

Wetlands for nature and people



Creating a world where healthy wetland
nature thrives and enriches lives

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We are living through unprecedented times.

The escalating crisis for our climate and the natural world not only poses threats to our wetland nature but to the livelihoods and wellbeing of people. COVID-19 has brought challenges for individuals and more widely for the world's economies. But as we seek to emerge from the pandemic, it's an opportunity to do things differently and '**build back better**'.



At WWT we believe wetlands are key in helping us meet our most pressing environmental challenges. Wetlands can help us repair our environment by boosting biodiversity, storing carbon and protecting us from flooding and pollution. Managed sustainably for both nature and people, wetlands can support livelihoods and local economies.

Spending time in natural places and particularly near water has been shown to improve our health and wellbeing, especially for those in urban areas with little access.

This growing realisation that working with wetlands can not only help sustain wetland nature but provide numerous ways of mitigating impacts on people too, has led WWT to refocus our strategy.

By setting out our priorities in this way, we believe we can have the greatest impact for wetlands and wetland nature while providing real solutions to some of the most pressing issues impacting people now and in the future.





Our four ambitions

Ambition one

The UK has a bigger, better and more connected network of wetlands, with over 100,000 ha of new and restored wetland habitats and the health of our existing wetlands is improving.

This network sustains healthy wetland nature and provides nature-based solutions to urgent challenges such as mitigating the impacts of the climate emergency.

Shorter term measure: 20,000 ha of created or restored wetlands by 2027.

Ambition two

The majority of the public in the UK value and are significantly more connected to wetlands, with at least a million people directly taking action for wetlands where they live and work.

Shorter term measure: 400,000 people taking action for wetlands by 2027.

Ambition three

In the countries where we work around the world, where wetlands, wetland nature and peoples' livelihoods are threatened, we will deliver community-led and sustainable solutions, and ensure wetlands are more effectively valued and considered in local, regional and national decision making.

Ambition four

Key international decision makers value wetlands and we will build a global community of highly skilled individuals creating and managing wetlands and mobilising wetland support.



Our **four ambitions** will enable us to draw on over seven decades of experience in wetland conservation and ensure wetlands are put centre stage in our fight to meet global challenges.



Why wetlands?

Why now?

There's growing recognition among policy makers and the public of the need for action to value and save nature. But despite this, the natural world remains under unsustainable pressure and wetlands have suffered particularly badly.

From the mightiest river estuary to the smallest farmland pond, wetlands are some of the most biodiverse habitats on the planet, providing homes for many thousands of endangered species.

Yet they're being lost at a frightening pace. In October 2018, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands published the Global Wetland Outlook.

Among a plethora of worrying statistics, the report states that up to 87% of our wetlands have been lost over the last 400 years and we are losing wetlands three times faster than natural forests. And with 40% of the world's species reliant on wetlands in some way, the loss of these valuable places is forcing many species to the brink of extinction.

But these extraordinarily biodiverse places are also essential for people. Their loss is our loss too and it's being increasingly acknowledged that their decline poses a threat to the livelihoods and wellbeing of millions of people around the planet.

Wetlands make up only 3% of the UK, but are home to around 10% of all our species.

