

# Annual Review

## 2008/09



Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings.

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More information on our work, including statistics on subjects in this review, can be found on our website [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

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# Foreword

It is now two and a half years since Natural England was formed, and thanks to the commitment and hard work of our staff and partners, we have made great progress towards achieving the challenges we set out for ourselves in our Strategic Direction.

We will build on the legacy of our founding Chair, Sir Martin Doughty, who died this year. Sir Martin's leadership, and his passion for the natural environment and for increasing and improving people's access to it, were an inspiration to all of us and he is sadly missed.

This year was a year of delivery. More than 88% of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest are now in favourable or recovering condition, while 72% of Natural England-led Biodiversity Action Plan priority species are on track to recovery.

We have invested time in defining our ambitions to inspire people to value and conserve the natural

environment, building on the success of our healthy walking scheme – now the largest in Europe.

We've also increased the number of volunteers who work with us, mapped accessible greenspace across the country to help us target where we can improve access provision further, and have projects underway to develop four of our National Nature Reserves as visitor destination centres.

We have continued to deliver our part of the Rural Development Programme for England, securing agreements with, and delivering advice to, land managers which make a real contribution to sustainable use of the natural environment – 65% of England's farmland is now in one of our environmental stewardship schemes. Through these schemes we invest £400 million each year into local economies. Our local advisors work in partnership with farmers to carefully target public money to: enable sustainable food production; boost our much loved wildlife;

manage our iconic landscapes; tackle climate change; and provide opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside and learn more about farming.

We are providing leadership in meeting the challenge of climate change through the publication of our four Climate Change Character Area reports. These set out what will be required to adapt to climate change and to inform the implementation of the Climate Change Act and provide a contribution to shaping the decisions that will collectively secure a future for the natural environment.

We have significantly improved our efficiency to provide real value for public money, achieving £23 million efficiencies since vesting, and our progress in reducing our carbon footprint is providing a lead for other public sector organisations to follow.

But many challenges remain. In this year, the 60th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, we will continue to focus on increasing people's access to the natural environment and enjoyment of it and will deliver through projects such as the creation of a coastal footpath around England, and a new campaign to get one million children outdoors into nature.

We will continue to be a leading delivery organisation and authoritative voice for the natural environment.



**Poul Christensen**  
Acting Chair,



**Helen Phillips**  
Chief Executive,



Pearl-bordered fritillary

Outcome 1

# A **healthy** natural environment

England's natural environment will be conserved and enhanced

## Why we are doing it

- For the intrinsic value of the natural environment.
- Because landscapes and wildlife enrich people's lives.
- For the services that healthy functioning ecosystems supply and for the economic prosperity they bring.

Spider crabs



## Highlights in our third year

- 88.4% of SSSI land was brought into favourable or recovering condition, representing an in-year gain of 5.7%.
- Brought more than 50,000 ha (65%) of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitat into HLS agreements and 72% of Natural England-led BAP species on track to recovery.
- Increased the quantity of bird-friendly habitats by over 4,000 ha through Environmental Stewardship, to help halve the decline of farmland birds.
- Collaborated with Defra and local authorities to establish a new South Downs National Park.
- Began addressing our European Landscape Convention Action Plan responsibilities by ensuring that Landscape and Geodiversity partnerships exist in all of England's regions.
- Established an overarching policy on Landscape, and consulted on detailed policies on 'Future Landscapes' and 'All Landscapes Matter'.
- Completed a survey of potential marine sites for designation as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), as well as securing Lundy as the first ever 'No take' Marine Protected Area (MPA).
- Progress made on securing an effective Marine Bill, developing four regional Marine Conservation Zone projects and the necessary guidance to support their work.

## Case Study: Wetland Vision

The partners in Wetland Vision (Natural England, the Environment Agency, RSPB, English Heritage and the Wildlife Trusts) launched their shared 50-year vision for the future of our freshwater wetlands with the written support of Minister Joan Ruddock in July 2008 at the Wildfowl and Wetland Centre in London (see [www.wetlandvision.org.uk](http://www.wetlandvision.org.uk)).

