politicians must cut waste – and invest in nature
“We shall all be paying for the impact of this crisis on the public finances for a generation.”

The RSPB’s Letter to the Future

Over 80,000 people have signed this letter since Autumn 2009.

I’m writing this now so that one day our children have a chance of growing up in a world worth living in.

Today there’s still time to save nature.

If we act now, our children may yet be able to share their world with snowflakes and polar bears, meadows and forests. There’s still a chance that they’ll inherit a world where the engines of life – the sea, trees, rivers and forests – are healthy. Where bluebell woods and osprey nests won’t be lost forever.

Yes, I accept that recovery from recession has meant spending billions of pounds – one way or another future generations will have to pay for this. The least we can do is to use this money to create a future they’ll thank us for.

I want governments to invest in a healthy economy and a healthy environment. As well as protecting jobs, I want them to tackle climate change and to protect our seas, countryside and wildlife.

I’m signing this letter to show that I care deeply about nature and the world we are creating for our children. In years to come I hope they’ll be able to see that their world is a richer one because of the action we took today.

I’m hoping that many thousands of people will join me in signing it.

Together we can be a powerful voice for nature.

Yours in hope.

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Signed
Challenge 2010: politicians must cut waste – and invest in nature

In 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, we face both ecological and economic crises. As political leaders grapple with the budget deficit they must strive to find ways to settle the ecological debt. It is an exacting but exciting challenge. Our children need a chance to grow up in a world worth living in – our politicians must give them that chance. It would be a magnificent legacy to the future.

Forests, seas and peatlands provide irreplaceable life-support systems – but many are being lost. Science suggests that human-induced climate change could bring about mass extinction – and threaten the very survival of our own species.

Yet, the current financial crisis presents an opportunity. The decisions that our political leaders make to fix the nation’s finances will have major implications for the health of our natural environment and the well-being of ourselves and future generations.

Now is the time to move away from an economy based on fossil fuels – oil, gas and coal – to one where we use energy efficiently and harness the power of our natural resources – the sun, wind and waves. And this is the time to move towards an economy that does not rely on exploiting natural resources far beyond their capacity to replenish what we take.

Such a new approach has huge popular support. Since September 2009, more than 80,000 people have signed the RSPB’s Letter to the Future. The letter has a simple message. It urges politicians to consider the health of the planet, for future generations, when they decide where to invest and where to cut spending. Action taken by politicians today should mean that children of the future will inherit a world full of natural beauty, where the engines of life – the air, seas, rivers and forests – remain vital and healthy.

This document is a rallying cry to politicians, at a time when they are considering ways to reform our economy. Our message is simple: cut wasteful expenditure that pollutes and damages the environment, and invest in protecting nature and all the services that it provides.
**Introduction**

**We have failed to halt the loss of biodiversity**

In 2001, European Heads of State agreed to halt biodiversity loss by 2010. The rest of the world followed, establishing a similar Millennium Development Goal. Today, it is clear that governments have not invested enough to meet this target.

Globally, the picture is bleak: tropical forests continue to be destroyed and species continue to become extinct. The G8+5 report on *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (TEEB) demonstrates the vast and varied costs associated with the loss of biodiversity. It is estimated that, without action, biodiversity loss will cost 7 per cent of global GDP per year by 2050\(^1\). This far exceeds the impact of the financial crisis.

Closer to home, we will also miss our target to halt biodiversity loss. Two-thirds of English rivers are in poor condition. Until the recent passage of the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act, our marine environment has been under-protected and under siege from damaging development: in the last decade, we have lost more than 600,000 seabirds from the UK’s annual breeding population.

Not all news is bad. We have made considerable progress and particular interventions have produced immensely successful results. For example, it is widely recognised that EU Nature Directives, and domestic legislation, to protect sites on land are the cornerstones of our ambitions to ensure a healthy natural environment. These laws prevent countries from damaging their natural assets for short-term competitive advantage and make sure polluters are held responsible for their actions.

Scientific tests of the effectiveness of the Birds Directive reveal it has made a real difference. Birds of greatest conservation significance (listed on Annex 1 of the Directive) have fared better inside the EU than populations of the same species outside. The role of protected areas was also found to be important – the larger the protected area, the stronger the recovery of rare and threatened birds. In recent years, governments across the UK have made a real effort to improve the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and in England, the Government looks set to achieve its target of 95% of SSSI areas to be in favourable, or unfavourable recovering, condition by December 2010.

**Politicians must protect and restore nature by 2020**

We want the UK to negotiate and adopt a target for 2020 that goes beyond halting the loss of biodiversity to championing the recovery of habitats and species at home and abroad. The natural world provides countless benefits to people, including food, wood, water, energy, protection from natural hazards, pharmaceutical ingredients and recreation. A healthy natural environment can also provide one of the cheapest ways of combating climate change.

We will not prevent biodiversity loss and help wildlife to adapt to climate change unless we continue to invest in protected areas. These are strongholds for wildlife in a changing environment, offering protection from human impacts, persecution and development. We cannot stop the loss of species and help species recover without putting stewardship of a healthy natural environment at the core of sustainable agriculture and fisheries.

With more than 200 nature reserves covering more than 140,000 hectares, the RSPB has a track record of piloting new approaches to land management. In 2001, we coined the phrase *Futurescapes* to describe our landscape-scale conservation projects. Since then, we have been putting this concept into practice. Our experience convinces us that we need to think big and create many more *Futurescapes*, where wildlife can adapt to climate change, where people enjoy and are inspired by nature and where local economies thrive.

We need to be ambitious in restoring nature at home and fulfilling our responsibility to provide new technical and financial resources to protect nature in developing countries.

**The role of governments**

The response of our political leaders to the financial turmoil of 2008 will have long-lasting implications for the state of our natural environment and the safety of our climate. These actions could threaten our progress towards the target of halting biodiversity loss. Worse still, ill-conceived policies could undo some of the progress already made.

The credit crunch provides a stark warning of the dangers of poorly regulated markets. We are currently heading towards the greatest example of market failure: a degraded environment on the brink of climate catastrophe.

