

# Our Impact

Report 2020/21



WWT



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a natural landscape. In the foreground, there are tall, green reeds and some small yellow and white flowers. In the middle ground, there is a calm body of water, possibly a lake or a wide river, with a line of green trees and bushes on the opposite shore. The sky is a clear, light blue with some wispy white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

## **Our reflections on the year**

The last year has highlighted how much we need nature in our lives. For many, the natural world has been a beacon of hope, an enchanting distraction from a darker reality and a clear sign that despite everything life continues. Local green and blue spaces have sustained many and with that has come an increased appreciation of not only the beauty of the natural world but how essential it is to our lives.



**At WWT we believe wetlands are key in helping us meet our most pressing environmental challenges. Wetlands 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 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 to nature. Working with wetlands can not only help sustain wetland nature but provide numerous ways of mitigating impacts on people too.

During 2020 we closed and opened our sites three times, paused our volunteering programme, furloughed hundreds of staff and saw much of our work brought to a standstill but despite these challenges we've been able to continue with most of our key conservation projects.



We are enormously grateful to all our supporters, both individuals and organisations, who have stayed by our side throughout despite their own challenges. Every donation made, membership renewed or campaign supported has helped protect the wetlands and wildlife we love.

**Now is the moment for wetlands.** As we emerge from the global pandemic we have an opportunity to create a future that takes nature into consideration, demands better living environments for people and slows down the catastrophic environmental emergencies the world is facing.







# Our mission

We conserve, restore and create wetlands, save wetland wildlife, and inspire everyone to value the amazing things healthy wetlands achieve for people and nature.



# Our ambitions

**In 2020 we reviewed all our work and set out four overarching ambitions to shape a clearer and more focussed set of priorities within our current Strategic Plan for 2017-22 and to ensure we maximise our impact for wildlife and people.**

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 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.

## **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.

## **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.

## **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.

## Ambition one

Bigger, better, more connected network of wetlands.

### Natural Flood Management (NFM)

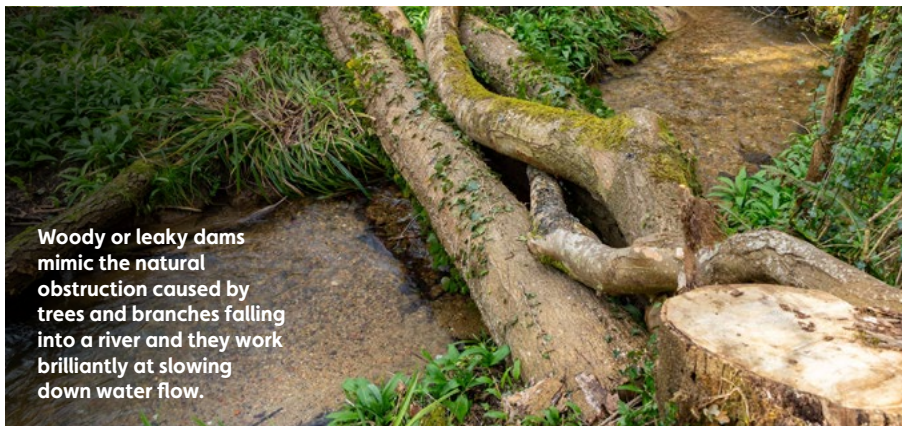
We successfully completed the 'Two Rivers – Slow the Flow' NFM project in partnership with the Environment Agency in Somerset.

The aim is to retain water in the uplands before it reaches and floods properties and businesses downstream. To achieve this, we worked with 27 farmers and landowners to add NFM features to their properties.

Not only do these methods reduce flooding, they create flourishing wildlife habitat too. WWT surveys have already recorded improvements in water quality and increased biodiversity at the NFM sites versus our control sites. Local flood risk has also been reduced.

This project can now act as a demonstration site for other practitioners who are inspired to use the same techniques.

