future.

To achieve these objectives we will:

- Manage our assets effectively
- Train and develop our staff and volunteers
- Grow our income and improve our financial stability
- Communicate efficiently and professionally
- Participate in productive partnerships
- Ensure good governance and organisational effectiveness

Delivery

The strategy will be delivered through detailed annual work plans and budgets, monitored by the Council of Trustees and measured against key success indicators.

Context

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust is an independent, locally based charity established in 1956 by a small group of naturalists. It has grown and developed to become the most important local organisation working for practical nature conservation in the two counties, acting as a focus for local people who care about the future of their natural environment.

We care for 33 nature reserves covering 1,229 hectares (3,036 acres), spread across Leicestershire and Rutland. Including woodlands, meadows, wetlands and heaths, these reserves contain a rich variety of animal and plant species, many rare. We offer everyone the chance to experience this wildlife by visiting these special places. We run activities and events throughout the year, everything from badger watches to the annual Birdfair, and we invest in the future through training and educational programmes. We also provide conservation advice and encouragement to other landowners and managers.

We monitor, study and record the wildlife of our counties to identify special places and important species, to inform land management and promote nature conservation, and to protect local biodiversity. In addition, we stand up for wildlife and work to protect threatened species and habitats.

Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust is part of a powerful conservation network of 47 Wildlife Trusts across the UK taking effective action to protect our unique natural heritage. The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts acts as a national voice, generates support and provides leadership for the movement.

Looking Forward

The challenges and threats to wildlife have never been greater. With increasing demand for land from agriculture, housing and development, the space for wildlife is decreasing. In addition, modern lifestyles mean many people are less connected to nature and feel less responsibility to protect their environment.

The Trust will do all it can to ensure that nature thrives in Leicestershire and Rutland. We will need the help of our members, volunteers, supporters and partners, working collaboratively and enabling local communities to value and take action for local wildlife and wild places.

Safeguarding wildlife and wild places

Key aims during the period 2015 – 2020:

1. Ensure our nature reserves are in good ecological condition to protect the wildlife living there.
2. Further develop Living Landscape projects in priority areas to create biodiversity networks – more, bigger, better and joined-up areas of wildlife value.
3. Work in partnership to promote and support Local Wildlife Sites, Regionally Important Geological Sites and other designated sites.
4. Survey and record flora and fauna to help safeguard special places and important species and to inform land management.
5. Be an effective voice for wildlife and champion a resilient and healthy environment that is valued and accessible.

I. Nature Reserves

The Trust currently manages 33 nature reserves covering more than 1,229 hectares (3,036 acres), including 20 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two National Nature Reserves and a Special Protection Area.

The Trust's nature reserves provide protection for an amazing diversity of wildlife, some rare and threatened, as well as giving people the opportunity to experience and learn about the rich variety of habitats that were once widespread.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Carry out planned habitat and access improvement projects on key nature reserves
- Enter into management agreements with Severn Trent Water for Blackbrook, Cropston and Swithland Reservoirs in the Charnwood Forest
- Acquire further strategic areas of land to buffer, enlarge and link nature reserves, creating extensive areas of robust habitat that are feasible to manage effectively – with a particular focus on the Living Landscape priority areas of Charnwood Forest, The National Forest, Leighfield Forest, Rutland Water, Soar and Wreake Floodplain and Rutland & North East Leicestershire Limestone area

Ongoing actions

- Maintain and further improve the existing nature reserves, with up to date and regularly monitored management plans in place
- Implement Environmental Stewardship work programmes and adhere to cross-compliance regulations to obtain Basic Payment Scheme funds
- Enhance the grassland nature reserves by securing better control over grazing and hay making
- Facilitate and support appropriate biological and geological recording and monitoring on Trust nature reserves and use experts and consultants to undertake surveys of key species where necessary