We call on the UK Government to address market failure by preventing harm, penalising pollution and rewarding environmental stewardship. Well designed and well implemented intervention ensures a healthy natural environment, providing goods and services from which we all benefit – from food to flood control, from livelihoods to landscapes. Both regulation and market-based instruments (including green taxation and market creation) are critical. It is, however, public spending that is currently in the spotlight.
Hard economic times call for wise investment

Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, estimates that the bailout of the banks cost £1 trillion. We will be paying for this for at least a generation. Constraints on public spending are a huge challenge but, while public finances are tight, this cannot be an excuse for overlooking the investment needed in our natural environment. For some investment, we cannot afford to wait until the economic cycle recovers. This report outlines how, in a difficult economic climate, our political leaders should respond and ensure that public money works hard to deliver public benefits. 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.

Public spending decisions should be based on three core spending principles:

**Cut the waste.** Governments must redirect spending away from wasteful or environmentally destructive activity.

**Ensure best value for money.** Governments must provide good value for money – we show how spending on the natural environment does just that.

**Invest in future prosperity.** The way in which we respond to this crisis will have huge impacts on our children’s well-being and prosperity. We must invest in the younger generation and ensure they learn from our mistakes.

There are opportunities across government for cutting wasteful expenditure that fails to deliver public goods, or is simply bad for the environment. In this report, the RSPB highlights some of the most egregious examples. Likewise, there are opportunities across government – especially in the environment, farming, energy and education sectors – for carefully targeted investment in our natural resource base. The returns will exceed the initial investment many times over.

The RSPB calls on the political parties to commit to these investments to ensure that we live within our ecological, as well as economic, means.
Challenge 2010: politicians must cut waste – and invest in nature

Eleanor Bentall (rspb-images.com)
The RSPB’s challenge to the parties on public spending

Create a countryside fit for wildlife
Farming is fundamental to achieving a healthy countryside that produces food sustainably, is rich in wildlife and supports rural industry. The vital countryside goods and services managed by farming need to be properly supported through measures such as agri-environment schemes. However, the current subsidy system in the UK spends more than £2.5 billion per year on direct payments that have unclear objectives, and fails to spend enough money on paying for public goods. The UK Government must reform the CAP to cut the waste and instead use this money in schemes that deliver better value for money by rewarding environmental protection, protected area management, improved water quality, wildlife restoration and landscape-scale conservation.

Safeguard our sea life
The UK’s marine environment has suffered prolonged, severe pressure from over-fishing and a disjointed, short-term approach to developing major projects at sea. The UK Government must ensure best value for money and provide £0.75–£1.6 billion over 20 years to fully implement the Marine and Coastal Access Act. Such investment would yield monetary benefits up to 26 times the cost.

Stop extinction
The UK’s Overseas Territories are home to 32 globally threatened bird species whose fate depends on spending decisions made in Westminster. The UK Government must ensure best value for money and allocate £16 million per year to help prevent these species from becoming extinct.

Save tropical forests
Tropical forests support the lives and livelihoods of millions of people throughout the developing world, and store billions of tonnes of carbon, which, if released through deforestation, will contribute heavily to climate change. Between now and 2014, the UK will have wasted between £420 and £720 million on the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO), which, in some cases, promotes biofuels produced from deforested land. The money could be much better used in saving the world’s tropical forests. The UK Government must cut the waste by redirecting wasteful investment on environmentally damaging biofuels towards tropical forests.

Stop Climate Chaos
To prevent catastrophic climate change, we must prevent average global temperatures rising by 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. To do so requires us to move from a high-carbon to a low-carbon economy and to embrace a green energy revolution. The UK Government must cut the waste and end the financing of climate polluting activities by the part-nationalised banks. It must invest in future prosperity instead, by creating a green investment bank to move us to a low-carbon economy.

Inspire the environmental champions of tomorrow
Unless children are inspired by nature to become its stewards, we have little hope of protecting and restoring the planet in the future. Learning experiences in the natural environment can do exactly that. The UK Government must invest in future prosperity by guaranteeing every child has at least one learning experience in the natural environment every year as part of their formal education. In England this means finding £40 million per year to help create a future generation that cares about the world they are living in.
1. Create a countryside fit for wildlife

Vision

The UK has a healthy countryside, rich in wildlife, that sustainably produces food, supports rural industry and inspires the millions who live within it and visit each year. Public funds are used to secure vital public goods from our countryside, including biodiversity, clean water, carbon sequestration and flood mitigation.

Political commitments

There is widespread political support for ending direct agricultural subsidies. However, greater political commitment is needed to ensure that these direct payments will be redirected to support a farming system that creates a healthy countryside, for example by improving water quality and by managing protected areas.

State of the countryside

Population growth and increasing consumption mean that the countryside must produce more food, fuel, fibre, clean water, opportunities for recreation and other valuable goods and services. These must be resilient to drought and flooding, particularly in light of climate change. Farming is at the heart of delivering these countryside services. Yet, the countryside’s ability to sustain us is being stretched and it remains in an impoverished state.

- Between 1970 and 2008, the UK farmland bird index – a key indicator of countryside health – fell by 47 per cent.
- In England, a shocking two-thirds of our rivers fail to meet good ecological status; only five out of 6,000 water bodies are classified as pristine.
- An annual loss of 2.2 million tonnes of topsoil to erosion costs UK farmers £9 million per year in lost production.

In addition to its many traditional roles, the countryside must help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and facilitate adaptation to climate change for ourselves and wildlife. Yet our current economic, planning and policy frameworks fail to recognise the full array of goods and services that the countryside delivers. Many farmers struggle to make a living despite their fundamental role as managers of the countryside.

Action needed now

Farming is key to achieving a healthy countryside that produces food sustainably, is rich in wildlife and supports rural industry. The vital countryside goods and services managed by farming need to be properly supported through measures such as agri-environment schemes.

