a million voices for nature

NATURE NEEDS A VOICE

Advocacy 2009
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Nature needs a voice: a challenge to the political parties

In 2006, the RSPB joined forces with eight other organisations to set the political parties six tests of environmental leadership. We called this initiative the Green Standard. We wanted to promote “a race to the top” — to encourage the political parties to compete for the most comprehensive set of proposals to tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Three years on, with a Westminster General Election due within the next 15 months, the RSPB has produced an agenda for the political parties to help protect the natural world. The challenges in this document are targeted at decision-makers within Whitehall and therefore cover matters reserved to Westminster, but also those issues on which the UK engages at European and global levels.

In 2001, European political leaders committed to halting biodiversity loss by the end of the decade. They have failed. Species are still being lost, habitat declines continue and many priority sites are impoverished. This has knock-on consequences for the health of our ecosystems and the services they provide to improve human well-being.

The bad news is that the pressures on the other millions of species with which we share this planet are in fact increasing. The “old” threats of habitat destruction, pollution and persecution remain but are now compounded by the new and growing threat of climate change.

Unless we cut man-made greenhouse gas emissions hard and fast, we will be responsible for a mass extinction event and will threaten the planet’s capacity to support our own species, leaving the world a much more desolate place. The latest research suggests that for every one degree rise in temperature, ten per cent of the world’s species will be threatened with extinction.

Yet, now is not the time to despair. We need leadership from the political parties. Leadership which provides an honest assessment of the challenges and a clear plan of action.

This document is the RSPB’s challenge to the parties to become voices for nature.

First, we must give life to the natural world by developing a new focus for action, so that by 2020 the UK will have stopped the loss of wildlife, begun its restoration and taken steps to ensure that common species flourish in harmony with human activities.

Second, we must step up our efforts to end climate chaos. This requires massive reductions in the amount of energy we use, not building new coal-fired power stations unless they capture and store carbon dioxide emissions from the start, stabilising emissions from aviation and increasing the amount of energy generated from renewable sources in ways that do not damage the natural environment.

Third, we need to inspire people by helping them remain in touch with nature. This must start in schools, and we think new measures are needed to ensure every child has contact with the natural world as part of their formal education.

In the run-up to the General Election, the RSPB will encourage its members to express their passion and concern for wildlife to those seeking election to the next parliament. Together we represent a million voices for nature. We hope and expect our political leaders to listen and respond to the challenges they face.

“Given the strength of public support and the scientific reality, it is surprising that protecting biodiversity is not higher on the political agenda.”

EU Commissioner Stavros Dimas, 14 February 2008
The role of Government is more critical than ever

The ongoing economic downturn has highlighted the role of government in addressing short-termism and market failure. Recent years have seen excessive consumption without consideration of the debt we were accumulating for the future. It is not just financial debt that has escalated. Our unsustainable exploitation of the natural environment has led to an ecological debt, which threatens our long-term well-being and competitiveness.

The G8+5 initiated report on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB, 2008) demonstrates the vast and varied range of costs associated with the loss of biodiversity which, globally, is estimated to outweigh the losses in the financial sector in 2008.

The current economic turmoil should prompt our political leaders to reconsider the goals of economic growth and the impacts of failing to live within our ecological as well as economic means. Without action now, we will face much greater crises in the future – the impacts of which we had a glimpse of at the beginning of 2008 as food, fuel and other resource prices spiked.

Against the backdrop of an economic recession and ever-tightening public finances, it may appear to be the wrong time to take serious action on biodiversity loss. This has not stopped our political leaders during past national crises. One of our important environmental protection acts, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, was introduced just after the Second World War and provided the framework for the creation of national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales.

As businesses restructure and cut costs, there is an opportunity to shift towards a more sustainable economy. Investments in sustainable energy systems, low-carbon enterprises and restoring our natural environment will create jobs, develop skills, support businesses and ensure the UK’s competitive advantage now and in the future.

Investment in our natural environment also enhances the resilience of public services as they come under increasing pressure. It has been shown that improving access to a high quality natural environment retains skills, delivers health and well-being benefits, supports local tourism and attracts investment. Green volunteering can play an important role in developing skills as well as reducing health impacts of unemployment, thereby reducing the pressure on health services.

This report outlines the steps our political leaders must take to halt biodiversity loss, and climate chaos and inspire people. In some cases, public finances are needed. At a time when the finances of the Treasury, as well as businesses and households, are constrained, we recognise that financial investments must deliver good value for money. As this report makes clear, relatively small investments in our natural environment can deliver large public benefits. For example, £16 million per year is needed to help protect the astounding biodiversity in the UK’s Overseas Territories and prevent 32 species from becoming extinct. To ensure that each of our children from underprivileged backgrounds enjoys one out-of-classroom learning trip in the natural environment per year – an activity shown to add significantly to pupils’ education and development – would require just £27 million per year.

In other cases, it is not public money that is needed, but efficient and effective regulation. A regulatory environment, which is proportionate, accountable, consistent, transparent and targeted, is crucial for a well-functioning economy and society, as highlighted by the recent financial crisis.