For more information [click here](#)



**I think the movement towards natural solutions and ways of doing things is absolutely essential.**

Sian Tennant, local landowner



**10**

**new open water wetlands created**



**169**

**leaky dams installed**



**3**

**wet woodlands created**



**4600**

**native trees planted**



## Calling for a Blue Recovery

Linked to wider calls for a 'Green Recovery' from the impacts of COVID-19, we developed our own Blue Recovery vision, calling for **100,000 ha** of new and restored wetlands as part of a network to store carbon, boost biodiversity, reduce flooding, improve water quality and improve people's wellbeing. We presented our proposals to a wide group of stakeholders in March, with Environment Minister Rebecca Pow MP describing them as 'the vision, advocacy and action the world needs'. We will continue to campaign for this Blue Recovery with government and the wider public over the coming months and years.

For more information [click here](#)





## Wetland treatment

We know wetlands can improve water quality from over 20 years managing and monitoring wetlands constructed to deal with sources of wastewater. The newest is at WWT Slimbridge and is designed to clean up water from cattle barns and livestock yards. Agricultural runoff like this is a major source of poor water quality in wetlands.

This system uses pools and native plants to clean the water and it has developed wildlife value in its own right, with seven species of dragonflies and damselflies already recorded. The system is an important demonstration for other agricultural landowners. We have also upgraded our wetland treatment system at WWT Castle Espie.



Water treatment system at WWT Slimbridge.

## Managing and improving wetland habitat

Across the wetland reserves we manage, more than 274 hectares of habitat was improved or created throughout the year.

We're excited to report that habitat enhancement work at WWT Slimbridge to open up a historic paleo-channel was completed. The new 600 metre long, four-metre wide channel has quickly become a rich aquatic habitat and is being well used by dragonflies, otters, great white egrets and large flocks of wintering waterfowl.

Our success in creating, restoring and managing healthy wetlands has led to some fantastic breeding successes at our sites. WWT Llanelli and WWT Martin Mere both had successful breeding by Mediterranean gulls for the first time and black-winged stilts' first attempt to breed at WWT Steart Marshes was also successful. Kingfishers bred at WWT Arundel for the first time and at WWT Slimbridge avocets fledged 40 young.

WWT Castle Espie had very good numbers of wintering roosting waders on site, with 450 black-tailed godwits, 850 oystercatchers and more waders than ever used the Freshwater Lagoon area.

At WWT Washington, numbers of great crested newts increased and at WWT Arundel we saw more common frogs than ever before.

Rare and protected plants flourished too. At WWT Arundel, triangular club rush flowered and set seed for the second year since planting in 2018 and the holy leaved naiad has expanded its range into a brand new waterbody.

Over  
**274**



hectares of  
habitat improved



## Ambition two

At least one million people directly taking action for wetlands.

### Urban wetlands – working with local communities

Final landscaping works on the wetland creation work in Salt Hill Park, Slough were completed in the autumn. The new stream channel is flourishing and proving popular with both wildlife and people. Project volunteers are managing the site in collaboration with the local authority.

In Bridgwater we've worked with local communities to help connect people in the town with nature and boost their wellbeing by creating more wetlands where they live and work. We're appointing community ambassadors, connecting people to their local heritage, enhancing access to blue spaces and promoting existing walking routes.



Urban wetlands project site at Salt Hill, Slough.



Pelican Cove at WWT Arundel.

### Engaging visitors

Creating engaging experiences at our sites for visitors builds a stronger connection with wetlands and wetland species as well as appreciation of their value and threats. Through this engagement we inspire greater support and action for wetlands.

As part of this we developed new exhibits including the two remaining major elements of Slimbridge 75 in 2021. The Waterscapes Aviary incorporates a Living Wetland Theatre, allowing a new level of immersive experience through demonstrations and films. We also created a WWT Slimbridge app that provides a digital guide to the site's habitats and wildlife. Experience was improved at other sites too, including a new diving duck aviary and Dalmatian pelicans at WWT Arundel that gets visitors thinking about the potential to reintroduce the species to the UK.



