Where next?

Inside: our vision for nature after the vote to leave the EU

Tony Juniper
Our president’s thoughts on a post-Brexit UK

Treasures of the Irish Sea
Help our campaign to save the seabed

The farm where wildlife thrives
“You just have to be interested,” says Nicholas Watts
It may not be an easy path but the decision to leave the EU is a chance to accelerate progress towards nature’s recovery.

The Wildlife Trusts are using the UK’s vote to leave the EU as an opportunity to press the Government to be more ambitious about the future of our natural world. We are asking every MP to pledge support for three key asks:

- Reform society’s investment in land management so that it protects our life support systems.
- Sustain the effort to establish a network of Marine Protected Areas and bring about sustainable fishing.
- Recognise the need for wildlife laws and set even higher environmental standards for the future.

“Success in these three areas is vital not just for wildlife, but for our health, wellbeing and economic security, and that of future generations,” said Joan Edwards, Head of Living Seas at The Wildlife Trusts.

“Even before the Leave vote we needed more positive planning for nature’s recovery, rather than just protecting the best of what was left. Our challenge is to build and improve on the benefits that EU membership brought wildlife.

“The seismic change facing the UK must be used ambitiously. It must prevent any further losses; recover and reconnect wildlife and wild places; and recognise the vital role that our natural world plays in our economy, health and wellbeing.”

■ Has your MP pledged? Check on http://tinyurl.com/h642uxw

We want a new Integrated Environment and Agriculture Policy which pays farmers and landowners for the things we all need, such as helping to manage flooding, cleaning up our water supplies as well as increasing wildlife and having beautiful landscapes for us all to enjoy. “This is not a polarised debate between the need for food and the need for a healthy environment,” said Steve Trotter, Director of The Wildlife Trusts for England. “The two outcomes are interconnected, and we need both of them to work well. We all have a stake in achieving the best outcomes for all involved.”

Continues over
I’m a great fan of change. Change can make us more creative and open-minded, break bad habits and encourage us to look afresh at the future. For all these reasons, I initiate frequent desk reorganisations. Initially this was unpopular but now the team almost looks forward to it! Well the vote on 23 June was more than a desk move. It changed the UK’s position in the world immediately. And it will change the basis of our farming, fisheries, and wildlife protection fundamentally. We have had to take a long deep breath as a result, because we have our work cut out to influence what happens next.

But even change you resisted can be liberating and energising and our President, Tony Juniper, talks about some of the opportunities that could arise from leaving the EU. We’re talking every day to other wildlife organisations to align our ideas. We are also working closely with bodies like the Country Land and Business Association. People who own land have a responsibility to future generations; but Government also has a responsibility to ensure that: soils are conserved for future food growing; peatlands restored to reduce carbon emissions; and wildlife is allowed to recover in all its beauty, abundance and diversity. Consequently, the old EU farming subsidies should be replaced by land management payments that bring benefits to the whole community – now and in the future.

With your mandate behind us, we at The Wildlife Trusts are making the case for a “greener” UK. We are meeting civil servants, submitting evidence to Select Committees and talking directly to Ministers, including the Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP.

We know from our research that wildlife was far from the minds of people entering the polling booths on 23 June. We hope you will tell your elected politicians how much you want the Government to seize this opportunity to restore the fortunes of wildlife.
To turn around decades of decline in the health of our seas and enable their recovery, The Wildlife Trusts want to see a strong, ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas.

We believe that the EU’s Common Fisheries Policy provides some strong measures, especially moving towards sustainable levels of fishing; banning the discarding of ‘unwanted’ fish; and linking fisheries and marine conservation targets. At the very least, these good parts of the Common Fisheries Policy must be maintained in any future agreements and future UK legislation.

The EU has some of the most extensive environmental legislation in the world, protecting vital wildlife and wild places on land and at sea, and improving member states’ approach to natural resource management. “It is vital that the UK continues to benefit from equally robust laws,” said Steve Trotter. “In fact, this is not just a chance to ensure existing laws are better implemented. A visionary approach can enhance our towns, cities, countryside and seas. This is an opportunity to build an overwhelming case for a sustainable future.”