Finally, underpinning any serious attempt to shift our economy to a more sustainable path requires political will. Without a credible and brave commitment from our political leaders, market failure and short-termism will ensure that we continue to suffer crises in the future.

Katie Bolt
Head of Economics
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/economicdevelopment

"We will find neither national purpose nor personal satisfaction in a mere continuation of economic progress in an endless amassing of worldly goods. We cannot measure national spirit by the Dow Jones Average, nor national achievement by the Gross National Product. For the Gross National Product includes air pollution, and ambulances to clear our highways from carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and jails for the people who break them. The Gross National Product includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. And if the Gross National Product includes all this, there is much that it does not comprehend. It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education or the joy of their play... It does not include the beauty of our poetry, or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials... The Gross National Product measures neither our will nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

Robert Kennedy, 1968"
STOP EXTINCTION

Sumatran tiger
Dave Watts (NHPA)
Halting and then reversing biodiversity loss

In 2001, EU Heads of State made a commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. As we rapidly approach 2010, it seems increasingly unlikely that this ambitious target will be met. Stopping the runaway train of species and habitat decline in a decade was always a big challenge. It will be important that the Government provides an honest assessment of the progress the UK has made by 2010. With this in mind, it is vital that we do everything we can to apply the brakes and limit the damage.

In 2010, government performance will be judged on what has happened to our priority species and habitats – our natural capital – both at home and in our UK Overseas Territories. The scale of the challenge is illustrated by the following statistics:

- Species are still being lost, for example the St Helena olive became globally extinct in 2003.
- Species’ declines continue, for example 331 species were listed as suffering severe decline under the 2007 revised UK Biodiversity Action Plan. In May 2008, two birds found on UK Overseas Territories, the Gough bunting and the Tristan albatross, had their global threat status increased to “critically endangered” (the highest category), and curlew was elevated to “near threatened” (37% decline in the UK between 1994 and 2006).
- Priority habitats and protected sites are impoverished, for example 64% of English and 68% of Welsh SSSIs remain in “unfavourable” condition and 38% of UK priority habitats are declining.

Yet, it is becoming increasingly clear that climate change is set to compound the existing threats facing the natural world. The Climatic Atlas of European Breeding Birds underlines the urgency for action to help biodiversity adapt to the effects of climate change; the predicted range of European breeding birds will contract by one fifth this century in a mid-range warming scenario, and on average, their predicted climate space will shift 550 km northeast. Other biodiversity will be heavily affected too. An adaptation plan for wildlife must focus on protecting, managing and buffering existing protected areas, adequately resourcing species and habitat recovery and enabling the land between protected areas to become more permeable to wildlife. A key test of this plan will be Natural England’s success in encouraging the restoration and recreation of wildlife habitat at a landscape-scale. These “futurescapes” should help buy time for wildlife while society continues its quest to create a low-carbon economy.

Looking further forward, 2009 also provides the opportunity to determine our vision for biodiversity post-2010. Biodiversity conservation must be about more than preventing extinctions. Whilst the loss of species represents the loss of irreplaceable natural assets, declines in wildlife populations impoverish our lives well before species become biologically extinct. We need to reverse biodiversity loss and increase our natural capital if we are to prosper beyond 2010. The UK should adopt an ambitious target to stop the loss and begin to restore and help wildlife adapt to climate change by 2020. We should ensure that a similar target is set for Europe and for the world.

Robin Wynde
Biodiversity Policy Officer
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- adopt within the UK, and promote across Europe and globally, a target to stop the loss of biodiversity and begin to restore and help wildlife adapt to climate change by 2020
- ensure nature conservation is core to government strategy by conducting and then responding to the review of the biodiversity duty on English public authorities
- deliver at least one new landscape-scale habitat recreation project – creating futurescapes – for each English region.

In the best of times and the worst of times, working to save our planet in the interests of all who live on it must remain the highest priority.

Simon Hughes MP
January 2009
The challenge of invasive non-native species

Humans – by accident or otherwise – frequently move animals and plants, native to one part of the world, to other areas where they don’t occur naturally. Some of these species then escape, establish and thrive, causing huge problems for native wildlife and for economies. Species that have evolved alongside each other as natural neighbours often cannot cope with the sudden arrival of new competitors, predators and diseases.

As the globalisation of trade and human movements increases, so this global problem intensifies. Many invasive species share traits that allow them to capitalise on climate change, finding new opportunities for establishment and spread. Damaged habitats provide greater opportunities for newly introduced species, and dangerous feedback effects can result.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a key report on the ecological state of the world, places the impact of invasive non-natives alongside habitat destruction, over-exploitation and climate change as one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss globally and a key challenge facing humanity.

Pressing for effective action to combat this threat is a priority for the RSPB. Representing the umbrella organisation, Wildlife and Countryside Link, we contributed to the development of The Invasive Non-native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain.