**The impact of the pandemic also meant that we looked afresh at the way we engage with our members and other supporters when visiting was restricted.**

We introduced a weekly digital newsletter and created a free to use on-line education website to support home schooling with new nature and wetland themes each week. This was extensively used and highly commended.

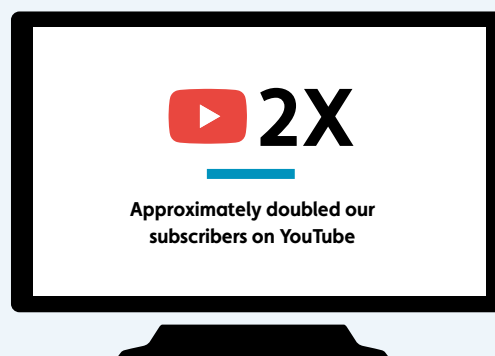
We also created a Wetlands and Wellbeing guide in partnership with the Mental Health Foundation, and teamed up with the Prince of Wales's Half Term Nature Challenge, setting a series of nature-based family challenges.

We replanned our engagement work to reach people remotely, particularly for Project Godwit. We developed virtual and outdoor sessions to replace the classroom sessions that were no longer possible, and targeted new audiences, including universities and colleges.

We also produced a godwit-cam. This live stream camera, set up by staff at WWT's conservation breeding unit, gave visitors to our website a brilliant view of our breeding black-tailed godwits at WWT Welney. Streaming twenty four hours a day, the camera brought the magical experience of three godwit eggs hatching, fledging and foraging online.

**As a result of developing this newly focussed content, we hit several milestones with our marketing and communications channels during the year. Our national social media channels saw considerable growth...**

## New ways of engaging



**Just wanted to say we're loving the learning hub thank you so much WWT! You've really recognised what it is families need at the moment. We're missing you but will enjoy these activities until we can visit again.**

Supporter



## Ambition three

Community-led and sustainable solutions for wetlands around the world.

### Madagascar

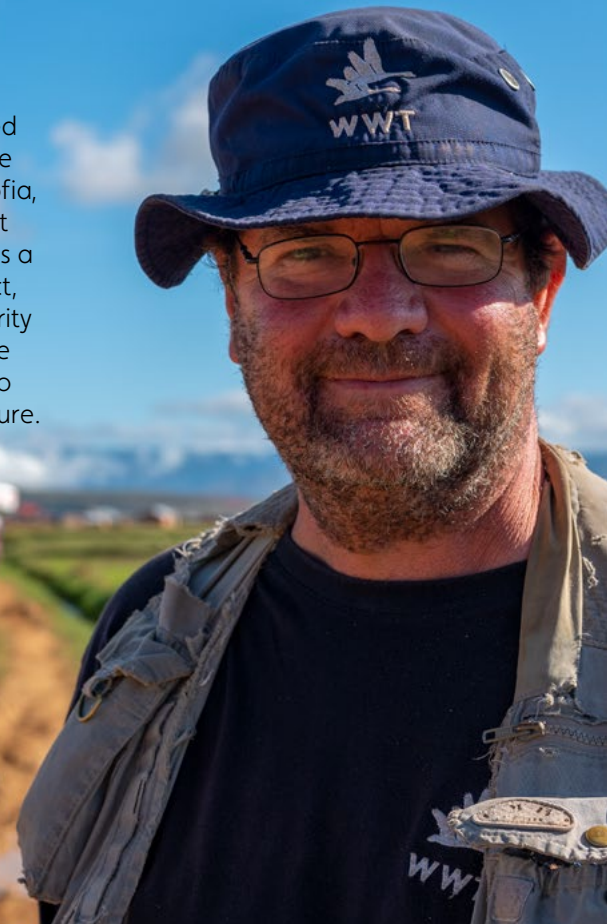
In Madagascar we supported non-governmental organisations and the national government to conduct a review of the conservation management of all 21 of Madagascar's Ramsar Sites. This will lead to a national report to help managers and government with capacity building and prioritising resource allocation.