More than £2.5 billion is spent on agricultural subsidies through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the UK each year. This is a huge amount of money – for comparison’s sake, the average annual total income from farming over the last five years was £2.6 billion. Despite the significance of the sum of money being given to direct payments, the objectives of the payments are poorly defined and often inefficiently achieved. The subsidies do not effectively achieve income support, as the payment structure favours large landowners and large businesses. They are not helping us achieve security of food supply in the long term, as the subsidies do not address the reliance of our farming methods on fossil fuels or ensure that we are not depleting the sector’s natural resource base. If the payments are intended to compensate for the costs of meeting the basic good agricultural and environmental conditions that subsidy recipients must comply with, then the current subsidy regime is not a cost-effective approach. It is estimated that meeting these additional standards costs landholders in England less than £50 million a year, far lower than the £1.45 billion used in direct payments in 2007.

Governments should use this money more wisely to help both the farm sector and wider society. We want our political leaders to negotiate within Europe for a shift in CAP funds from agricultural subsidies to agri-environment schemes and other rural development measures. Unlike the direct payments, agri-environment payments have a clear purpose and economic rationale – securing vital public goods from farming that the market does not reward. For example, agri-environment schemes can be used to restore habitats, improve water management (quality and flood mitigation), manage protected areas, help deliver landscape-scale management (as seen in the RSPB’s Futurescapes) and assist in the move to low-carbon farming. At the moment, only 15 per cent of government agriculture spending goes to agri-environment schemes across the UK. Redirecting subsidies for agri-environment schemes would keep the money within the UK countryside and would provide better value for money for the taxpayer.

Resource protection

Although there are minimum standards that should be expected of all land managers in relation to protecting our natural resources of air, water, forests and soil, there is also a
clear need to pay land managers for providing public goods, such as carbon sequestration, that are not rewarded by the market.

One example of how this approach can provide better value for money than agricultural subsidies is in water management. The Environment Agency estimates that water pollution from agriculture costs between £445 and £872 million per year in England and Wales. The UK has some of the safest drinking water in the world. However, it costs water companies at least £129 million in England and Wales alone to remove diffuse pollution from water – costs passed on to customers in higher water bills. Using CAP funds to reduce water pollution at source would help cut these costs. Achieving good water quality by 2015 would bring economic benefits of £1 billion to £3.8 billion a year to English and Welsh households.

Protected areas
Protected areas are the best sites for species and habitats in a countryside that is increasingly inhospitable to biodiversity.

We have made good progress with improving the condition of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which have been identified as the UK’s most important habitats and wildlife areas. A recent study found that SSSIs on agricultural land (approximately 75% of the total SSSI area) offer excellent value for money. In England around £90 million is currently provided by public funds for SSSI management, but this gives approximately £276 million in benefits. For the UK the sites deliver potential benefits to the public of £655 million per year. Yet, over half of SSSIs are not in favourable condition in England and Wales, and more than a quarter of listed features are in unfavourable condition in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Improving the condition of these sites will increase their value.

To ensure that the good work to date is not wasted, sustained and focused investment is required to address those sites still in unfavourable condition and to support the management of SSSIs that have started on the road to recovery.

Widespread biodiversity
Agri-environment schemes that cover large areas of the landscape can help wildlife populations to expand and thrive outside protected areas. Enlarged and improved schemes could also help us achieve our international obligations towards our biodiversity. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) sets biodiversity targets for habitats and species across the UK to ensure we comply with the international Convention on Biological Diversity. There is currently an estimated shortfall in funding of at least £166 million per year for the UK BAP. Similarly, our Natura 2000 network of protected areas, which represents Europe’s most important conservation areas, would benefit from additional funding to identify and carry out the most appropriate management.

A shift in CAP funding towards agri-environment schemes can help to ensure better value for public funds, conserve our natural resources, reduce diffuse pollution at source, sustain our protected areas and deliver biodiversity targets while supporting farming that delivers real benefits.

Sharing the burden for water management

There are many different sources of water pollution, and it is only right that everyone pays their fair share towards dealing with the problem. Although diffuse pollution from agriculture costs society between £445 and £872 million a year, farm subsidies are distributed with only minimal conditions attached. The agricultural sector is also key to achieving the Water Framework Directive’s aim of achieving good ecological status in water bodies. For the first round of plans for England and Wales (2009–2015), it is proposed that the agricultural sector bears a meagre average of 0.12 per cent of the total costs, while water companies and their customers bear an average 77 per cent. Clearly water companies need to bear significant costs, but this does not seem proportionate. In addition to assisting farming through re-directed CAP payments to achieve water quality objectives, there needs to be stronger regulation to ensure that the natural resource base for farming is protected and that there is clarity over the obligations of land managers to control pollution.
2. Safeguard our sea life

Vision

The UK’s most vulnerable marine wildlife is protected, including the millions of seabirds that breed on our coasts and forage at sea. The marine environment is managed more effectively for marine wildlife and for development, reducing developers’ costs and opening new opportunities for local economies to benefit from wildlife tourism. The UK Government designates a network of marine protected areas and by so doing, society receives benefits at least five times and up to 26 times greater in value than the initial investment.

Political commitment

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 received cross-party support. As well as streamlining processes for development at sea, the Act requires the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments to designate a network of marine protected areas for the protection of species, habitats and natural undersea features.

The state of our marine environment

The UK’s marine wildlife ranges from top predators such as seabirds, sharks and dolphins, down to the rich soup of microscopic plants and animals that form the base of the marine food chain. The UK’s marine habitats are equally diverse, ranging from cold-water coral reefs in the dark depths far offshore, to fragile seagrass beds in the warmer sheltered coastal waters.

Marine wildlife has, however, suffered prolonged and severe pressure from over-fishing, which has undermined stocks and disrupted the food web; the impacts of climate change; the great increase in human activities at sea; and the disjointed, short-term approach to their development. It has never been more important to strengthen the resilience of the marine environment to these cumulative impacts. Comprehensive marine legislation was long overdue. It was secured, in part, thanks to the decade-long campaign by the RSPB and other environmental groups to stop the neglect of our seas.

The following snapshot illustrates the threats to the UK’s marine wildlife:

• In the last decade, the number of seabirds breeding around the UK has declined by more than 9 per cent; this means that in less than a decade, we have lost more than 600,000 breeding seabirds from the UK population.