The UK Government launched this strategy in May 2008. It contains some good sense and commendable aims that we welcome. It is, however, incomplete in its scope, as it explicitly excludes the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). These territories are small but are hugely important for wildlife. Many are oceanic islands and host globally unique and specialised ecological communities, which are most vulnerable to invasive non-native species. The new strategy was a missed opportunity to recognise and commit resources to this urgent problem. We have pressed for the inclusion of the Overseas Territories in the strategy’s scope, and will continue to do so.

Furthermore, the GB strategy is explicitly intended as a “steering” document and offers few concrete commitments to action in Britain, and no new resources. The challenge now is to implement effective action to raise public awareness, to address current problems and, critically, to prevent future introductions of dangerous invasive species. Invasive non-native species cause at least £2 billion of damage to agriculture, forestry and industry each year in the UK, and increasing biological damage to ecosystems. The new strategy highlights the imperative to invest now in the prevention, mitigation, communication and active management of this problem.

We have also been in close discussion with the European Commission regarding EU-wide policy and legislation relating to invasive non-native species. The Commission published a Communication on the issue in November 2008. It contains a series of options for future action, including the development of dedicated EU legislation on non-native species. Surveys of non-native species legislation across Member States show unequivocally that domestic arrangements vary hugely, and significant gaps in coverage are common. It is clear that new EU legislation to fill the gaps and provide a coherent legal framework would be the most effective response to this inherently international threat to biodiversity.

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

1. Agree an implementation plan under the GB strategy that assigns clear responsibilities and targets resources to addressing current threats and preventing future problems.
2. Strengthen non-native species legislation in England and Wales, and work collaboratively with the Governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland to achieve this.
3. Prioritise tackling non-native species problems on the UKOTs, and allocate sufficient resources to enable rapid action to prevent biodiversity loss.
4. Continue to show leadership in international discussions to tackle non-native species problems.

Paul Walton
Species and Habitats Policy Officer

[case study]

Red squirrel

Mike Lane (rspb-images.com)
Reducing seabird bycatch on the high seas

Albatross and petrel species are declining faster than any other major group of birds. According to IUCN (2008), 18 of the 22 albatross species are now under threat of extinction, due mainly to incidental mortality in longline and trawl fisheries.

Both the EU and the UK have a clear role and responsibility to help address this issue. The European Commission represents its distant-water fleets in the tuna commissions (Regional Fisheries Management Organisations – RFMOs), whose fisheries generate significant seabird bycatch.

For its part, the UK’s Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic – Tristan da Cunha, the Falklands and South Georgia – are breeding stations for over 30% of the world’s albatross populations, including seven of the 22 species, two of which are endemic. These populations are declining faster than any others. During the breeding season, most forage in well-managed waters where bycatch is minimal. However, outside the breeding season they are globally dispersed and are highly vulnerable to bycatch.

Of the five tuna commissions that BirdLife has identified as key to resolving this issue, all have now adopted “seabird resolutions” and four now require vessels to use bycatch mitigation measures. However, much remains to be done.

In the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), which is central to the UK’s interests and is due to report in 2009, mitigation measures may need to be revisited in the light of a new assessment of seabird distribution, bycatch and fishing effort. Monitoring and reporting of the problem at sea, and compliance with agreed measures, are still inadequate, so ICCAT also needs to develop a standard, best practice, regional observer programme. Similar priorities apply to the IOTC, which currently also has very low observer coverage.

Progress demands action by the European Commission on behalf of the EU Contracting Parties to these tuna commissions, including ensuring that the EC’s emerging Community Plan of Action sets standards for the RFMOs. The UK has a critical supporting role to play in ensuring adoption of a robust plan and improving RFMO measures for mitigation, monitoring and compliance.

Helen Booker
Senior Policy Officer (Global Seabird Programme)
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/marine/international

“One of the most memorable moments was sitting eyeball to eyeball with a wandering albatross chick on the remote Atlantic islands of South Georgia.”

Sir David Attenborough

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- ensure the EU develops and implements an effective plan of action for reducing seabird bycatch in EU fisheries around the world
- work within the five key tuna commissions to improve measures for reducing seabird bycatch through mitigation, monitoring and compliance.

Sir David Attenborough

One of the most memorable moments was sitting eyeball to eyeball with a wandering albatross chick on the remote Atlantic islands of South Georgia.

Sir David Attenborough
As the thirtieth anniversary of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) approaches, the benefits of strong legal protection are clear for most wild birds. However, one group – birds of prey – have experienced contrasting fortunes. For some, such as the sparrowhawk and buzzard, legal protection has helped their populations recover. Others continue to experience unacceptably high levels of illegal killing.

In 2007, the RSPB received 262 reports of shooting or destruction of birds of prey across the UK – the highest number of reports ever received. Despite there being sufficient habitat to support well over 200 breeding pairs, only 10 pairs of hen harriers bred successfully in the English uplands in 2008, a consequence of illegal killing and deliberate disturbance. Illegal killing has halted the recovery of golden eagles in Scotland and is thwarting their return to northern England. Much of the killing occurs on land managed for driven grouse shooting, meaning large swathes of suitable habitat in our uplands are devoid of harriers and eagles.