We will persuade all stakeholders that healthy fish stocks live in healthy seas

We will pressure the Government to renew its commitment to statutory protection

The way ahead
Keep the best of the EU legislation, and complete the UK’s network of MPAs

If we get this right we will become world leaders in environmental protection

15% of UK species at risk of extinction

The UK’s wildlife continues to suffer widespread decline, with more than one in ten species now facing extinction. Action to save UK wildlife is needed now.

That is the central finding of the second State of Nature report, which gives the clearest picture to date of the status of our native species across land and sea. It also identified intensive agriculture as the single biggest cause of wildlife loss. “The future of nature is under threat,” said Sir David Attenborough, President Emeritus of The Wildlife Trusts. “We must work together – Governments, conservationists, businesses and individuals – to help it.”

More on wildlifetrusts.org/stateofnature16

The report at a glance

53 wildlife organisations pooled knowledge and expertise to produce it

53 per cent of the 8,000 UK species studied have declined since 2002

1,199 of the 8,000 species studied are at risk of extinction
Norfolk Wildlife Trust is 90

In 1926, one visionary purchase began the county Wildlife Trusts movement

Not only were Cley's habitats and wildlife preserved; the foundation of the trust was the start of the county Wildlife Trusts movement. Dr Long's group continued purchasing important sites for wildlife and people. Today, the Trust owns and cares for more than 50. “This group was not afraid to take big risks to achieve their goals,” says the Trust's Chief Executive, Brendan Joyce. “I feel passionately that Norfolk Wildlife Trust should always push on.

“2016 has been a fantastic year for us: celebrating what has been achieved but looking forward to what still must be done in Norfolk and also with our fellow Trusts across the UK.”

More on wildat90.org.uk

Bee friendly farmers

Worceshireshire Wildlife Trust is running a five-year pollinator project with more than 20 farmers. Each farm undertakes a pollinator health check, and shares best practice on improving land for native wild pollinators.

“This is a great opportunity for farmers to get together through study days, site visits and training events to talk about changes they can make, or have made, that complement the different practices of each individual farm,” said the Trust’s Caroline Corsie. “They work together to establish what pollinators are on their farms and how they can help increase their numbers.”

The project is funded from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development through Natural England’s Countryside Stewardship Scheme’s Facilitation Fund.

A bird-breeding sanctuary for all time

The Secretary of State with farmer, David Banner

Minister backs nature-friendly farm

The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP visited Dovecote Farm in Northants in October where the local Wildlife Trust has helped inspire a farmer to revert arable land to wildflower meadows.

Mrs Leadsom said: “We’re working with farmers and environmental organisations to learn from their expertise and develop an ambitious plan setting out a new approach to managing our environment to bring about even more successes like this.”
...so why do so few people from ethnic minorities visit nature reserves, or take up a career in conservation? Mya-Rose Craig organised a conference to find out

Both my parents are passionate birders. My sister is too. So by the time I was three I knew that nature was what I was interested in, and birds were what I felt passionately about.

My Dad is white British and has been birding forever. My Mum is British Bangladeshi. Her parents took her to parks for picnics and rounders when she was growing up, but she only became interested in nature after she met Dad.

I’ve grown up within a huge, closely-knit extended British Bangladeshi family in Bristol. As well as the traditional first generation of older relatives my grandmother’s age, many are second and third generation. Some have been to university and have professional jobs; many work in Indian restaurants or as taxi drivers, and live in deprived inner city areas. None show any interest in going out into nature – which I thought was simply because they didn’t want to. After all, we very rarely saw any ethnic minority people whilst out birding.

Last year I read about what was being done in the USA to try and get non-white people outside, and an article by David Lindo, the Urban Birder, about taking Afro-Caribbean teenagers on nature walks in London as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award, helping them make a connection with nature so they would able to carry on or go back to it later in their lives.

I decided to try attracting Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) teenagers from Bristol to a birding camp I had organised, Camp Avalon.

Even though I offered free places and allowed parents to come, it was harder than I thought it would be. But taking advice from those who worked in these communities, I persuaded five BAME teenagers to attend.

I learned a lot from Camp Avalon. For example, many BAME parents will only let their teenager stay overnight if they know and trust an organiser well, and feel sure that their child’s dietary and religious needs will be met.