We supported the government to develop a National Wetland Strategy for Madagascar, including important steps to mainstream this alongside other policies and strategies.

We also secured funding through the BIOPAMA programme to help improve the livelihoods of 10,000 people living around Lake Sofia.

For more information [click here](#)

WWT and project partners secured local community rights to manage their natural resources at Lake Sofia, a key wetland biodiversity hotspot in the North West highlands. This is a major achievement for the project, and provided much needed security for local people, together with the opportunity for conservationists to continue to plan long into the future.



### Cambodia

In Cambodia, we've started habitat restoration for *Eleocharis dulcis* grassland, the primary feeding habitat of the threatened Sarus crane. This will improve food security for the cranes before embarking on their annual migrations to their feeding grounds.

An inundated forest restoration programme is now underway, with local community groups leading the planting, helping to boost natural habitat and provide nursery grounds for the community fisheries. This work will protect this important area for wildlife and livelihoods for generations to come.

Our assessment of wetlands in the Cambodian Lower Mekong Delta has been instrumental in bringing about the protection of a new 3500 ha wetland in this country that relies so heavily on healthy wetlands for the livelihoods of its people.

**3500** hectares of new wetland protected





## Ambition four

A global community creating and managing wetlands and mobilising wetland support.

The Freshwater Emergency Recovery Plan we co-authored in 2019 was used to influence global post-2020 wetland conservation plans that will be agreed by the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022. Freshwater conservation was driven up the global conservation agenda with our help as we joined forces with WWF, the IUCN and many others.

The World Wetlands Network's Global Wetland Watch citizen science survey received 522 respondents from 89 countries and territories across the globe. The results will input into the Ramsar Convention's next Conference of the Parties in late 2022.

We also developed Ramsar Guidance for Wetland Monitoring, which is soon to be published by the Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia.

A new Wetland Link International (WLI) website was developed. Through WLI, WWT has helped to develop a draft resolution on 'Wetlands and Education: supporting the East Asian-Australasian Youth Flyway initiative'.



**New Wetland Link International website launched**

We produced materials to celebrate WLI's 30th anniversary, tracking down original founders, running a '30 ideas for WLI 30th campaign', and creating resources for use by our members.

We are working with the Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia to run a pilot scheme this year.

**Through our scientific research we developed a substantial body of evidence to alert hunters, policymakers and the public to the deadly effects of lead shot. Assisted by this compelling evidence, in 2021 the EU finally banned the use of lead shot. One million waterbirds will be saved a year.**



**1M** waterbirds saved a year

With ongoing research and our connections across international flyways we've identified more migration stopover sites for the spoon-billed sandpiper along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF). As a result of this we'll now lobby to protect them.

Our research into declining migratory waterbirds such as the Bewick's swan and the Greenland white-fronted goose continues to shed light on the complex pressures these birds are under, and the importance of protecting the wetland habitats they visit along the North West European Flyway. Future management plans to preserve these wetlands will be informed by our research and will also benefit other migratory species using the route.



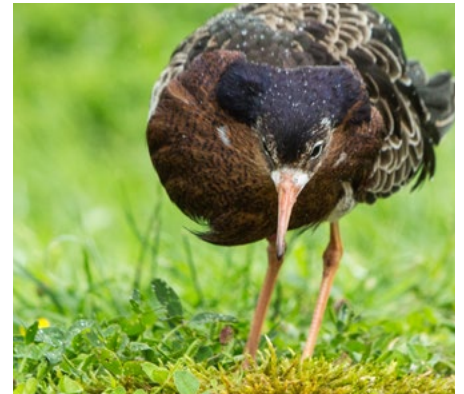


## Partnerships: Severn Trent

Severn Trent continued their support of WWT Slimbridge, providing vital funds to improve habitat for feeding and breeding birds as well as improving habitat connectivity across the reserve.