The protective legislation in all countries of the UK, while strong, can be strengthened further, and it is important that the UK Government continues to show leadership in Europe by ensuring wildlife legislation fully transposes European requirements.

Of greatest urgency is the need for action to ensure the law is properly enforced and those responsible for killing protected birds are punished. The National Wildlife Crime Unit is an important focal point for tackling wildlife crime, but this aspect of criminality remains a low priority for many police forces. Tackling those who carry out wildlife crime will help some of our most special birds. Eradicating hotspots of criminality will enable birds, including the hen harrier and golden eagle, to return to places from which they are currently missing.

Ultimately, if the minority within the shooting community responsible for killing protected birds cannot or will not change their ways, tighter regulation of their industry is needed through licensing. Those shoots that condone illegal acts should be shut down.

David Hoccom
Head of Species Policy Unit
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/species

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- make tackling wildlife crime a higher priority; and as a first step conduct a thematic review of wildlife crime enforcement in England
- work collaboratively with country administrations to ensure consistency of and, where necessary, strengthen wildlife protection legislation
- explore a licensing system for all game shoots
- work within the European Union to strengthen the penalties available under cross-compliance so that anyone contravening EU Wildlife Directives faces having their single farm payment withdrawn
- continue to show leadership in international discussions to protect and conserve migratory birds of prey.

Simon Barnes

“Birds of prey are the ultimate contradiction of conservation: what we celebrate as the most wild and fierce creature of them all is the one that most desperately needs our protection.”

David Hoccom
Head of Species Policy Unit
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/species
Protected areas for wildlife form a cornerstone of successful conservation action across the world. They also provide essential ecosystem services – life-support services – for humans. Investing adequate resources to integrate effective conservation of protected areas with social and economic objectives can benefit wildlife and society as a whole. More government action is needed to achieve this goal.

Protected areas in developing countries are critical to wildlife, local people and the global community, for example through carbon storage in tropical rainforests. Yet, the cost of managing and protecting these sites falls largely on local people and poor economies. Current support from developed countries, including the UK, is often short-term, unpredictable and woefully inadequate. Globally the UK Government spends around £20 million annually on biodiversity related areas. We estimate that the UK should spend at least £160 million annually in order to pay its fair share in assisting developing countries to meet the costs of maintaining an effective protective area network at land and sea. Furthermore, in order to ensure funding is sustainable in the long run, appropriate financing mechanisms must be developed, such as the establishment of conservation trust funds.

The UK Overseas Territories are hotspots for global biodiversity and globally threatened birds, but, as highlighted in the case study over the page, severe lack of resources continues to place that wildlife at risk. Conserving Europe’s most important wildlife sites is central to reversing declines in European biodiversity. Across the EU, the terrestrial network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats and other species – Natura 2000 – is nearing completion. However, major gaps remain in several countries, including the UK’s SPA network. Overall, the main challenge is shifting from designation to securing better protection alongside land-use and habitat management that is compatible with their conservation objectives. Clear conservation objectives for each Natura 2000 site are necessary to help identify the resources needed to deliver site management and integrate those management requirements into relevant land-use plans.

Nationally, great challenges remain, including improving the condition of protected areas on land and creating a new, coherent network at sea. Our best wildlife sites on land are in the process of being restored to good condition, essential to increase their resilience to climate change. Appropriate regulation and adequate funding are needed to ensure effective delivery and maintain the momentum by bringing all unfavourable sites into favourable condition.

Containing over half of England’s SSSIs and a disproportionate share of semi-natural habitats, our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be central to this effort. Yet, they perform no better than the wider countryside in terms of SSSI status and farmland bird numbers. Additional effort needs to go into bringing these special places centre stage in the fight to safeguard the nation’s wildlife. The challenge in the marine environment is even greater where the UK Government has failed to meet Birds Directive obligations to create coherent networks of nationally and internationally important protected areas for birds. Lack of such networks hampers the proper planning and management of our seas. Urgent action, combined with more resources, is needed so the nature conservation agencies can identify and designate comprehensive marine protected area networks.

Andrew Dodd
Head of Site Conservation Policy
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/sites

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- Secure new resources to support long-term financing of protected areas in developing countries
- Identify a Whitehall department to assume responsibility for conservation in the UKOTs and allocate £16 million per year to help prevent 32 species becoming extinct
- Show leadership across the EU by defining conservation objectives for each Natura 2000 site and showcase good practice in integrated planning and site management
- Ensure UK areas, identified as Important Bird Areas by BirdLife International, are designated as SPAs under the EU Birds Directive
- Provide adequate funding and smart regulation to ensure effective delivery and maintain momentum towards favourable conditions of SSSIs
- Initiate and agree an action plan that stimulates a renaissance for nature conservation in England’s National Parks and AONBs.

Fulfilling commitments to protected areas

In the certainty of impending threat of climate change looming large over the survival of life on this planet, protected areas are the best means to adapt to climate change, conserve biological diversity and achieve sustainable development.