Afterwards, I interviewed BAME people who were into nature. They had similar stories of feeling like they were the only ones. Having my Mum as a birder had helped me because I grew up knowing that it was normal for ethnic minority people. However, my biggest inspiration was from having a cool older sister crazy about birds. That’s why I believe that BAME mentors are so important.

In February 2016, a report confirmed that children from lower socio-economic or BAME backgrounds had less access to nature.

None of my huge extended family show any interest in going out into nature

Mya-Rose organised a second birding camp in July 2016. She is second from right

It is such an important issue that I organised a conference, Race Equality in Nature, which took place on 3 June at Bristol Zoo and was supported by The Wildlife Trusts (see box on right). 85 people attended from nature charities, Exmoor, local communities, mental and physical health teams, the media, universities and schools.

There was a really positive vibe. I hope that together we can make changes in the future, as access to nature is a right for all our citizens.
Laura Bacon of Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust ran a three-year project to encourage BAME people to enjoy nature. Since then, attendance at Attenborough Reserve has improved. “We hope these groups will now see our reserves as a site for them,” she says.

HOW TO GET ETHNIC MINORITIES INTO NATURE

The conference last June began by identifying barriers to nature. The main conclusions were:

- Living in deprived areas
- Lack of transport
- Poverty leading to things such as a lack of appropriate clothing
- Fathers working antisocial hours
- Fear of teenagers getting involved with gangs, or being seen as troublemakers by the police
- Parks, green spaces and reserves poorly known, or seen as unsafe
- Rural areas seen as white-only places, with a linked fear of racist attacks especially towards Muslims
- A fear of dogs which stems from aggressive guard dogs and the risk of rabies ‘back home’
- A lack of role models, especially on mainstream nature TV

Next, the conference came up with ways these barriers could be overcome:

- Encouraging mums to take children to green spaces in groups
- Taking BAME and inner city people on trips to the countryside, showing them it is safe
- Starting a mentoring scheme
- Setting up a forum online
- Incorporating wild spaces into new housing developments
- Educating young people and parents in school about conservation careers

“Encouraging mums to take children to green spaces in groups”
A farm where nature

You can't have a profitable farm and abundant wildlife, some say. But Nicholas Watts has proved you can. Welcome to Vine House Farm in Lincolnshire.

**BARN OWL TOWER**

Six species nested here in 2016: mallard, jackdaw, stock dove, tree sparrow and barn owl. A feeding station is next door.

**FARMLAND PONDS**

There are ponds all along this strip, and Nicholas estimates the total area of water on the farm at 15 acres (6 hectares).

**TREE SPARROW NEST BOXES**

Since these went up in 2009, close to insect-rich habitat, the tree sparrow population has rocketed.

**WILD FLOWER MEADOW**

This picture is taken after the late summer cut, but in season it is awash with bees and butterflies, and many other insects.

Nicholas Watts has experimented for many years with ways to combine commercial farming with high biodiversity. This is one of several wildlife areas on his land.
It's the largest grower of birdseed in the UK – and at first glance a typical Lincolnshire fen farm, all flat land and big sky. But Vine House Farm is anything but typical. Owned by pioneering farmer Nicholas Watts, it is a living challenge to the idea that farming and wildlife can’t co-exist.

It was spotting a brambling in the garden that first sparked Nicholas’ love of birds. By the age of four he was already wandering along hedgerows, searching for nests. So it was natural that after he inherited the farm he should start conducting bird surveys.

His first species counts were in 1982. Ten years later he’d noticed a shocking trend: skylark numbers down by 60%, and corn buntings by 90%.

“I could see wildlife was in trouble,” Nicholas says. “But I was just lucky that I’m interested in birds and I could do something to help.” He began using the annual surveys to inform his farm management choices. His first step? to replicate the pockets of habitat where wildlife was still thriving.

What Nicholas had noticed was the result of crop specialisation; a reduction in the variety of plants and insects the land supports, and therefore a reduction in birds. He cites one example: “In late June there is very little available food for birds in a modern wheat crop. But winter barley matures three weeks before wheat. So by planting two ounces of winter barley per tonne of wheat, the birds on the farm have an uninterrupted food source. It tides them through this difficult period, without affecting the commercial value of the wheat crop.”