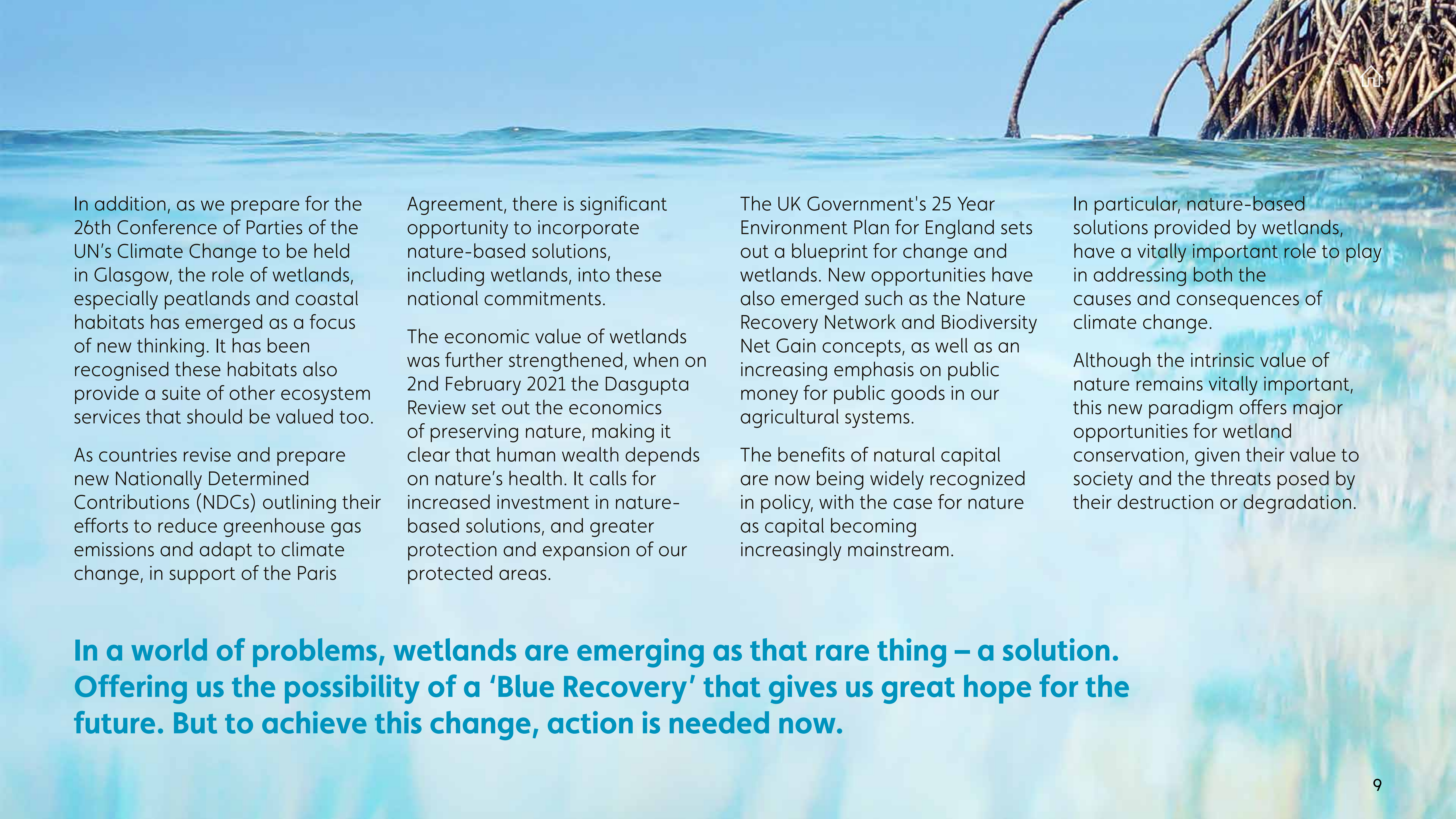


In 2019 the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) published its comprehensive and shocking report that showed that biodiversity in wetlands and other habitats around the world is in freefall. The report concluded that only through 'transformative change' can nature still be conserved, restored and used sustainably.

Ahead of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) due to take place in China, WWT is working with our partners to influence the global biodiversity agenda in the post 2020 biodiversity framework and beyond, given that this is one of the best ways to create systematic change.

83%

**of freshwater species
are in decline worldwide.**



In addition, as we prepare for the 26th Conference of Parties of the UN's Climate Change to be held in Glasgow, the role of wetlands, especially peatlands and coastal habitats has emerged as a focus of new thinking. It has been recognised these habitats also provide a suite of other ecosystem services that should be valued too.