Dr Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

| The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to: |
|-------|-----------------|
| Secure new resources to support long-term financing of protected areas in developing countries. | Identify a Whitehall department to assume responsibility for conservation in the UKOTs and allocate £16 million per year to help prevent 32 species becoming extinct. |
| Show leadership across the EU by defining conservation objectives for each Natura 2000 site and showcase good practice in integrated planning and site management. | Ensure UK areas, identified as Important Bird Areas by BirdLife International, are designated as SPAs under the EU Birds Directive. |
| Provide adequate funding and smart regulation to ensure effective delivery and maintain momentum towards favourable conditions of SSSIs. | Initiate and agree an action plan that stimulates a renaissance for nature conservation in England’s National Parks and AONBs. |
The UK Overseas Territories: the forgotten jewels

The UK Overseas Territories are astonishingly rich in biodiversity. Out of sight and out of mind, these special places are home to more than 80 Important Bird Areas. These priority sites for conservation have been selected because they hold 32 bird species that are threatened with extinction as well as globally significant populations of migratory species, such as magnificent albatrosses. Protecting these special places and species is the UK’s responsibility and is crucial to meeting international commitments such as the 2010 biodiversity target. Yet the total government spend on biodiversity in the Overseas Territories is less than £2 million per year — wholly inadequate to meet their needs.

The RSPB is assisting local partners to conserve these areas, both for their birds and the ecosystem services they provide to people living on the islands. They include the Centre Hills on the volcanic island of Montserrat, a dramatic mountainous forest and the last remaining habitat of the critically endangered Montserrat oriole, which is found nowhere else on earth. The Total Economic Value provided by the Centre Hills to the people of Montserrat is around £1 million per year, with the most important value being tourism, followed closely by water supply. The conservation of the Centre Hills is therefore critical for both globally important biodiversity and the economic development of the island, so we are working with the Department of Environment to enable its designation as a protected area.

We have regularly reminded UK Government Ministers and Select Committees of their responsibilities to the Territories. The Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry concluded in June 2008, “that given the vulnerability of Overseas Territories’ species and ecosystems, this lack of action by the Government is highly negligent. The environmental funding currently being provided by the UK to the Overseas Territories appears grossly inadequate and we recommend that it should be increased…”

It is time for the UK Government to take seriously its responsibilities for biodiversity conservation on the UKOs. A lead government department should be identified to take on this responsibility and allocate sufficient resources (at least £16 million per year) so that UOTs can address their biodiversity priorities and the UK Government can demonstrate to the world that it takes its commitment seriously.

Sarah Sanders
International Officer (Overseas Territories)

Case Study

The Centre Hills, Montserrat
Andrew McRobb (Kew)

The Centre Hills, Montserrat is a dramatic mountainous forest and the last remaining habitat of the critically endangered Montserrat oriole. The Total Economic Value provided by the Centre Hills to the people of Montserrat is around £1 million per year, with the most important value being tourism, followed closely by water supply. The conservation of the Centre Hills is therefore critical for both globally important biodiversity and the economic development of the island, so we are working with the Department of Environment to enable its designation as a protected area.
SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Nick Cobbing (Stop Climate Chaos)
Ending climate chaos

The year ahead will be critical for the climate, and hence for the future of millions of people and species on earth. The challenge for the UK Government will be to deliver the best possible global deal through UN negotiations, whilst securing investment in a green economic recovery at home. Above all, the UK will need to demonstrate that tough action on the climate is both possible and beneficial at a time of serious economic downturn, by implementing the right policies here and advocating them in Europe.

Internationally, through the UN climate talks, the UK continues to play an important role as a champion for climate security. As part of any global deal, the UK must be prepared to offer ambitious emissions reductions in its own economy; but it must also prove that it means business, by taking the decisions that will make those promises a reality. Offering to slash emissions during UN talks, whilst sanctioning high carbon investments at home, will not wash. At the same time, developed country governments, including our own, must fight for adequate financing for developing countries to enable sustainable adaptation and forest protection. Having a forward thinking partner in the US could make a real difference, but it will not be enough on its own to secure a good outcome.

The UK Government must also be committed to a new, low-carbon Europe. It must become a powerful voice for European policies which cut emissions dramatically in the power sector, curb aviation growth, and deliver the funds necessary for developing country action. They must argue for a European future built on investment in truly green infrastructure, rather than one that relies on carbon offsetting, or perverse and ineffectual solutions such as liquid biofuels.

Alongside this, the UK must find the courage and skill to champion biodiversity protection alongside climate mitigation. Renewable energy development is essential to tackle climate change, but it must not be used as an excuse to dismantle nature protection laws and open the floodgates to development in Europe’s last wildernesses. Wildlife, here and abroad, will be amongst the first victims of climate change. We must invest in policies and programmes to help it adapt, not see it as “disposable” in our desire to clean up climate pollution at the least cost and inconvenience to business.