Another innovation: planting a double line of eight native hedgerow species (Nicholas laughingly calls it, “Instant 500 year-old hedgerow”) between fields, separated by a wildflower meadow strip. The hedge provides year-round food, and shelter, and in summer the whole area is alive with the flutter of butterflies and the buzz of bees.
The 110 nest boxes between these hedges are perfect for tree sparrows. “This spring, 105 boxes were occupied. Since then over 900 young have fledged. We had about 1000 tree sparrows on site in August.”

On my visit in August I saw a box with five chicks – the fourth brood of the year. “We clean out the boxes in September. By Christmas the birds have already begun filling them with nest material.”

The biggest difference for wildlife was turning a large section of the farm organic. The inspections are a burden, but the benefits outweigh the costs. Not only do the organic crops benefit insects and birds, they are also financially viable. Before the move to organic, herbicides drastically reduced the number and diversity of insects. “Now that we know it’s wrong,” muses Nicholas, “we should try to put it right.”

Water is another key factor: 12 acres are kept as water sources, including six large ponds. These offer breeding space for insects, and nest sites for redshanks, lapwings and terns. “Without water there is no life,” says Nicholas.

The fenland landscape is shaped by drainage and irrigation, which led Nicholas to campaign for a seat on the drainage board. He managed to change the way dyke margins are cut, increasing the population of a reed warbler colony from four birds to 70. However, in recent years the birds are again at risk. He relates the decline to the drainage board keeping water levels high in summer and low in winter, the opposite of the natural order: “We’ve been draining the Fens for 200 years, and we’ve taken too much. We’re sucking the wildlife out of the countryside.”

But Nicholas believes farming’s biggest problem is a simple question of motivation. He is sure the steps he has taken on his farm could be replicated elsewhere, but with a proviso: “Where there’s a will there’s a way. But where there isn’t a will, there often isn’t a way.”
Our vision for the future of farming

The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy has increased food production at the expense of wildlife. Intensive agriculture in the UK is the largest cause of biodiversity loss, and a major cause of soil loss and water pollution.

The way our land is farmed and managed after leaving the EU is a chance to refocus taxpayers’ money to deliver more for people and nature. The Wildlife Trusts are calling for a new Integrated Environment and Agriculture Policy, which would invest in producing the things we all need: clean water, clean air, wildlife everywhere, healthier intact soils, flood reduction and beautiful places to enjoy.

It can only happen if everyone – farmers, landowners, consumers – gets involved.

Price pressure from supermarkets and globalised competition make it increasingly difficult to make a living through agriculture. Nicholas is still determined to balance a productive farm business with the evidence provided by of his farm wildlife surveys: “People ask me about my plans for the future. I will go where my surveys take me.”

Nicholas passionately believes in thinking for future generations as well as his own. His butterfly corridors and ponds are still a work in progress. But Vine House Farm proves that supporting wildlife doesn’t need to come at the expense of a profitable business. As he puts it: “You just have to be interested.”

Once that interest has been sparked Nicholas’ advice for fellow farmers is simple: “Dig ponds, plant diverse hedges, feed birds. Ultimately, just leave a few places for wildlife.”

Who knows what the impact would be if every farm, garden and workplace followed his example?
Save our sea

Seven years after the Marine and Coastal Access Act was passed, England’s network of Marine Conservation Zones is taking shape. But one of the biggest remaining gaps is the Irish Sea.

If I told you the bottom of the Irish Sea consisted of mud, you probably wouldn’t think it needed much protection. In fact, it is one of the world’s most productive and biodiverse marine environments.

This relatively small but busy sea, bounded by six countries, suffers from a poor public perception. People describe it as “dirtier and colder” than the sea in the South West. But it is actually an extraordinary ecosystem. And its murkiness is what makes it so productive.

There is a lot of mud in the Irish Sea. Two belts of soft, fine, muddy plains stretch up either side of the Isle of Man. But these aren’t featureless deserts. They are crammed with life which depends on dead and decaying matter sinking to the sea floor.

Sea urchins, angular crabs and ghost shrimps turn over the mud as they feed and burrow, helping to bury carbon and recycle nutrients. There are many beautiful creatures here too: delicate sea pens and hydroids, and dramatic fireworks anemones, alongside brittle stars, and flat, peanut, spoon, and bristle worms.