• Since 2000, the UK breeding populations of the following seabirds have suffered severe declines:
  – Arctic skuas have declined by 57 per cent;
  – kittiwakes have declined by 40 per cent;
  – herring gulls have declined by one third; and
  – shags have declined by a quarter.

• Scotland, which holds approximately 85 per cent of the UK common seal population, has reported major declines of up to 50 per cent.

• Only one third of the UK’s commercial fish stocks are at full reproductive capacity and fished sustainably.

These losses are unacceptable, especially in the context of the UK’s global importance for seabirds and the UK Government’s failure to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) at sea. This is despite its legal obligation to do so, and clear evidence that such sites are effective. The resulting uncertainty has also created an unnecessary hurdle to the effective regulation of development at sea, with associated cost implications. This is a cause of frustration to developers and conservationists alike.

Any further delay in the identification and designation of Special Protection Areas at sea and any lag in implementing the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act would be a disaster for wildlife. We still have amazing wildlife in our waters, but without a network of marine protected areas, marine wildlife and ecosystems will deteriorate further. Only immediate investment will stop the damage and let our natural resources recover.

Action needed now

In a designated network of marine protected areas, our diverse marine wildlife would not only inspire people and enrich our cultural life, it would also underpin new scientific discoveries and deliver colossal environmental benefits to UK society. Healthy, wildlife-rich seas would boost local and regional economies directly through eco-tourism. Bird-, whale- and dolphin-watching activities, recreational diving and the visitor facilities that support them are examples of the “green economy” that would flourish.
Conservation works

The RSPB’s Bempton Cliffs nature reserve in North Yorkshire supports 200,000 nesting birds. A popular tourist attraction, it receives more than 60,000 visits per year. Spending by tourists in local businesses, such as cafés, B&Bs and sightseeing trips, is critical to the health of the local economy. In 2009, more than 80 per cent of visitors to Bempton cited the seabirds as a main reason for their visit. RSPB estimates show that the seabird colonies at Bempton Cliffs reserve directly attract more than £750,000 of tourism expenditure to the local economy. This equates to almost 25 FTE jobs being supported, or approximately 6 per cent of all employed people in the Bempton Parish Council area. Fully implementing the Marine and Coastal Access Act will help ensure that the seabirds that delight visitors and support local economies of seaside reserves such as Bempton Cliffs thrive in the future.

Marine ecosystems provide broader environmental services worth billions of pounds per year, services that boost our economic productivity and quality of life. A network of marine protected areas would safeguard vital organisms that remove waste from seawater, store carbon, and recycle nutrients. Scientists estimate that the value of nutrient recycling in UK waters is £1.3 billion per year.

Phytoplankton, which accounts for most photosynthesis in the marine environment, sequesters carbon with a value of £8.2 billion per year in the UK alone.

According to the UK Government’s own impact assessment, the total discounted costs of putting the Marine and Coastal Access Act into force amounts to between £0.75 and £1.6 billion over 20 years. This includes the costs of designating and managing effectively a network of marine protected areas for species and habitats of national importance in English and Welsh territorial waters and all UK offshore waters. The anticipated benefits of implementing the Act are valued at £8.6 billion to £19.6 billion over a 20-year period. That is at least five, and up to 26, times greater than the costs.

Some benefits are gained by streamlining the licensing process and introducing a new marine planning system. This leads to simpler, clearer procedures for developers, as well as nature conservation benefits. The vast majority of the benefits, however, derive from implementing the nature conservation part of the Act, and valuing the goods and services that nature provides in return.

The annual nature conservation benefits of the Marine and Coastal Access Act alone are estimated conservatively at £0.75 to £1.6 billion, which matches the full costs of implementing the entire Act over a 20-year period (see above). For these benefits to be fully realised, the UK Government needs to ensure that the funding to fully implement the Act is made available. Some complementary actions will also be required. For example, a co-ordinated seabird survey and monitoring programme will not only help identify marine protected areas (including SPAs), but will save money through eradicating duplication of effort.

It is clear that a marine protected area network would provide UK taxpayers with improved quality of life and incredible value for money. That is even before the significant benefits that have not been included are taken into account, such as the increased resilience of the environment to disasters, and the inspiration and cultural resource provided to the public by a healthy marine environment. The non-use values of marine conservation are estimated to be worth up to an additional £1.2 billion a year. Once these are accounted for, the Act demonstrates even better value for money.
3. Stop extinctions

Vision

The 32 globally threatened species on the UK’s Overseas Territories are brought back from the brink of extinction, and the fragile ecosystems they inhabit are protected from damaging developments.

Political commitment

The main UK political parties are largely silent on the matter of looming extinctions in the Overseas Territories. The RSPB urges all parties to respond to the call to action by the parliamentary committee charged with halting biodiversity loss:

“One of the most important contributions that the Government could make to halting biodiversity loss would be to provide more support for the UK Overseas Territories, where it is the eleventh hour for many species. Although England has a number of internationally important species and habitats, the biodiversity found in the UK Overseas Territories is equally valuable and at a greater risk of loss. The Government must act now to protect these areas.”

House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee on Halting Biodiversity Loss (2008)

The state of the UK Overseas Territories’ environment

The UK is responsible for 14 Overseas Territories, ranging from tropical coral atolls, such as the British Indian Ocean Territory and Pitcairn Islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, to volcanic islands such as St Helena and Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic. The Overseas Territories are remarkable for having 22 endemic bird species: species found nowhere else in the world.

The territories are also home to some of the most endangered species anywhere on Earth. They have 32 globally threatened bird species, which puts them ahead of Madagascar and South Africa. A 2006 BirdLife International report estimated that the territories could have up to 50 million pairs of seabirds, making the UK one of the most important nations in the world for marine wildlife.

Many of these endangered bird species are threatened by invasive species, such as rats and feral cats that predate young chicks. These problems can be addressed with relatively small, targeted interventions. Tourism is expanding rapidly and in places is in danger of damaging the natural environment on which it depends.