At home, the UK Government’s commitment to addressing climate change will be judged against some simple benchmarks. To meet its own targets, energy use in the UK economy will need to fall dramatically – by at least a quarter – by the 2020s. At the same time, the power sector must be transformed, so that it can become truly zero-carbon by the 2030s. This means an immediate halt to investment in new coal-fired power stations, if they do not capture and store their carbon emissions, and a massive boost for sustainable renewable energy projects. Finally, to have a chance of achieving our long-term climate goals, we must curb the proposed rapid growth in aviation emissions by halting plans for new runways and airports.

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- work to secure and then implement a new global deal aiming to limit global temperature rises to 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels
- immediately invest in sustainable adaptation programmes in developing countries to address the impacts of climate change on poor people and ecosystems
- offer a green-print for the EU, with a set of proposals to secure international financing for climate action, emission reductions within the EU, and green infrastructure investment
- commit to protect nature from the impacts of climate change, by investing in policies to help it adapt, and ensuring that our efforts to reduce emissions don’t trample over the needs of wildlife
- meet UK domestic targets, by securing dramatic reductions in energy use, an end to coal-fired power generation without carbon capture technology, an immediate curb on aviation growth and a revolution in sustainable renewable energy.

Ruth Davis
Head of Climate Change Policy
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/climatechange

If we carry on with business as usual, we’ll cause the extinction of one million species. Proportionately, several hundred of these extinctions would be associated directly with Kingsnorth power station.

Professor James Hansen,
NASA Chief Scientist, 3 September 2008

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:
Tackling climate change without wrecking the planet: a spotlight on the Severn Estuary

No one ever said that tackling climate change was going to be easy but just because it is a major problem, it does not mean that every solution proposed is either needed or necessary. Moreover, just because one option might be really big does not automatically suggest that it should be included in the radical plan to tackle climate change.

The current debate about how to harness the power of the Severn Estuary illustrates this point.

The Severn is attracting interest because it has a 45-foot tidal range – the second largest in the world – and engineers believe that we may be able to use its considerable power to generate carbon-free electricity. One proposal is to build a barrage connecting Lavernock Point near Cardiff to Brean Down near Weston-Super-Mare. It is estimated to cost in excess of £20 billion, and it reportedly has the capacity to provide 4.4% of the nation’s electricity needs.

At a time when we are embarking on a revolution in the way we generate and use energy, this appears to be an attractive proposition to politicians.

Yet a study by the Sustainable Development Commission concluded that a barrage would destroy the estuary. It would cause considerable damage to internationally important habitats for birds and to migrating fish protected under the EU Nature Directives.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that this environmental sacrifice is justified. The findings of a two-year review assessing whether the Government could support a tidal power project on the Severn will be published in 2010.

The RSPB has been encouraged by an engineering option for harnessing tidal power in the Severn Estuary – the so-called “tidal reef”. This offers a number of advantages over a conventional barrage while largely maintaining the habitats upon which birds depend and causing less harm to migrating fish species.

The Atkins report concludes that a tidal reef scheme could make use of conventional barrage technology. It also suggested that:

- it would be feasible for this concept to generate more energy than the Cardiff-Weston barrage proposal
- it would cost £2 billion less than the Cardiff-Weston barrage proposal
- it could be developed to project design stage with £0.5 million within the two-year timescales of the Government Feasibility Study.

The Secretary of State, Ed Miliband, has confirmed that energy from the Severn Estuary is not critical to meeting the 2020 renewable energy target. This is reinforced by a study produced by Frontier Economics, Europe’s leading economic consultancy. The final report concluded that:

- the cost of generating renewable energy (per unit of electricity) from the Cardiff-Weston barrage is likely to be double that of other renewable energy sources
- there is likely to be sufficient capacity in the cheaper, less damaging sources, to meet the 2020 renewable energy target.

We entirely agree that wave and tidal power are essential in moving to a zero carbon power sector in the 2030s – a point re-enforced by the advice provided by the Committee for Climate Change on 1 December 2008. We therefore support the exploration of how to harness the considerable tidal power resource of the Severn Estuary, to contribute to emissions reductions beyond the 2020 timeframe.

Given that the energy from the estuary is not essential for meeting the renewable energy targets by 2020, there is still time to conceive, test and develop an engineering solution that maximises energy output with minimal environmental damage at an affordable cost to consumers and tax payers. The aim should be to ensure that the final project is the best option for people and the natural environment.

Martin Harper
Head of Sustainable Development
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/climatechange/solutions/waveandtidalpower

When the bore comes, the stream does not swell by degrees, as at other times, but rolls in with a head… foaming and roaring as though it were enraged by the opposition which it encounters.

Thomas Harrel, 1824

When the bore comes, the stream does not swell by degrees, as at other times, but rolls in with a head… foaming and roaring as though it were enraged by the opposition which it encounters.
The world’s growing population can be fed most successfully in the long-term by agricultural systems that manage the land within environmental limits.

HRH Prince Charles delivering the Sir Albert Howard Memorial Lecture 2008.