The world’s longest-lived creature, a clam called the ocean quahog, also hides here. Individuals can live for over 500 years. Above the mud are plaice, sole, cod, whiting and haddock.

Each spring-summer a current system called the ‘Irish Sea Gyre’ is established. It channels nutrients, causing plankton blooms, which provide food for herring, sprat and sandeels. Manx shearwaters, guillemots, puffins, razorbills and gannets are attracted by the fish. Some fly long distances each summer to forage in the gyre. Basking sharks, whales and dolphins also travel to this hotspot to feed.

The deep muddy habitats which help to drive this system are not disturbed by waves or tides, so human activities have a big impact. Historically, fishermen went after cod, whiting and sole, but these species have suffered declines of 80-90% since the 80s. Now, as we fish down the food chain, the target is the langoustine, also called the Dublin Bay prawn, or scampi.

Unfortunately, these burrowing animals are caught by trawling - dragging heavy nets across the sea floor. Habitats have been destroyed and 20-50cm of the seabed surface has been removed. Many tonnes of other species are discarded as ‘by-catch’, preventing recovery of fish stocks. Cold-water corals vanished from the Irish Sea decades ago, and delicate sea pens and sea urchins have declined dramatically.

Without action the damage to these vulnerable habitats will only get worse. We believe they should be allowed to recover and thrive - in turn protecting the wider Irish Sea and its ecosystem function.

Please add your voice to our campaign to save the mud habitats of the Irish Sea, and all the diverse wildlife that depends on it.

WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

In the Irish Sea, three MCZs have been recommended to protect deep-water mud habitats. However, their designation has been delayed due to lobbying from the fishing industry.
Dr Emily Baxter is Senior Marine Conservation Officer for the Irish Sea, working at Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

We need your help.

We are campaigning for robust legislation that protects the seabed. Your support is crucially important. Find out how you can help at wildlifetrusts.org/mczs.

We want a sustainable langoustine fishery.

Sea pens and a fireworks anemone - two of the many species that make up this exceptionally rich ecosystem.

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10 ex-military reserves

It might sound strange, but the places where our armed forces used to operate are some of our least damaged landscapes.

As well as offering the opportunity to see amazing wildlife, many of our reserves have an intriguing past. From Civil War battlefields to WWII airbases, places which have been protected for other reasons can offer a much needed sanctuary for nature.

In Gunners Park in Essex, for example, where migrating swallows nest in the derelict buildings and common lizards sun themselves on the 19th century walls. Or East Wretham Heath in Norfolk, where five species of bat roost in an abandoned bunker. These military landscapes are often some of the best preserved for wildlife.

Here is a taste of the variety of our former military nature reserves. Find the full list at http://wtru.st/places-militaryhistory

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**See nature reclaiming its old haunts**

Details on each of these sites are on your Wildlife Trust’s website. You can find that via wildlife-trusts.org

1. **Bovey Heathfield, Bovey Tracey, Devon WT**
   Site of an English Civil War battle; used to train US soldiers in WW2. Today it’s a flourishing heathland with reptiles and nightjars.
   **Where is it?** Outskirts of Bovey Tracey, Devon TQ12 6TU.

2. **Misson Carr, Nottinghamshire WT**
   Former training area purchased from the MoD by the Trust after 50 years of restricted access. Wet woodland, marsh, grazing pasture.
   **Where is it?** Haxey, 9 miles SE of Doncaster, DN10 6ET.

3. **Longis Nature Reserve, Alderney Wildlife Trust**
   Six Victorian coastal forts and dozens of World War II German Bunkers. At its centre lies the Alderney Bird Observatory.
   **Where is it?** Longis, Alderney, Channel Islands, GY9 3YB.

4. **Blashford Lakes, Ringwood, Hants and IOW WT**
   A Spitfire base in WW2, it later became gravel pits; now it’s a haven for wetland birds.

5. **Greenham & Crookham Commons, BBOWT**
   A long military history culminated in their use in the Cold War for nuclear bomb storage. Now good for nightjar, woodlark and lapwing.
   **Where are they?** Burys Bank Rd, Thatcham, Berks RG19 8DB.