As countries revise and prepare new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outlining their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change, in support of the Paris

Agreement, there is significant opportunity to incorporate nature-based solutions, including wetlands, into these national commitments.

The economic value of wetlands was further strengthened, when on 2nd February 2021 the Dasgupta Review set out the economics of preserving nature, making it clear that human wealth depends on nature's health. It calls for increased investment in nature-based solutions, and greater protection and expansion of our protected areas.

The UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan for England sets out a blueprint for change and wetlands. New opportunities have also emerged such as the Nature Recovery Network and Biodiversity Net Gain concepts, as well as an increasing emphasis on public money for public goods in our agricultural systems.

The benefits of natural capital are now being widely recognized in policy, with the case for nature as capital becoming increasingly mainstream.

In particular, nature-based solutions provided by wetlands, have a vitally important role to play in addressing both the causes and consequences of climate change.

Although the intrinsic value of nature remains vitally important, this new paradigm offers major opportunities for wetland conservation, given their value to society and the threats posed by their destruction or degradation.

In a world of problems, wetlands are emerging as that rare thing – a solution. Offering us the possibility of a 'Blue Recovery' that gives us great hope for the future. But to achieve this change, action is needed now.



Why WWT?

As we celebrate our 75th anniversary, we're building on the lead of our founder Sir Peter Scott, championing wetlands and wetland nature, while recognising their value to people.

As the UK's leading wetland conservation charity, we have an established track record of managing, creating and restoring vast areas of wetlands. Our species recovery work builds healthy wetlands and we engage and inspire people to value wetlands and influence key decision makers.

In our refocussed priorities, saving threatened and declining wetland species will continue, but only where they play an important role

as flagships or ambassadors as part of wider efforts to conserve wetland ecosystems.

In addition, we also now need to respond to the growing environmental and societal crises. In setting out our ambitions at this crucial time, and by reshaping some of our work in this 'super year' for climate, nature and the environment, we're ensuring WWT is more agile and can act more effectively and efficiently.

In embracing this moment of great opportunity, we are able to demonstrate more clearly than ever, the vital role wetlands can play in sustaining global nature and meeting the pressing needs of its people.



Ambition one

The UK has a bigger, better and more connected network of wetlands, with over 100,000 ha of new and restored wetland habitats and the health of our existing wetlands is improving.

This network sustains healthy wetland nature and provides nature-based solutions to urgent challenges such as mitigating the impacts of the climate emergency.

We will, with others, create and restore over 100,000 hectares of wetlands and ensure the health of our existing wetlands in the UK is improving. It's an ambitious figure, but one that will deliver a 'Blue Recovery', that will mean not just greater biodiversity, but better flood management, more carbon storage,

cleaner water and more opportunity to experience wetlands with benefits for our health and wellbeing.

It is also a credible one, recommended to the UK Government by its own advisers, the Natural Capital Committee (NCC), as part of a Nature Recovery Network: a national network of 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife habitat, that lies at the heart of their 25 Year Environment Plan.



Wetlands, biodiversity and water quality

Our planet faces a biodiversity crisis on a scale never seen before. It's fueled by poor water quality, along with changing practices in land management, population growth, industrial use and climate change. And nowhere is this more acute than in the world's rivers, lakes and wetlands. But we believe that by looking after our wetlands and their wildlife we can help rebuild some of the world's most valuable ecosystems and halt the catastrophic biodiversity loss.

We are working to demonstrate how water quality can be improved through the use of nature-based solutions.

Wetlands perform a critical role in protecting and improving water quality by filtering out and removing pollutants like pesticides, sediment from agricultural runoff, and road runoff in urban areas.

We've been constructing treatment wetlands and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to improve water quality at our sites for over 30 years.

In addition, we have expertise delivering wetland treatment schemes for a variety of other organisations from treating sewage, stormwater and agricultural waste, to handling landfill leachate and mine drainage.