Seeking a sustainable future for food and farming

Food riots around the world in 2008 were a stark reminder that productive land is a finite resource requiring wise management, and they posed a direct challenge to biofuel subsidies. But after a brief surge in grain prices, by the end of the year arable farmers were again joining their livestock colleagues in seeking greater stability. In 2009, we will need more than the knee-jerk responses we heard in 2008: calls to maximise production at all costs and for a return to protectionism and self-sufficiency.

The end of the policy of set-aside framed this debate in 2008. Set-aside was an attempt to address the famous grain mountains that resulted from the damaging former system of EU production subsidies. The RSPB highlighted the potential consequences of the sudden withdrawal of set-aside as farmland wildlife lost vital feeding and nesting resources across the countryside, and Defra responded by commissioning studies of the likely impacts. The RSPB welcomed the subsequent commitment by the Secretary of State to ensure mitigation was put in place in England.

This episode reinforced the urgent need to transform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) into a policy to secure sustainable agriculture and land management in Europe – though the reluctance of the European Union to address the environmental impacts stemming from the loss of set-aside highlighted the scale of that task.

Europe urgently needs a policy that helps ensure global food and climate security; delivers on Europe’s environmental commitments on clean water, biodiversity and landscapes; and underpins the economy of rural areas.

The review of the EU budget presents the ideal opportunity to further this ambition. The UK Government has made a useful start by presenting a vision for a CAP based on the principle of cutting subsidies and, instead, rewarding public goods.

Gareth Morgan
Head of Agriculture Policy
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/farming/policy

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- persuade sceptics in Europe that the EU budget debate is about more than just cost cutting and the UK rebate
- develop and promote a vision for a transformed CAP that rises to the challenges of the 21st century and secures sustainable European land use and agriculture
- ensure, via work of the food council, that the country has an approach to food production that for the first time truly integrates environmental sustainability into the food chain.
Reinvigorating land-use planning as an environmental tool

The planning system is a valuable democratic tool for protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment of our countryside and towns. In recent years, the land-use planning system in England has undergone major change. Even while the new system of regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks is being put into place, proposals to combine regional spatial strategies and regional economic strategies into a single regional strategy are being considered. Regional assemblies face abolition and the transfer of their planning responsibilities to business-focused regional development agencies and local authority leaders’ boards.

The Planning Act 2008 introduces an entirely new consent regime for nationally significant infrastructure projects such as airports, roads, power stations and reservoirs. Perhaps most significantly, national policy statements on issues such as ports, energy and water supply will become key to determining individual projects. However, there is no national spatial strategy for habitat creation.

While the architecture of land-use planning seems to be in a state of permanent revolution, the demand for development – whether housing, business, windfarms or major infrastructure – continues to put pressure on the natural environment. The economic downturn, which has particularly affected the housebuilding sector, may provide a breathing space for affected wildlife and landscapes, but the pressure is likely to continue in the long term.

A plan-led system has a vital role in securing environmental protection and enhancement through the use of tools such as strategic environmental assessment and assessment under the Habitats Regulations, and through positive planning for habitat enhancement and re-creation. Plans must be founded on a sound evidence base and must be robustly assessed and scrutinised for their environmental impacts. Decision-makers must seek to integrate environmental considerations in spatial planning, not to trade off environmental resources in favour of social and economic objectives. Ultimately, the protection of biodiversity through the planning system is a key test of sustainable development.

Simon Marsh
Head of Planning and Regional Policy
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/planning

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- develop a national spatial strategy for habitat creation to complement national policy statements for other infrastructure
- ensure regional strategies contain ambitious policies to protect and enhance biodiversity in England
- apply robust strategic environmental assessment to all national policy statements and other spatial plans in England, as well as assessment under the Habitats Regulations where necessary.

To get where we want to be in 5, 10, 20 years’ time, we need to be planning for more and better green spaces now.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP
Demanding better forestry for heathland and woodland birds

The wildlife promises of the English forestry and biodiversity strategies need to be delivered. Government’s own biodiversity targets are not being adequately met on England’s National Forest Estate. The wrong trees growing in the wrong place should be removed, and the native broadleaved woodlands should be better managed.

The RSPB is concerned about the amount of important open-ground wildlife habitats, such as lowland heathland for woodlarks and nightjars, that remain damaged by non-native coniferous plantation forestry. This is primarily on the state forest, as well as on Ministry of Defence land – from Dorset to Suffolk, from Staffordshire to Surrey.

Forestry Commission England must set ambitious targets for lowland heathland restoration at national and regional levels and then translate these commitments into real progress on the ground. Natural England must play a key enabling role in sustaining the necessary management of restored habitat. Opportunities for habitat restoration within existing forest plans should be realised by not replanting restorable areas following timber felling.

Yet, biodiversity within woodlands is also under pressure: the declines in woodland birds, butterflies and plants are well documented. The RSPB is working in partnership to examine the causes of declines of some native broadleaved woodland birds, such as the willow tit and lesser spotted woodpecker. Further government research effort is required to trial solutions to help reverse such declines.

The biodiversity of England’s existing native woods needs improving; the focus must not just be on creating new native woodland. Current grants are helpful, but further action will be needed to address wildlife losses associated with under-management of some native woods.