Wider Countryside

2. Living Landscape Projects

Wildlife needs room to thrive and must have more opportunity to move across the countryside in order to adapt to whatever conditions arise in the future. Living Landscapes restore, recreate and reconnect fragmented habitats to create a sustainable biodiversity network and an environment full of wildlife and rich in opportunities for learning, health and well-being.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Appoint officer(s) dedicated to the Charnwood Forest and Soar and Wreake Floodplain Living Landscapes, who will promote nature conservation and secure the support of local people and landowners
- Participate in the Black to Green project in the Heart of the National Forest in partnership with The National Forest Company

Ongoing actions

- Further develop, deliver and promote Living Landscape projects and initiatives with a particular focus on key priority areas of Charnwood Forest, The National Forest, Leighfield Forest, Rutland Water, Soar and Wreake Floodplain and Rutland & North East Leicestershire Limestone
- Raise public awareness of and support for Living Landscapes by focussing on defined core areas as showcases and assembling the evidence to demonstrate the benefits of Living Landscapes
- Work with key partners including Aggregate Industries, Anglian Water, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Local Authorities, National Forest Company and Natural England, to secure landscape-scale environmental enhancement in Leicestershire and Rutland

3. Local Wildlife Sites and Regionally Important Geological Sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are important places for wildlife but are not protected by law. A healthy network of LWS is crucial in providing more, bigger, better and joined-up areas of wildlife value. Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) are non-statutory places of geological importance that also offer opportunities for educational use and scientific study.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

Ongoing actions

- Maintain core work surveying, monitoring and promoting favourable management of LWS and advising and influencing land owners and managers, with a particular focus on the Living Landscape priority areas of Charnwood Forest, The National Forest, Leighfield Forest, Rutland Water, Soar and Wreake Floodplain and Rutland & North East Leicestershire Limestone area
- Work with the Wildlife Sites Panel to identify and designate LWS within Leicestershire and Rutland
- Work in partnership with others including Geology Sub-committee and Charnia Research Group to identify, conserve and promote the counties' RIGS

4. Surveys and recording

Accurate habitat and species data are vital to inform conservation management policies, practices and procedures, and help protect and enhance biodiversity.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

Ongoing actions

- Work with local naturalists and others to ensure effective biological recording in Leicestershire and Rutland
- Organise an annual Recorders Conference
- Publish *Leicestershire and Rutland Recorder* annually
- Carry out habitat and species surveys as appropriate
- Maintain and develop the *Recorder* database
- Continue long-standing CES bird ringing and other project at Rutland Water Nature Reserve
- Support the work of RWNR wildlife recorders' group and all associated activities
- Publish annual RWNR Wildlife Report

5. Advocacy and influence

A whole range of policies and decisions can affect our wildlife and wild places. With ever-increasing agricultural, housing and other development pressures in Leicestershire and Rutland, it is crucial that there is an effective voice for wildlife at a local, county and regional level.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

Ongoing actions

- Work with owners and managers, particularly those with land adjacent to Trust nature reserves, and seek to influence their land management practices to benefit wildlife
- Comment as appropriate on significant consultations and planning applications that could adversely affect wildlife with a particular focus on Trust nature reserves, SSSIs, LWS and land in key Living Landscape priority areas
- Ensure regular communication with Leicestershire and Rutland MPs plus Local Authority elected members and officers
- Engage effectively with members and other partners to campaign for wildlife protection and enhancement where this can help achieve a successful outcome
- Participate in regional and national Wildlife Trust campaigns

Inspiring people

Key aims during the period 2015 – 2020:

1. Encourage more people to engage with nature through volunteering - for the intrinsic benefits it brings and to help protect wildlife and wild places.
2. Create innovative and imaginative learning and outreach opportunities that explore our natural heritage and the need to safeguard its future.
3. Provide a wide range of activities so that people of all ages and backgrounds can experience, enjoy and benefit from our wildlife and wild places.
4. Reach out to new audiences to broaden the support base for the Trust's work.
5. Ensure our nature reserves are enjoyable, informative and safe places to visit.
6. Develop the new Volunteer Training Centre into a centre of excellence that will enable skilled volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to safeguard the precious wildlife at Rutland Water and other nature reserves into the future.