6. **Gunnery Park, Shoebury Essex Wildlife Trust**
   Has many derelict 19th century military buildings. Rare dune plants, invertebrates, butterflies and passage migrants.
   **Where is it?** Shoebury, Thames Estuary, Essex.

7. **East Wretham Heath, Norfolk Wildlife Trust**
   A NW reserve since 1938, but taken over as an airfield in WW2. Wildflowers push through the old runways, and five bat species hibernate in the bunker.
   **Where is it?** On A1075 N of Thetford, IP24 1RU.

8. **Blackhall Rocks & Cross Gill, Durham Wildlife Trust**
   Magnesium limestone coast hiding old pillboxes, tank traps and trenches. Now a stopoff for migrant birds, with rare plants.
   **Where is it?** 5 miles N of Hartlepool off A1086, TS27 4DG.

9. **Spurn NNR, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust**
   A gun battery site in the 1800s and WW1/2 military complex. An amazing place for migrant birds, but check the tides at ywt.org.uk.
   **Where is it?** South of Kilnsea, Hull, East Yorks HU12 0UH.

10. **Flodden Quarry, Northumberland WT**
    A disused quarry which stands on a hill a mile and a half south of Flodden Battlefield. There is evidence that the troops of King James IV of Scotland camped in the woods around the battlefield in 1513, so the chances are they camped at Flodden Quarry.
    **Where is it?** 4 miles W of Ford, Blinkbonny, Millfield NE71 6HU.
The view from the lighthouse at Spurn National Nature Reserve. Once a military complex, Spurn is now one of the best sites in England for migrating birds.

The quick firing battery at Gunners Park in its heyday and (below) fronting the housing estate.

Viper’s bugloss and wild thyme at East Wretham Heath.
Brexit and Nature: where next?

The science, policy and objective are all worked out. All we need now is public support

One of the EU’s most important aspects has been the measures jointly agreed by member states which have led to major improvements in how we approach environmental challenges. Through our membership we have adopted renewable energy targets, improved how we deal with waste, cleaned up our air and water and, of course, elevated the protection of many threatened species and habitats.

All this is fundamentally important to the quality and sustainability of life in the UK. So some real vision and leadership is needed in shaping how we go forward.

Our starting point must be to embrace the basic fact that healthy Nature is vital for our health, wealth and security. This is officially recognised, and is why the Government’s own Natural Capital Committee called for a 25-year plan to improve the state of our environment. That idea was included in the Conservative election manifesto.

Influencing that 25-year plan must be one focal point for The Wildlife Trusts. Whatever post-Brexit arrangements are put in place, it is vital that we don’t simply avoid going backwards, but actually secure improvements for wildlife and our environment. What might that look like though?

In terms of holding on to what we’ve got there are five strands. First are the Nature protection rules under the Birds and Habitats Directives. These protect some of our most cherished wildlife and special natural places on land and at sea. Second are the policies that govern everything from the state of rivers to the quality of the air we breathe. Third are the powerful rules of the Common Agricultural Policy, including those geared to meeting ecological goals in farmed landscapes. Fourth are the aims of the Common Fisheries Policy that requires the sustainable management of fish stocks. Fifth are EU agreements to combat climate change.

These policies, rules and laws guide much of how Britain approaches conservation and environmental challenges. The first objective for any post-Brexit situation is to adopt all of them directly into UK law.

This will not be enough, however. We are still far from achieving a sustainable future for UK wildlife, and our place in a sustainable world. This is why it is so important for us to call for the full implementation of that manifesto promise to adopt a 25-year plan for the recovery of Nature. We have all the information and policy ideas needed to get on with that job, and could set out an approach comparable to the 2008 Climate Change Act. That piece of legislation was a rare example of how we went ahead of the EU on a key environmental challenge. It shows how we could similarly enshrine Nature protection with climate change goals, by for example by restoring the degraded blanket bogs that are each year emitting millions of tonnes of CO₂.

All the science as to why we need to do this is already collected, and we know many policy ideas can work. The final part is public support. The Wildlife Trusts will be at the forefront of making the case and you can do the same. Please urge your MP to sign the Green Alliance pledge (page 2) if they haven’t already. Nature matters, and that is why we should all be ambassadors, championing the value of the natural world to anyone who will listen.

I very much hope you will join us in this, and help to create a future of which our children and grandchildren can be proud.