Natural England has allocated almost £6 million over three years to the Wetland Vision, which will also support the lowland wetland BAP targets which Natural England leads. During 2008–9 the project contributed £2 million towards 15 projects including:

- major land purchase in the Lancashire Mosslands (led by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust) and at Hesketh marshes on the Lancashire coast (led by the RSPB); and

- wetland restoration work with Wildlife Trusts, the Environment Agency and local authorities in the Severn Avon Vales and Mayesbrook in London.

At Baston and Thurlby fens in Lincolnshire the project will expand the existing fragment of original fenland by restoring 114 ha of farmland to lowland fen, wet woodland and reedbed habitat. Natural England's contribution of £250,000 has enabled the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust to secure £2 million of lottery funding to purchase and manage land adjacent to the nature reserve. The resulting 200% increase in Lincolnshire's remaining fenland will make a significant contribution to expanding the wider East Anglian fenland landscape area, which was targeted for further wetland creation by the Wetland Vision project partners.

### Partners





## Case Study: South West Farmland Bird Initiative

Natural England is taking a leading role in working with conservation bodies, land managers and farmers, and volunteers to help to stop and reverse the decline in wild and farmland bird numbers. There are a range of options in Environmental Stewardship which give added help to farmland birds. In the past year Natural England exceeded its target for securing new farmland bird options.

The South West Farmland Bird Initiative (SWFBI) is an exciting and pioneering partnership, which is working with the farming community and other partners within four defined target areas spread across some 400,000 ha of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset countryside. These areas are recognised as being nationally important for farmland birds and other wildlife found within the wider countryside. The SWFBI focuses on increasing the populations of six nationally important bird species associated

with arable farmland: lapwing; grey partridge; turtle dove; yellow wagtail; tree sparrow; and corn bunting. Additionally, other species will benefit such as the skylark, brown hare and arable plants like shepherd's needle and corn marigold.

A key feature of the SWFBI is its partnership approach and the initiative consists of four sister projects, each led by a different partner organisation. Four advisors – one each for the Cotswolds, North Wessex, Cranborne Chase and Dorset – will deliver a combination of tailored advice via one-to-one farm visits and workshops where best practice can be shared. Implementation of 'wildlife-friendly' land management practices offered through Natural England's Environmental Stewardship schemes will be crucial to the project's success.

Farmers have welcomed the £400,000 partnership project, which will run until March 2011. The initiative will encourage land managers to put the right measures in place to help them deliver the three things that farmland birds most need: winter seed food, summer invertebrate food and places to nest, thus contributing to the Government's objective of reversing the decline in farmland bird populations.



Lapwing

Partners





Randwick Woods, Cotswold Way

Outcome 2

People are inspired to **value and conserve** the natural environment

More people inspired to enjoy, understand and act for the natural environment

## Why we are doing it

- Because everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the natural environment.
- So that people are inspired by and engage with the natural environment and understand its importance to our survival.
- To galvanise people and communities to act to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Improving Natterjack Toad habitat, Sandscale Haws, Cumbria



## Highlights in our third year

- Developed a major new three-year survey to measure the extent and trends in people's engagement with the natural environment.
- Conducted five pilot projects to involve school-aged children in local greenspace design.
- Received two million hits in the first month of operation of the BBC - Natural England Event Finder used in support of natural history broadcasts such as 'Springwatch', 'AutumnWatch' and the 'Nature of Britain'.
- Expanded the Walking the Way to Health Initiative by increasing the number of health walks by 15% (28% above baseline) and increasing participation in health walks by 20% (37% above baseline).

Students from Oakridge Primary School in High Wycombe enjoy a visit to a nearby farm



## Case study:

# One Million Children Outdoors – Schools Programme

By 2012 Natural England aims to have given one million children and their families a high-quality learning experience which enriches their understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.