1. Encourage people to engage with nature through volunteering

Volunteering provides intrinsic benefits through health and well-being, and also enables the Trust to achieve more for nature conservation.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

Ongoing actions

- Further develop volunteering opportunities and engagement including corporate groups plus health and well-being
- Support the work of the Reserves Officer and the roving mid-week, Sunday and reserve based volunteer groups
- Support the work of the Volunteer Co-ordinator at RWNR to facilitate volunteer recruitment, training, support and development.
- Provide focused training in key nature conservation skill areas
- Further support and strengthen the Trust's network of Local Groups
- Continue to develop the volunteer Trainee Reserves Officers schemes at The Old Mill and Rutland Water Nature Reserve, enabling trainee placements to gain comprehensive training and skills in practical nature conservation and make a significant contribution to managing the Trust's nature reserves

2. Education and outreach

The Trust believes that it is vital to provide opportunities for people to learn about the natural world and the need to safeguard its future. We have a responsibility to educate the next generation so that they in turn will play a crucial role as future guardians of our natural heritage.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Produce a comprehensive Education Strategy to guide all Trust education initiatives, programmes and projects
- Develop and deliver a series of Grow Wild workshops for teachers
- Initiate Wild Play sessions and set up new Wild Tots groups

- Investigate the feasibility of a schools membership package, with the aim of increasing the number of schools that regularly participate in Trust initiatives and programmes and providing regular income
- Establish a permanent site for Forest School activities
- Investigate Education Trainee / Apprenticeship scheme to support the work of the Education Officers
- Engage with a variety of community groups in Leicester City

Ongoing actions

- Further develop and deliver Outreach Education and Forest School programmes, with the aim of becoming the go-to leading provider of quality environmental education for schools and families in Leicestershire and Rutland
- Support the Grow Wild project to effectively meet the needs of schools and community groups wanting advice and support to create wildlife / nature areas
- Ensure comprehensive wildlife information and related educational resources on to the Trust's websites
- Continue to promote wildlife gardening and sustainable living
- Support education programmes at the Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre

3. Events and activities for all ages and backgrounds

Connecting people with nature is essential to safeguarding it. Delivering a wide range of interesting and imaginative events and activities will enable people of all ages and backgrounds to experience and enjoy Leicestershire and Rutland's wildlife at first hand and gain a greater appreciation and understanding of nature.

3.1 Wildlife Watch

Wildlife Watch, the Trust's junior club, provides valuable opportunities for children and young people to explore and discover local wildlife and get involved in fun and interesting projects.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

Ongoing actions

- Support the activities and development of Wildlife Watch and better promote it across the two counties
- Facilitate the formation of new Wildlife Watch groups
- Develop and deliver Wildlife Watch family events and activities at a variety of locations around Leicestershire and Rutland

3.2 Birdfair

The Birdfair is now the biggest event of its kind in the world and provides an important showcase for birdwatching / wildlife organisations plus associated commercial enterprises, as well as raising vital funds for global nature conservation programmes.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Plan succession for key personnel
- Secure appropriate legal agreement on land rented for Birdfair

Ongoing actions

- Deliver further sustainable development of Birdfair and ensure it continues to integrate appropriately into ongoing activities and plans at Rutland Water Nature Reserve
- Ensure effective working partnership arrangements with RSPB

3.3. Rutland Osprey Project

The Rutland Osprey Project has successfully established a breeding colony of ospreys in Rutland. Ospreys are a charismatic species and have generated a huge amount of public interest and visitors, allowing the project to engage with a significant range of people and offering valuable opportunities to broaden knowledge and understanding of ospreys and the natural world and foster care and respect for our environment.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Expand the Osprey Flyways initiative to at least 10 schools in The Gambia and Senegal and create a sustainable model that can be replicated elsewhere in Africa

Ongoing actions

- Support and monitor osprey activity and breeding in Rutland
- Continue to provide an outstanding visitor experience at the Lyndon Visitor Centre, osprey viewing hides and on Osprey and Wildlife Cruises
- Promote the project widely
- Utilise satellite-tracking and other technology to better understand osprey behaviour and ecology
- Liaise further with other potential nesting sites and provide advice /encouragement
- Develop and grow World Osprey Week