Here are some of the ways that endangered species are under threat in the UK Overseas Territories:

- The critically endangered Tristan albatross, which breeds only on Gough Island, is projected to decline by 80 per cent over three generations because of adult deaths on longline fishing vessels, and the predation of chicks by non-native mice.
- The population of northern rockhopper penguins on Gough Island has fallen by 90 per cent in the past 45 years; a loss equivalent to 100 penguins disappearing every day.
- Scientists cannot be certain what is causing the declines, but climate change and over-fishing are the main probable causes.
- There are fewer than 250 St Helena plovers left in the world and, until recently, their numbers were in decline thanks to land-use changes on this small island, and the predation of chicks by non-native feral cats.

Already, several birds endemic to the UK Overseas Territories have become extinct. These include the Grand Cayman thrush, five land birds in St Helena, and a rail and a night-heron on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic. The Tristan bunting, endemic to the Tristan da Cunha island group, became extinct just 50 years after the islands were settled by humans, probably because of introduced rats. This sorry history places the UK in the top five countries in the world for bird extinctions.

The next government must reinvigorate the UK’s overall effort to halt biodiversity loss and, as part of such an effort, commit to halting species extinctions in the UK Overseas Territories. Without urgent action, several species are likely to become extinct in the territories in the next two or three years. The UK Government must not stand by and let this happen.

Despite years of pressure from the RSPB and other leading conservation bodies, and calls for action from parliamentary committees, the UK Government has continued to under-invest in the environment of the UK Overseas Territories. For years, the UK Government did not even assign a lead department to take responsibility for environmental affairs in the territories. Only in June 2009 was Defra assigned this responsibility: a small but significant step.
UK Government investment can help save 32 species from extinction, including the Tristan albatross. Angel/Wanless

Action needed now

Today, UK Government investment in environmental protection in the UK Overseas Territories stands at a paltry £3 million per year. It should be more than five times as much. The next UK government must invest an additional £16 million a year for five years to stop extinctions and address the other, most pressing conservation issues in the UK Overseas Territories.

The financial cost to stop these extinctions is small in Government terms but its impacts are incalculable. Species such as the Gough bunting, whose population is in steep decline due to chick and egg predation by house mice, could be lost in just a few years without intervention. We cannot afford to wait.

For less than 27 pence per year for every person in the UK – that is less than the price of a bag of crisps – the UK Government could stop fantastic species on the UK’s Overseas Territories, such as the Tristan albatross, Gough bunting and Montserrat oriole, from disappearing forever.

Economic benefits of action

As well as the moral case for stopping extinction, there is also a practical, economic case for investment. A recent report co-sponsored by the RSPB found that invasive species pose an increasing threat to the economies of the UK’s South Atlantic Overseas Territories (Ascension, Falkland Islands, South Georgia, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha). Due to their inaccessibility and isolated locations these islands have vulnerable economies based on just one or two main sources of income that are largely dependent on the islands’ natural resources. For example, tourism is South Georgia’s second largest industry, with visitor fees contributing more than £800,000 to the economy in 2007–09. This tourism is dependent on the island’s spectacular albatrosses and other native wildlife. Research activities have helped inject significant cash (£0.9 million over seven years) into the tiny economy of Tristan da Cunha. Introduced species threaten the native biodiversity that attracts tourists and researchers to these territories. Introduced plants and animals also threaten local food production, some types of commercial agriculture and drinking water supplies. It is generally cheaper to deal with invasive species in a co-ordinated manner at an early stage than waiting until they are well established.

Similarly, on the UK territory of Montserrat in the Caribbean, the Centre Hills area is not only the last bastion of the critically endangered Montserrat oriole, but is also a rich forest that provides environmental services to the people of Montserrat. The Centre Hills forest is worth about £1 million per year to the people of Montserrat as a source of fresh water and a valuable tourist amenity. However, the cost of meeting the biodiversity priorities for Montserrat, including actions to protect the tourism and water supplies, is less than £400,000 a year.

As well as saving species, taking action now makes sound economic sense.
4. Save tropical forests

Vision

New, reliable, and sufficient funding from the developed to the developing world, to support the protection and restoration of tropical forests – action that will not only make a major contribution to tackling climate change, but will also save priceless biodiversity from disappearing forever. This can be partly achieved by the UK freezing subsidies for environmentally-damaging biofuels, many of which are grown on cleared rainforest land.

Political commitment

All UK political parties must commit to provide their share of the funds needed to cut deforestation rates by 25 per cent by 2015, and halve them by 2020. This money must be new, reliable and predictable. Parties should also commit to reverse national policies that incentivise deforestation. These include the RTFO, which forces motorists to pay for unsustainable biofuels produced at the expense of rainforests. This money should be invested in keeping forests standing, not cut down.

State of the world’s tropical forests

Tropical forests are the storehouses of biodiversity. They are home to 70 per cent of the Earth’s land-based species. They are also vital stores of carbon. Every year, forest destruction causes almost one fifth of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, most of this in tropical areas.

The loss of the world’s remaining tropical forests would be a disaster for the climate. It would also mean an incalculable loss of life and livelihood:

- Tropical forests are home to more than 1.6 million distinct species.
- Forests are by far the most important habitat for birds, supporting 74 per cent of all bird species. BirdLife International estimates that the degradation and destruction of forests have a negative impact on 1,045 globally threatened bird species.
- Tropical forests support the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people directly, most of them poor.

The Copenhagen Accord, supported by some countries in December 2009, includes pledges to address the loss and degradation of tropical forests. But warm words to help poorer countries conserve their rainforests will only have meaning if a legally binding agreement is established to lever the funding needed to support national action on deforestation.

Any new international regime for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation – REDD as it is known – will require investment of between £550 million and £915 million of UK public finance now, rising over time.

Until now, government funding for tropical forest protection has been a drop in the ocean, with an average annual expenditure of £15 million a year. Following Copenhagen, developed nations must work fast to resurrect talks about deforestation and create a mechanism for financing REDD in both the short- and long-term. This is essential if the UK is to meet its international obligations and stop rainforest destruction before it is too late.