We support the UK’s work on sustainable forest management standards and procurement – both must be genuinely environmentally sustainable. All new woodland planting must be located, designed and managed to enhance, not harm, important wildlife.

Finally, the Government must ensure that all tree-planting “carbon offsetting” schemes in the UK are environmentally sustainable and credible, by actually mitigating climate change while not damaging biodiversity.

Mike Wood
Forestry Officer (UK)
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/forestry

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- devise and deliver an ambitious action plan for open-ground habitat restoration from plantation forestry
- put a spotlight on the Forestry Commission’s performance in England and assess the stewardship of biodiversity in the National Forest Estate
- amend the tree felling licence conditions in the Forestry Act 1967 (GB) to assist in the restoration of open-ground habitats in England and Wales.

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“It may be necessary to remove plantations and nationally colonised scrub, for the purpose of recreating and maintaining valuable open habitats such as heath and bog.”


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Wanting more sustainable water use

An abiding image from recent years is of the chaos and misery caused by water in the wrong place: towns submerged, loss of power, queues for drinking water and billions of pounds’ worth of damage. At the same time, demand for water is growing in those areas least able to provide supply. The fact that our climate is changing means that such events will only become more likely, and there is an urgent need to adapt water management to increase resilience for people and wildlife.

Policy makers are responding and the ambition set out in both the Government’s Water Strategy, Future Water, and the Conservative Party’s Quality of Life review are broadly welcomed. The challenge for government in the next few years will be translating these words into action. 2009 in particular is a crucial year for water management, when water industry investment for the next five years will be agreed, river basin management plans will be signed off and new legislation regarding flooding and water will be put to parliament.

In 2008, we received a new insight into the quality of our rivers, lakes and coastline with Draft River Basin Management Plans showing that over 80% of water bodies are failing to meet “Good Status”, the objective set out by the Water Framework Directive. Worriedly, the measures set out to tackle the pressures affecting the water bodies would bring less than 5% of rivers up to scratch, and do nothing to address the problems of lakes, coastlines and estuaries, by 2016. Planning to fail on this scale puts the UK at clear risk of breaching European Law and, more importantly, condemns threatened water and wetland wildlife to years of inaction.

On a more positive note, the proposed Flooding and Water Bill provides an opportunity to place sustainability at the heart of flood risk management. Its vital new flooding legislation places an emphasis on measures that make space for water in the landscape, as well as providing new powers to restore the physical condition of rivers and coasts to improve the water environment.

The RSPB was also glad to see a new enthusiasm for projects that protect raw water quality at source in draft water company business plans. This emphasis on working with landowners to combat pollution at source, through catchment management, investment in measures that return the landscape’s capacity to store and slow water.

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- set ambitious targets for improving the water environment in River Basin Management Plans, with a package of measures to tackle the chronic threat of diffuse pollution, river morphology etc, undermined by the regulation and funding needed to make them work
- ensure Water Company plans address consumer demand, tackle abstractions and discharges that threaten the environment and place a new emphasis on working with landowners to combat pollution at source, through catchment management
- remove the outdated definition of flood defence in new legislation to address flooding, enabling

If there is magic on the planet, it is contained in the water.

Loren Eisley, from The Immense Journey, 1957
Delivering Real World Learning

Without education, conservation of the natural world can only be a short-term, single-generation activity. Without mechanisms for creating and establishing conservation values, knowledge and skills, today’s conservation efforts remain unsustainable. Within this, first-hand experience of the natural world is an essential component of environmental education and, in turn, in developing a commitment to biodiversity conservation.

In October 2008, Ofsted reported that “when planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils’ personal, social and emotional development.” Studies for the RSPB have also shown broad positive impacts on physical and mental health from time spent in the natural environment.

Despite these diverse benefits, research over recent decades has shown a contraction in childhood experiences, with fewer opportunities for children to have first-hand experiences of nature than previous generations. The RSPB believes that every child and young person should have regular, quality, first-hand experiences of the natural environment.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has begun to address this issue through their “Out and About” package – also launched in October 2008 – which is designed to give English schools information about organising effective learning outside the classroom. However, these welcome steps must now be built on to ensure learning in the natural environment is a reality for every child.

Philip Burfield
Education Policy Officer
www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/education

The challenges for this and the next UK Government are to:

- Amend the school inspection regime so that Ofsted integrates the mandatory inspection of learning outside the classroom into every school’s self-evaluation process
- Build teacher training capacity by encouraging the Training and Development Agency for Schools to redefine the professional requirements for the entire school workforce, including Qualified Teacher Status, to ensure that they are committed, confident and competent to enable every child and young person to have regular, quality, first-hand experiences of the natural environment
- Provide £27 million of funding to ensure that every child eligible for free school meals enjoys one day per year of out-of-classroom learning in the natural environment

I went pond dipping with a group of local children. Their enthusiasm was amazing. Newts and creepy crawlies are always going to be more memorable than double maths.

Peter Ainsworth MP, October 2008
The RSPB

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The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.