4. Broaden the Trust's support base

The Trust needs to reach out to new audiences both to increase membership and to broaden our support base. Members are the lifeblood of the Trust, contributing in many different ways – providing income, giving volunteer help, offering moral support and exercising influence. A committed and engaged membership that is representative of the local community is vital to the success of the Trust.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Be innovative in identifying and communicating with new audiences
- Explore new ways of communication with members and engaging them with the Trust's work and initiatives
- Investigate new ways of engaging local employers and industry generally with conservation and volunteering
- Develop systems and procedures for understanding the requirements and wishes of our members

Ongoing actions

- Invest in membership recruitment to ensure continuing membership growth
- Continue to improve membership retention rates

5. Enjoyable, informative and safe nature reserves.

The Trust's nature reserves are our most precious resource and also our showcase. The opportunities to maximise their value for both people and wildlife should be fully explored.

New actions

- Develop online guides for use on smart phones
- Devise self-guided family friendly-guided trails for key nature reserves
- Create an outdoor education facility at an appropriate Trust nature reserve
- Establish new education trails at Rutland Water Nature Reserve

6. Volunteer Training Centre

The new Volunteer Training Centre offers an exciting opportunity to deliver an effective hub for practical nature conservation and recording and monitoring of Rutland Water and other nature reserves in Leicestershire and Rutland.

During the period 2015 – 2020 we will:

New actions

- Ensure the new Volunteer Training Centre provides a centre of excellence:
 - supporting and developing volunteers of all ages and backgrounds
 - providing a wide range of training, workshops and courses in practical nature conservation skills plus wildlife monitoring and recording
 - engaging with new volunteer audiences
 - delivering corporate volunteering opportunities

Enablers crucial to delivering our strategic objectives and key aims

Assets

New actions

- Ensure The Old Mill and new Volunteer Training Centre function well for all sectors of the Trust's work, as appropriate.

Ongoing actions

- Properly maintain and manage the Trust's buildings, vehicles, machinery, tools, equipment and other assets

Staff and volunteer development

Ongoing actions

- Recruit, develop and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff and volunteers to carry out all aspects of the Trust's work and activities

Revenue streams

New actions

- Explore ways of developing the Trust's capacity, capabilities and financial reserves, especially unrestricted funds, in particular by harnessing the commitment of the existing membership and by attracting new categories of supporter

Ongoing actions

- Maintain and further develop diverse funding to provide the Trust with adequate financial resources

Communications and marketing

New actions

- Further develop communications to secure a better public profile including social media and digital technology to complement traditional approaches
- Upgrade and consolidate websites ensuring they have comprehensive, up to date and interesting information on our nature reserves, work and activities, projects and campaigns plus key wildlife data and educational resources
- Rework the Trust's Nature Reserves Guide to provide more background information on habitats and Living Landscape priority areas

Ongoing actions

- Deliver effective coverage and profile of the Trust in a wide range of press and media

Partnerships

Ongoing actions

- Develop effective working partnerships with a range of different organisations:
 - Funders - Aggregate Industries, Anglian Water, Caterpillar and the Caterpillar Foundation, Heritage Lottery Fund, Peter De Haan Charitable Trust
 - Statutory bodies – Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Local Authorities, The National Forest Company, Natural England
 - NGOs - Canal and Rivers Trust, National Trust, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts
 - Corporates – including Hanson Cement, Lafarge, People's Postcode Lottery

Governance

Ongoing actions

- Maintain good governance through adherence to recommended best practice
- Ensure Trust plans, policies and procedures are relevant and up to date

- Ensure organisational systems and processes are fit for purpose, understood and used
- Integrate safe working practices into all areas of the Trust's activities
- Encourage good communications at all levels
- Identify and respond promptly to opportunities and threats as they arise
- Ensure growth in the Trust's charitable activities and operations are appropriately sustained and supported