Not only has the UK Government’s spending on forest conservation been inadequate to date, the policy of the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) has contributed to tropical forest destruction while imposing additional costs on households through higher motor fuel bills.

Since April 2008, the RTFO has forced companies to include biofuels in the vehicle fuel they sell; at present, 3.25 per cent of vehicle fuel must be made up of biofuel. This is planned to rise incrementally to 5 per cent by 2013/14.

The law was intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport, but left so many loopholes that it may have caused more harm than good. The RTFO did not set environmental sustainability standards, so many of the crops grown to make biofuels have a large environmental footprint. Some are produced with fertilisers that are responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions. Some crops, such as palm oil for biodiesel, are grown on cleared rainforest lands.

Once the effects of intensive production and land-use change are accounted for, biofuels may produce more emissions over their lifecycle than their fossil fuel equivalents. Conservative estimates show the biofuels obligation, which came into force in April 2008, could have caused 1.3 million tonnes of extra carbon dioxide emissions in one year. Soy crops from the US, Argentina and Brazil, used in the most common biodiesels sold in the UK, could be causing three times more emissions than conventional fossil fuels. It could take between 75 and 600 years for the carbon emissions saved through use of biofuel to
compensate for the carbon lost through forest conversion, depending on how the forest was cleared and the soil type. The Government has allowed companies to include biofuels in the fuel stream without full information about their source. Therefore, it is impossible to know how much of the UK's transport fuel at the pump is sustainable.

**Action needed now**

The forced inclusion of biofuels into transport fuel has increased costs to car-running families. Increasing the proportion of biofuel from 3.25 per cent to 5 per cent by 2013/14 will steadily increase the costs by between £5 and £20 per family per year. This amounts to UK households paying between £420 and £720 million between 2010 and 2014 for a policy that neither assures climate safety nor protects our tropical forests.

Freezing the RTFO, and implementing price-neutral alternative policy options, such as an equivalent increase in fuel duty, could raise a significant proportion of the finance needed for investment in rainforest protection, while imposing no additional cost to taxpayers.

**Redirecting expenditure on unsustainable biofuels to support rainforest protection would be good for the climate and biodiversity. It would enable the UK to make a significant contribution to its climate change commitments, without increasing the overall burden on UK households.**

**A new approach to financing forest protection**

The planned incremental increase in the proportion of biofuels used in motorfuels imposes an additional cost to households with cars. Yet, this extra cost does not deliver its policy objective of reducing greenhouse gases. This calculation shows how much money is being wasted on a biofuel policy—funds that could be much better used to protect tropical forests.

Forecasted prices and biofuel use was based on the four future scenarios presented by the Department of Transport. The impact of the RTFO on the price per litre fuel at the forecourt was estimated for each year to 2013/14.

Depending on the year and scenario assumptions, the estimated increase in forecourt price per litre was estimated to be between 1 and 2 per cent for petrol and 2 and 4 per cent for diesel, depending on the year and scenario assumptions. The inclusion of biofuel (due to both higher cost and lower energy content) is estimated to increase the average household expenditure on motorfuel by between £5 and £20 per year in 2013 compared to if the RTFO was frozen at 3.25 per cent.

It is estimated that freezing the RTFO at 3.25 per cent (rather than increasing to 5 per cent by 2014 as currently planned) would avoid wasteful expenditure of between £130 million and £1,050 million. The middle two scenarios show avoided cost of between £420 and £720 million. A fuel duty that imposed the same cost burden could be used instead to contribute significantly to the funds needed for rainforest protection.
5. Stop climate chaos

Vision

Massive flows of public and private investment transform the UK into a low-carbon economy, putting job creation and the fight against climate change, together, at the heart of our economic recovery.

Political commitment

The UK Climate Change Act (2008), which won cross-party backing, commits the UK to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. However, none of the parties have created an adequate financing package to ensure these cuts occur.

The state of the climate and efforts to tackle climate change

Scientific consensus suggests that if the Earth warms beyond an average of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the impacts will be catastrophic for people and the environment. The future will include: massive crop failures, particularly in tropical areas; increasingly intense rainfall and severe flooding during our winters; rapidly accelerated sea level rise; and a high risk of extinction for 10 per cent of species for every degree temperature rise. The average global temperature has already risen by 0.8 degrees since pre-industrial times.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in its 2007 report that average global temperatures could rise a further 1.8 to 4.0 degrees this century and that human activity, through greenhouse gas pollution, was the principal cause of global climate change. Since this grim assessment, new scientific evidence suggests that climate change and its impacts could be even more severe, and more rapid, without urgent action to limit it:

- A 4 degree Celsius global temperature rise is not only possible by the end of the 21st century, but could happen as early as 2060 if the global economy continues to depend on fossil fuel use.
- One indicator of serious climate change impacts is the extent of Arctic sea ice in summertime. Rather than disappearing by the 2060s, as scientists had expected, the Arctic could now be completely ice-free in summer by 2015.
- Sea level rise could be higher than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted, reaching an order of 2 metres by the end of the 21st century if we continue to emit greenhouse gases at current rates.
- Impacts on species and ecosystems, including changes in the timing of seasonal events and rapid species range shifts, are increasingly being documented.

The political implications of these findings are that global society as a whole must cut global greenhouse gas emissions to date and are best able to fund emission cuts, must largely decarbonise their economies by 2050. To have a good chance of staying within the 2 degree limit will require global emissions to peak by 2015. For rich countries, this means a minimum 40 per cent aggregate cut by 2020.

There is currently a huge gap between the provision of green finance and the levels of investment needed to shift the UK towards a low-carbon economy. Dieter Helm, Professor of Energy Policy at the University of Oxford, estimates in a recent Policy Exchange paper that £157 billion of investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency is needed by 2020. In the same ballpark, analysis by Ofgem estimates that around £200 billion is required in energy investment by 2020, the majority of which is for clean energy.

While raising adequate investment at a time of economic austerity may be challenging, delaying action will result in far greater costs. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that each year’s delay will increase the cost of investment needed globally by 2030 by $500 billion.