Removing fencelines and non-native hedgerows on the reserve has provided larger open habitats more suitable for flocks of wading birds such as golden plover, lapwing and dunlin. Re-landscaping of islands on shallow lakes has provided better habitat for feeding and roosting waterbirds.

By holding back water in ditches we have provided migratory corridors for eels. Ancient "paleo channels" have been re-excavated to provide ideal habitat for a range of waterbirds, including wading birds and egrets, and have stimulated germination of dormant seeds of a range of wetland plants.



## Sustainability

**As a wetland conservation charity, environmental sustainability is fundamental to what we do.**

**We make the best use of our resources, minimise our impacts on the environment and society and ensure continuous improvement.**

This year has seen our greenhouse gas emissions further reduced. Our 2020/21 operational carbon footprint (from our sites and business travel) was 592 tonnes compared to 1,082 tonnes the previous year, down from 1,816 tonnes in 2014/15.

We have implemented some permanent changes in the way we work including reduced commuting, business travel and more energy efficient operations.

We changed a large amount of lighting to LED bulbs, saving 13 tonnes of carbon (with a financial pay back of 10 months) and successfully trialled an Infrared (IR) heating system at our WWT Martin Mere site which will be rolled out during 2021/22.

Additional projects were developed and approved for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects for delivery in 2021/22 including solar photovoltaic (PV) installations at WWT Castle Espie, Llanelli, Martin Mere and Slimbridge. These 2021/22 projects will collectively reduce our operational carbon footprint by approximately 85 tonnes.

These projects and more support our Net Zero plans which ensure we reduce our emissions as much as possible. We then rebalance the rest through increasing sequestration (absorption) from our existing reserves and from new wetlands created as part of our Blue Recovery 100,000 hectares project.



**13**

**tonnes of carbon saved by switching to LED bulbs on-site**

## Looking forward

**Now is our opportunity for a blue recovery. Wetlands provide a solution to many of the environmental crises we face.**

They provide habitat for an amazing diversity of wildlife and coastal wetlands are highly efficient carbon sinks. Wetlands help prevent flooding, clean up our water and spending time in wetlands is great for our health and wellbeing.

We will continue to work with partners to develop and promote opportunities for the creation of 100,000 ha of wetlands to meet all of these challenges.