Wetlands and Carbon

Climate change is our gravest threat and wetlands are emerging centre stage in our fight against the current climate emergency. Their ability to sequester carbon, especially that of peatlands and coastal wetlands to capture 'blue carbon', has emerged as a focus for new thinking. WWT is playing a leading role in promoting 'blue carbon' in the UK and developing the role of other wetlands in the fight against climate change.

**Wetlands store
almost a third of
the world's carbon**

despite taking up just 3%
of the world's surface.





5.2m

households in the UK are
vulnerable to flooding.

Wetlands and flood mitigation

Flooding is now recognised as one of the UK's top climate change risks as the severity and frequency of extreme rainfall events increases. WWT is demonstrating how wetlands can help protect us from flood risk on our coasts, inland and in our built up areas. Called Natural Flood Management (NFM) it involves reconnecting our natural floodplains or building new ponds to store and release water slowly over time or building "leaky dams" on streams to slow flood flows. If designed and managed well NFM can also result in nature-rich wetlands.



Wetlands and wellbeing

We know the natural world plays an important part in maintaining our health and wellbeing, now more than ever, when record levels of stress, anxiety and depression are being diagnosed. Even before the pandemic, the value of nature for people and the impact of the current state of disconnection had been recognised in the UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

WWT is adapting to ensure we play our role in reconnecting significant numbers of people with wetlands and by so doing, create meaningful behaviour change and build our relevance to society. We're calling for more blue spaces in our neighbourhoods where we live and work. This is intrinsically linked to our existing work to understand and demonstrate the health and wellbeing benefits of blue spaces.

'We know that a blue environment can be as good or even better for you than a green one: living near or visiting the coast, rivers and lakes increases people's reported levels of mental health and wellbeing.'

Sir James Bevan,
Chief Executive, Environment Agency, September 2020



Recent studies undertaken at our London Wetland Centre showed that just 10 minutes in urban wetlands was sufficient to record positive changes to wellbeing



Working together to create a new wetland network

We can't achieve our ambition for bigger and better wetlands alone. So we will continue to advocate the value of wetlands to key decision makers and stakeholders. We will use key wetland species, such as curlew, black tailed godwit, corncrake and beaver to engage and inspire support for their

critical wetland habitats, benefiting a wide range of nature. We will also engage with those with a wider interest in supporting and engaging with wider environmental nature-based solutions and economic gains that can be provided by such a network of wetlands.

This will require working with numerous partners, developing innovative ways to build support and finding new models to fund and sustain wetlands, offering numerous benefits to nature and to people.

WWT already creates, restores and manages nationally and internationally important wetlands in the UK and is developing new creation projects in the catchments, our waterscapes around our reserves, as a first step towards delivering our ambition.





Since its creation in 2014, it's estimated

35,000 tonnes of
blue carbon

have been buried at Steart.

Bigger, better, more connected wetlands: WWT Steart Marshes

With the Environment Agency we've created a vast 490 ha wetland in Somerset – one of the largest wetland creation projects in the UK. As well as providing homes for wildlife and a special place for people to enjoy, the wetlands also help mitigate the impacts of climate change by increasing carbon sequestration. In addition, they build climate resilience by helping protect local houses from flooding and by reducing the risks of coastal erosion. WWT Steart Marshes brings together WWT's skills in both wetland creation and management with community engagement, to deliver a new 'working wetland' on a truly remarkable scale.



Steart now supports a host of breeding and winter birds.



Species and habitats

Working with landowners and our partners in the Curlew Recovery Partnership, we are securing the future for the threatened Eurasian curlew in lowland England. By providing advice on habitat management, protecting nests, and using our skills in conservation breeding, we are creating a recipe for success. The evocative sound and image of the curlew make it the perfect flagship to inspire action for wetland habitats at a scale that matters for this and many other wetland species.