As we enter the second year of the UK commitment to a Carbon Budget, the UK Government’s expenditure on the transition to a low-carbon economy is falling far short of what is needed. Worse still, billions of pounds of public money ploughed into propping up ailing banks are actually being spent on climate polluting activities.

Since the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) was bailed out by the UK taxpayer, it has invested over £10 billion in loans to coal, oil and gas companies. People & Planet, World Development Movement and PLATFORM documented how, in this period:

- RBS helped raise £400 million for the Irish company Tullow Oil (January 2009). It was part of a consortium of 14 banks that lent £1.4 billion to Tullow Oil in March 2009. Tullow Oil is involved in the exploration and extraction of oil on the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This area has seen some of the fiercest fighting in a civil war driven by drilling and mining, as rival armies and militias have struggled for control of the land,
 Chall enge 2010: politicians must cut waste – and invest in nature 15

leading to thousands of civilian deaths and refugees. 
- RBS helped to raise £116 million for Cairn Energy, a Scottish oil company, for “accelerated drilling” in Arctic Greenland.

RBS also lent £6 billion to the energy company E.ON, as it was developing plans for the first new coal power station in the UK for over 20 years at Kingsnorth in Kent (these plans have been put on hold, thanks in part to public protest).

Action needed now

The UK Government must develop and implement the policy, incentive and regulatory framework that makes private investment in climate mitigation and adaptation attractive. Not only is this a necessity, it will also help the UK develop a world-leading low carbon industry providing jobs and wealth.

To mobilise private funding of low-carbon investments, a Green Investment Bank should be established. The Bank would co-ordinate investment from institutional investors (such as pension funds), individuals and public sources, while working closely with policy makers to ensure a stable policy environment. One option to ensure immediate finance is available to the Green Investment Bank would be to use the Government’s status as a major shareholder in private banks, such as RBS, and dedicate money currently used to support carbon-intensive industries and redirect it towards low-carbon investments.

The Green Investment Bank could co-ordinate investment towards an expanded version of the current Regulated Asset Base (RAB). The new RAB system would encompass renewable energy investment as outlined in the recent Policy Exchange paper. By ensuring sustainable investments are part of the national asset base and backed by a duty to repay, the risk of investment is lowered and is therefore cheaper.

We believe the RAB proposal can and should be expanded further and include investments in ecosystem-based climate adaptation and habitat recreation. Natural adaptation solutions, including managed realignment and local flood alleviation projects (such as through provision of wetland habitat), should both fall under the remit of the Green Investment Bank.

Major investment is also needed in habitat re-creation. During the 20th century, there was a massive reduction in the area and quality of wildlife habitat in the UK, caused by changes in agriculture, forestry, and increasing urbanisation. This poses a serious threat to wildlife’s ability to adapt to climate change.

Our society’s choice is between investing funds of this magnitude now to head off dangerous climate change, or to pay far more in the future to live with the consequences. If the UK follows this prescription, it will create the bedrock for its citizens’ future prosperity. The UK has to play ‘catch up’ with other European economies on the scale of its low-carbon industries, but has the potential to position itself at the leading edge of developing – and exporting – low-carbon goods and services.

Wildlife on the move

The Climatic Atlas of European Breeding Birds maps potential changes in distribution of the continent’s regularly occurring nesting birds. It underlines the urgent need for action to cut greenhouse gas emissions – anything above an average 2 degree Celsius temperature rise risks catastrophic impacts on wildlife.

The atlas shows that, for the average bird species, the potential distribution by 2100 will shift nearly 550 km north east, equivalent to the distance from Plymouth to Newcastle. The average bird’s distribution will be reduced in size by a fifth and overlap the current range by only 40 per cent. Three-quarters of Europe’s nesting bird species are likely to suffer declines in range. This potentially disastrous vision for the future of wildlife, which could set some species on a path to extinction, reinforces the need for urgent action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and to help wildlife adapt to a rapidly warming world. Investments in low-carbon technology are needed alongside investment in creating larger areas for nature and making the countryside more wildlife-friendly to allow species to move to areas where the climate becomes suitable.
6. Inspire the environmental champions of tomorrow

Vision

The UK takes seriously its challenge to develop the environmental champions of tomorrow. Government invests strategically in learning experiences in the natural environment that give children a deep-vested love of nature and sense of responsibility for its stewardship. These experiences broaden children's horizons and equip them to handle the environmental challenges ahead.

Political commitment

Politicians broadly recognise that learning in the natural environment has a central part to play in preparing the next generation of environmental stewards and leaders. They also recognise the part out-of-classroom learning can play in broadening children's horizons, putting them in touch with nature, improving their motivation and making them more rounded individuals.

There is broad cross-party support for providing out-of-classroom learning to children. Unfortunately, meaningful funding for out-of-classroom learning has not backed these expressions of support.

State of the UK’s learning in the natural environment

The natural environment needs sound government investment in the broadest sense. However, even if green infrastructure and special places for wildlife exist, that doesn’t mean every child has access to them. In the past, a child was typically free to roam miles from his or her home, into the countryside. Today’s younger generation is typified by its closeness to home and lack of freedom to explore in wild nature. The most effective way to ensure that every child is guaranteed the opportunity to be in touch with nature is for schools to provide regular out-of-classroom learning in the natural environment.

Out-of-classroom learning offers opportunities to reintroduce young people to the world around them, demonstrating how it can be explored and enjoyed. It is one of the most effective forms of education. It broadens children’s outlook, improves their motivation, nurtures social skills, and creates a sense of place and nature that can create active and politically engaged citizens. It has also been shown to improve critical thinking skills37, and children gain a more powerful grasp of environmental issues through self-exploration of the natural environment38.

Learning in the natural environment provides inspirational experiences that teachers can use as a springboard for wider curriculum-based work, across core subjects. In 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 development39.” This backed up previous academic research, which concluded that “substantial evidence exists to indicate that fieldwork, properly conceived, adequately planned, well taught and effectively followed up, offers learners opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in ways that add value to their everyday experiences in the classroom40.”

