NATURE NEEDS A VOICE

A handbook for UK Parliamentary candidates

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.

www.rspb.org.uk

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The RSPB is Europe’s largest wildlife conservation charity, and together with our BirdLife International partners around the world, we campaign for nature. Our work is driven by the belief that wildlife improves the quality of lives and that we all have a responsibility to protect the millions of other species with which we share this planet.

As Andrew Marr said at the climax of his recent television series, Darwin’s Dangerous Idea, “If we want to prolong our own existence, we have to preserve the environment – the natural world inside which we live”.

This document summarises the issues that we will be asking politicians in the next UK parliament to address, focusing on reversing the decline in biodiversity, ending climate chaos and inspiring people through nature. We need our politicians to invest in things that we value today and that our children will thank us for in the future.

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.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Some facts and figures about the RSPB

The RSPB has:
- over a million members, more than all of the political parties put together
- members living in every UK Parliamentary constituency
- a staff of over 1,600 people and over 13,000 volunteers
- a UK headquarters, three national offices and 10 regional offices
- a local network of 175 local groups and more than 110 youth groups
- 203 nature reserves covering 140,441 hectares and home to 80% of our rarest or most threatened bird species
- 60,000 children taking part every year on our reserves in our Living Classrooms scheme
- partnerships through BirdLife International with organisations operating in over 100 countries and territories worldwide.
The RSPB believes that the wealth of the natural environment is our most treasured asset. It provides us with resources and beauty beyond that which we can create ourselves. We have a moral duty not to threaten its continued prosperity.

Yet, our activities are harming nature. In response to alarming biodiversity loss, EU Heads of State made a commitment in 2001 to halt these losses by 2010. It is now clear that this target will not be met, as species’ declines continue and priority habitats remain in inadequate condition. The threats of habitat destruction, pollution and persecution remain, but are now compounded by the growing threat of climate change.

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 measures to help it adapt to climate change.

The following steps will be needed:

- saving and restoring native forests and peatlands
- the instigation of sustainable fishing
- establishment of robust networks of protected areas on land and at sea
- the recovery of threatened species
- common species flourishing in harmony with human activities.

We should ensure that similar targets are set for Europe and for the world, and that the next government plays its part in turning the rhetoric into reality.
Climate change is the single biggest threat facing our planet. Unless we cut man-made greenhouse gas emissions hard and fast, we will be responsible for a mass extinction event and will threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

Preventing catastrophic climate change requires action from all of us with clear leadership from decision-makers.

UK energy use 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 genuinely environmentally sustainable renewable energy projects. Finally, to have the 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.

Through the Climate Change Act, the country has set itself a carbon budget. We must now learn to live within it.

Of course, actions in the UK alone will not be enough, and the year ahead presents opportunities to achieve a global deal on climate mitigation, critical for the future of millions of people and species on earth. The challenge for the UK Government will be to deliver the best possible deal through UN negotiations, whilst securing investment in a green economic recovery at home.

We must also 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 of our last wildernesses. Wildlife will be amongst the first victims of climate change. We must invest in policies and programmes to help it adapt.

We need to demonstrate that tough action on the climate is both possible and beneficial in the recession by implementing the right policies here and advocating them abroad.
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.

The RSPB has over 170,000 youth members all over the country. We also provide learning and teaching resources for children, parents and schools to explore the educational and recreational benefits of the natural environment. We know first-hand how nature excites and inspires young people, and the value it can add to their lives.

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. First-hand experience of the natural world is an essential component of environmental education and, in turn, in developing a commitment to biodiversity education.

Studies show that learning outside the classroom contributes significantly to children’s education, and that time spent in the natural environment provides beneficial impacts on physical and mental health. Yet childhood experiences of nature are falling in number and frequency. We believe that every young person should have regular, quality, first-hand experiences of the natural environment.

In Westminster, the Department for Children, Schools and Families has begun to address this issue through their “Out and About” package, launched in October 2008. We must build on these simple steps to ensure this learning is a reality for every child.
How to get in touch

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