Creating habitats for wetland wildlife: WWT Welney

We have transformed over 120 ha of former vegetable fields back to wetlands next to WWT Welney on the Ouse Washes. These wet grasslands provide feeding grounds for large numbers of wintering birds as well as breeding sites for wading birds including the Red-listed black-tailed godwit.



Harnessing nature's power

In Somerset, we've created ten new wetlands, installed 169 woody dams and planted over 3,668 native hardwood trees. This, along with our work in the Cotswold Hills is providing much needed evidence of the benefits of Natural Flood Management (NFM), which is vital for influencing policy and encouraging wider uptake of this type of approach. Early evidence shows the new NFM features, particularly woody dams, have also boosted local wildlife, especially insects.





Ambition two

The majority of the public in the UK value and are significantly more connected to wetlands, with at least a million people directly taking action for wetlands where they live and work.

Our focus is to increase the relevance of wetlands to a wider range of people and inspire them to take action for wetlands, for example by campaigning for change, volunteering to build a local wetland, or donating to an appeal.

We aim to achieve this in three main ways:

1. Engaging with our supporters in new ways.
2. Improving the experience and engagement of visitors at our sites.
3. Engaging communities with wetlands on their doorstep.



Engaging with our supporters in new ways

We will raise the profile of wetlands, make them more relevant to people and increase understanding of the vital role they play.

We will take supporters on a journey with us, creating new ways for them to become involved with WWT and with wetlands, particularly as not everyone may have the opportunity to visit one of our sites. For example, we will use citizen science to engage and inspire our supporters with their local wetlands, so they can become our ears and eyes on the ground.

We are launching a public campaign working with local communities, government and stakeholders to support Ambition One including calling for 100,000 ha of new, restored and healthier wetlands. In addition, we will develop our income streams to ensure that we are able to expand our conservation work and increase our impact.





Increasing support for wetlands through improved visitor engagement

WWT's founder, Sir Peter Scott, believed that only by giving people the opportunity to experience wetlands and their wildlife first hand, could he transform peoples' understanding and inspire them to protect these amazing spaces.

Today, over one million people visit our sites. But our ambition is to attract and inspire even more people to take action for wetlands. We will do this by providing outstanding immersive and interactive experiences with our living collections and nature reserves.



Generation Wild

We want every child to experience a passion for nature and be inspired to protect wild spaces in the future. So with the support of ScottishPower Foundation and other generous funders, we're working with thousands of children, their families and teachers from schools in disadvantaged areas. We will immerse these young people in nature and nurture a life-long love of the natural world through a combination of free, specially designed, wild experiences at our wetland sites and in communities, follow up family visits, teacher training and an award scheme. Results of Generation Wild will also be evaluated for academic research.



Wetlands on your doorstep

We know that access to blue spaces varies dramatically and is particularly limited for minority groups and low-income families. That's why we're working with partners and local communities in our towns and cities to create more wetlands right on our doorstep and in our neighbourhoods where we live and work. We're working with developers to demonstrate how simple design features and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) can be included in new developments to create

beautiful nature rich spaces for people, that can also help manage flood risk and improve water quality. Finding space for water in our built up areas is increasingly important. We're encouraging everyone to do their bit to help alleviate local flooding by creating their own rain garden, mini wetland or garden pond to help capture rainwater.



Healthy Blue Cities

The Salt Hill Stream that runs through the centre of Slough was in terrible health. Fish were dying. It was clogged up with old car tyres, carrier bags and household waste. Water quality had deteriorated and its future looked bleak. But now WWT, in partnership with the local community, Slough Borough Council, Thames Water and the Environment Agency have transformed the area into a wetland sanctuary for the benefit of people and nature.





Ambition three

In the countries where we work around the world, where wetlands, wetland nature and peoples' livelihoods are threatened, we will deliver community-led and sustainable solutions, and ensure wetlands are more effectively valued and considered in local, regional and national decision making.