An interest in outdoor activities other than formal sport can also help keep children fit and healthy, physically and mentally. A study in the USA showed that activities in green outdoor spaces could reduce attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children41. The UK Government estimates that medication prescribed to children as treatment for ADHD increased 24-fold between 1995 and 200442. ADHD has a significant impact on a child’s prospects, with more than one-third of children suffering from ADHD being excluded from school. By ensuring all children are entitled to regular access to the natural environment, the negative social and family impacts of ADHD should be reduced.

Activity programmes have resulted in clinically significant decreases in body fat and body mass index in obese children. In Natural Fit43, Dr William Bird identifies that children increase their physical activity levels when outdoors and are attracted to nature. In addition, schoolwork may be improved by such physical activity. Natural Fit also found that there is a positive relationship between physical activity and cognitive functioning that includes concentration, memory and language.

Outdoor activities can also distract young people from anti-social behaviour. Ofsted44 found that “where pupils feel responsible for their environment, incidents of vandalism have decreased.” In addition, studies have shown that children who understand and care about their local environment, community and cultural heritage, and are active within it, are far more likely to engage as active citizens in a democratic society later on in life45. Recent research from The Netherlands supports these
arguments, finding that it is plausible that the cognitive, motor and socio-economic development of children can benefit from varied, regular and direct contact with nature\(^{46}\).

The UK Government's investment in out-of-classroom learning has been inadequate to achieve these potential benefits. Although the UK Government has moved in the right direction, it has not gone far enough, fast enough. In England, it has set up the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom and put in place a badge scheme to make it easier for schools to access quality out-of-classroom experiences. However, the annual budget is under £1 million, a slim proportion of the £40 million that the RSPB believes is needed to ensure that every child has at least one learning experience in the natural environment every year. This funding would mean that each child entitled to receive free school meals could have contact with the natural world through formal education\(^{47}\).

**Action needed now**

The next UK Government must guarantee every child’s access to the natural environment by:

- entitling every child to regular out-of-classroom learning experiences in the natural environment throughout their school-based education, and commit to reducing the barriers preventing equality of participation
- providing adequate funding and support to ensure that equality of access for all children and young people to out-of-classroom learning in England. Just £40 million per year will ensure that every child has at least one out-of-classroom learning experience in the natural environment every year.

Giving children learning experiences in the natural environment is an investment in the development of the UK’s future leaders and its society – an investment in our future prosperity. Given the ecological crisis facing the world in the 21st century, this must be a priority for spending. Each of us only gets one childhood; precious years that cannot be recaptured. There is no time to waste.

“I think if you look at children you will see, right from the very early stages, an interest and an excitement about the natural world and their surroundings. It’s in our nature to be concerned about the nature of life around us, and to be fascinated by it. And sadly, I think, some people lose touch with that initial love of the natural world around them altogether. But, if they do, it is a major loss.”

Sir David Attenborough
Challenge 2010: politicians must cut waste and invest in nature

Mudflats in The Wash at Snettisham RSPB nature reserve, Norfolk
Conclusion

In 10 years’ time, people will look back and judge the decisions that politicians made to deal with the economic crisis in 2010. The recommendations in this report need to be adopted so that 2010 is seen as the date when we turned our back on an economy based on over-exploitation of the natural world to one that allowed us to live within our ecological means. Future generations will thank us for making the right decisions today.

Summary of financial challenges
to providing adequate investment in nature

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Government action</th>
<th>Benefits from action</th>
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<tr>
<td>Countryside fit for wildlife</td>
<td>Fill the £166 million per annum shortfall in delivery of the UK Biodiversity Action Plans by redirecting CAP payments into agri-environment schemes.</td>
<td>Halt the decline of our habitats and species that deliver a suite of ecosystem services including recreation benefits, flood protection and carbon storage.</td>
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<td>Safeguard our sea life</td>
<td>Maintain ongoing investment into SSSIs and where necessary increase funding with redirected CAP funds to ensure condition continues to improve.</td>
<td>The benefits of investment in SSSIs on farmland are already three times the cost in England – continued improvement using re-directed CAP funds will increase their estimated value of £655 million across the UK.</td>
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<td>Redirecting CAP payments into agri-environment schemes designed to improve water quality.</td>
<td>Assist in achieving good water quality valued at £1–3.8 billion in England and Wales. Help reduce diffuse pollution at source, avoid £445–872 million damage and reduce water treatment costs.</td>
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<td>Investigate £0.75 to £1.6 billion over twenty years to implement the Marine and Coastal Access Act.</td>
<td>Improved management of marine environment could deliver net benefits of £8.6–19.6 billion over 20 years – a return between 5 and 26 times greater than costs.</td>
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<td>Stop extinction</td>
<td>Invest a further £16 million per year over a five-year period in the UKOTs.</td>
<td>Step up to our global responsibility and help bring back from the brink of extinction 32 globally threatened bird species. Help avoid the damaging impacts of invasive species on biodiversity and local economies.</td>
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<td>Save tropical forests</td>
<td>Find £550–£915 million to support a global effort to halt deforestation in developing nations, for example by freezing the RTFO and implementing alternative policy options such as an increase in fuel duty.</td>
<td>Make a major contribution to tackling climate change by stopping the destruction of our tropical forests, which causes almost one fifth of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, protect the home of 70 per cent of the Earth’s land-based species.</td>
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<td>Stop climate chaos</td>
<td>Generate £200 billion by 2020 to support the drive towards a low-carbon economy. A key activity is establishing a Green Investment Bank, which will mobilise public and private investment.</td>
<td>The world avoids an added investment cost of $500 billion for each year of delay between 2010 and 2030.</td>
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<td>Inspire young people</td>
<td>Provide £40 million per year to ensure all children that qualify for free school meals in England have contact with the natural world through formal education.</td>
<td>All children are given the opportunity to experience the benefits of access to nature, and are inspired to become champions for nature throughout their lives.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

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47. This calculation is based on the current 1.1 million children on free school meals and the additional 500,000 children who will be eligible for free school meals in 2010 and 2011 after the December 2009 pre-budget report (total 1.6 million children). The transport and provider costs for one nature reserve visit is estimated at £25 a child.
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.