**Thank you for your interest in our projects. Please join us on our wetland creation journey ahead.**

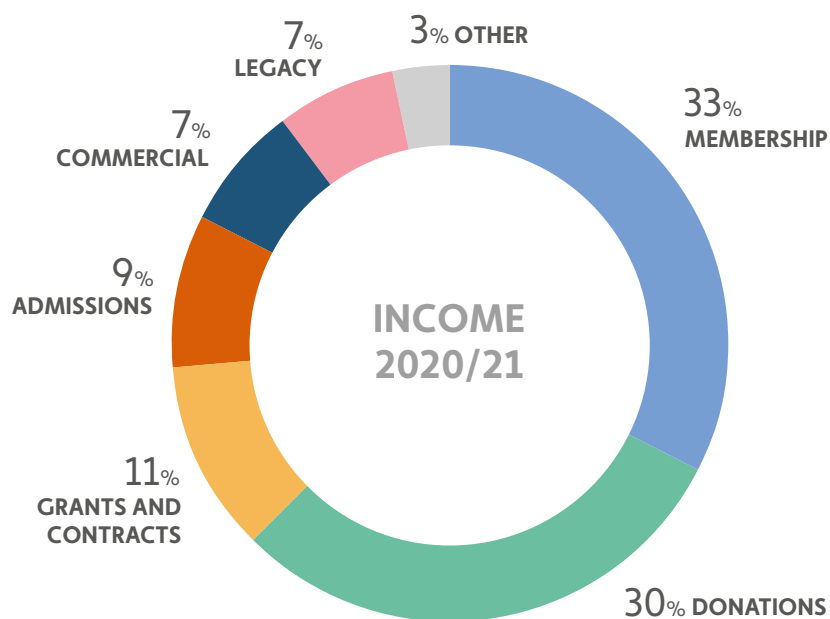


## Financial information 2020-21

We are hugely grateful to everyone who supported us so generously at such an uncertain time. The Covid-19 pandemic put the country into lockdown just prior to the start of the financial year. We closed our sites for three months and again later in the year. As a result our finances this year are quite different to other years.

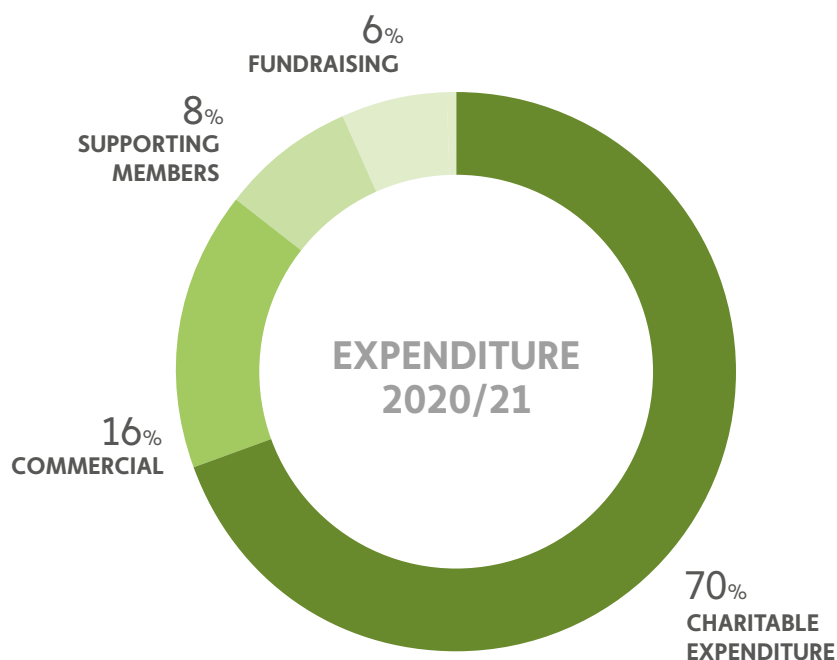
Our total income fell to £21m, down £5m from the year before. This could have severely depleted our reserves but we acted quickly, applying for emergency funds that were available to us, and reducing expenditure.

INCOME	£'000
MEMBERSHIP	6,815
DONATIONS	6,230
GRANTS AND CONTRACTS	2,377
ADMISSIONS	1,814
COMMERCIAL	1,504
LEGACY	1,478
OTHER	654
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>£20,872</b>



We reduced spending from unrestricted funds by £3.9m on the year before, a saving of 22%. When the pandemic struck, we cut back expenditure wherever possible. We paused projects where we could and staff agreed to be furloughed. This careful approach meant significant savings against budget and the year before, and enabled us to end the year in a good financial position.

EXPENDITURE	£'000
CHARITABLE EXPENDITURE	13,803
COMMERCIAL	3,200
SUPPORTING MEMBERS	1,562
FUNDRAISING	1,230
OTHER	58
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£20,375k</b>
OPERATING SURPLUS	497k





If you'd like to support us, please get in touch. Whether you're interested in an existing project or enabling us to develop all the exciting work we have planned, from wellbeing programmes to new urban wetlands, we'd love to hear from you.

**Together we can help secure the future for wildlife,  
for wetlands and for us.**

[wwt.org.uk/wetlands-can](http://wwt.org.uk/wetlands-can)



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