Our overseas work is focused in China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Madagascar and Russia. We're working to ensure decision makers in these priority countries value and consider wetlands at all levels of environmental policy making. From empowering community leaders in our

wetland sites in Cambodia and Madagascar to working across countries to protect our vital migration flyways, we are delivering direct action and site-based demonstrations to then influence national policy, built around tackling specific issues in line with the global wetland conservation agenda.



Community led conservation in Madagascar

Madagascar has lost 60% of its wetlands in 50 years. Local communities, of which 80% are rural and 90% have jobs reliant on natural resources, have suffered as a result of this devastating loss. We are working with communities that live on the shores of Lake Sofia in the north of Madagascar, to help develop sustainable management of the wetlands to benefit both wildlife and people.

In addition to being one of the most intact lakes in Madagascar, Lake Sofia is also providing a new home for the world's most endangered duck, the Madagascar pochard. WWT is now working with local partners to influence local and national wetland policy in Madagascar.



Promoting sustainable management of the Mekong floodplain in Cambodia

On the lower Mekong floodplain, Cambodia's vast seasonally flooded grasslands have been almost entirely lost to intensification of agriculture. In a country where 80% of the population depend on harvesting natural resources for their livelihoods, it's the most vulnerable that are suffering the most. With the sarus crane as its flagship, WWT is working with regional partners to protect the more pristine remnants of this precious wetland.

We have supported the designation of Anlung Pring Protected Landscape as the first East-Asian Australasian Flyway partnership site in the country, further enhancing its protection and profile. We are also exploring other sites with the potential to become designated Protected Areas by the Cambodian government.



Ambition four

Key international decision makers value wetlands and we will build a global community of highly skilled individuals creating and managing wetlands and mobilising wetland support.

We will push for the increased recognition of the wider benefits of wetlands for both wildlife and people internationally. This will require a focus on the role of CEPA (communication, education, participation and awareness) and building skills in wetland management and creation, referred to as capacity building, one of the most effective ways of achieving wetland conservation internationally.

Identifying the greatest need and helping to develop monitoring and practical conservation skills will be a new focus for WWT particularly along priority flyways.

We will achieve this by boosting the delivery of Ramsar's CEPA programme at wetland centres and parks and maximising the conservation impact of WWT's Wetland Link International (WLI). As part of this we will also be developing the Wetland School for Conservation concept.



An Emergency Recovery Plan for freshwater biodiversity

In 2020, a global team of scientists from WWT, WWF, the IUCN and other eminent organisations and academic institutions developed an Emergency Recovery Plan for freshwater biodiversity. The aim of the plan is to protect and restore freshwater habitats, tackling the threats that have led to an 84% collapse in freshwater biodiversity and the degradation of 90% of the world's wetlands. The plan outlines a whole raft of pragmatic solutions to the freshwater biodiversity crisis that are already proven to work. WWT and our partners are using the plan to influence important decisions on biodiversity conservation that are being taken in 2021 and beyond, ensuring wetlands are at the top of the global environmental agenda.



Wetland Link International

Wetland Link International (WLI) is a support network run by WWT for wetland education centres that deliver engagement activities on site. WLI is free to join and has 350 members across six continents. It aims to improve international wetland centres and build the skills of those running them. WLI forms part of the Ramsar Convention's CEPA programme and aims to bridge the gap between influencing high level international policy and delivering tangible benefits for wetland conservation on the ground.



World Wetland Network

The World Wetland Network (WWN) was set up to engage more NGOs with the Ramsar Convention and recognise its efforts. WWT plays a key part in the running of the WWN and currently acts as deputy chair and regional representative. Key achievements of the WWN include: supporting local citizen science groups to deliver campaigns and tangible wetland conservation outputs, bringing wetland NGOs to Ramsar COPs and coordinating their input and initiating the Wetland Globe Awards.



To find out more about our work and to discuss how we might work together to achieve our ambitions for a better world where wetlands are thriving and helping us meet our most pressing environmental challenges, please get in touch:

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