Over the current school year, Natural England will deliver and evaluate five innovative school pilots aimed at testing new ways of fostering greater connection between primary school-aged children and their local green spaces and communities. Around 3,000 children from 20 schools located in areas of multiple deprivation in Bristol, South Buckinghamshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Barking and

Merseyside are taking part in this initiative. In Stoke, for example, children from a cluster of schools surrounding the Park Hall National Nature Reserve are creating new walking routes through the reserve and helping to organise a wide range of promotional activities and events in their communities.

The design of the pilots has been aligned with a number of key government initiatives such as the Change for Life Campaign (DH), ActON CO<sub>2</sub> campaign (DEC) and the Learning Outside the Classroom manifesto (DCSF). Evidence and learning from the evaluation studies will be used to support discussions with these Departments, with the aim of scaling up the pilots.

## Partners



Environment  
Agency



THE  
MERSEY  
FOREST



Case study:

## Walking the Way to Health

The Walking the Way to Health Initiative is now the largest outdoor walking programme in the European Union, with over 32,000 participants in 2,000 health walks every week throughout the 525 health walking groups. We have also trained over 37,000 volunteers to support that delivery.

A good example of how the initiative inspires and mobilises local people to value and conserve the natural environment and help shape and improve their health and wellbeing is the work of Natural England's Active London team.

During spring 2009 Natural England's Active London team supported NHS London to deliver the first element of 'Go London' – a programme utilising the capital's hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games to generate a health legacy for Londoners through increased participation in physical activity. Go

London, as part of their wider 'Think Feet First' campaign, worked with the Active London Team to promote walking during March 2009 through the provision of Walking Ambassador schemes. Through our expertise and key partnership links we enabled 17 London Boroughs, with the lowest levels of physical activity, to highlight the value of walks in London's natural environment drawing on NHS London funds. This engaged thousands of Londoners in the 195 walks and required an additional project support officer (funded by NHS London) within Natural England to help co-ordinate activity.

As part of the campaign in partnership with NHS London, we also helped create walking literature promoting the value of walking in the natural environment, which was delivered to all GP surgeries and hospitals across the capital.

This work (coupled with our ongoing projects with primary care trusts to further explore how the natural environment can play a role in health solutions in an urban setting) has demonstrated the potential and importance of establishing new working partnerships with the health sector to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.



Hilt: get up and go walk group

#### Partners





Greenwich Park, London.

Outcome 3

## **Sustainable** use of the natural environment

The use and management of the environment is more sustainable

## Why we are doing it

- So that the use of the land, freshwaters and seas does not compromise the natural environment.
- So that change and development can occur in a manner that protects and enhances the natural environment.

## Highlights in our third year

- Increased the total of England's agricultural land under agri-environment agreements from 59% to 65% (6.1 million ha).
- Launched a new approach to targeting Higher Level Stewardship incentives to maximise benefits, and a new on-line ELS tool to give a quicker and more accessible applications process.
- Reduced diffuse water pollution from agriculture. Working with the Environment Agency and Defra, we successfully completed Phase 1 of the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative in 40 catchments across England, engaging over 6,000 farmers and delivering 1,400 capital grants.
- We are now involved with Regional Development Agencies and other key partners in all regions to influence regional strategies and other plans to deliver benefits to and from the natural environment.

- Developed 25 high quality Green Infrastructure projects with partners to benefit wildlife, access, health and climate change adaptation.
- Secured a requirement that all 20 new Growth Points must produce Green Infrastructure strategies, and a 40% Green Infrastructure standard for Eco-towns.
- Worked with the fishing industry to secure a sustainable future for the fisheries harvesting sector that balances the needs of the environment and fishing operations.
- Supported the Severn Tidal Power Group and DECC to put environmental considerations at the heart of discussions around options for tidal power generation.
- Established a close working relationship with the offshore renewables sector (DECC, British Wind Energy Association, Crown Estate) to ensure better understanding of the potential impacts of marine renewable energy developments on the marine environment.
- Worked with the Environment Agency, Defra and non-governmental organisations to deliver the Pitt Review recommendations on use of natural processes to respond to flood risk.

## Case study: Effective land management advice

This year Natural England delivered 16,608 advisory contacts with farmers and land managers.

Effective advice to farmers and land managers plays an important role in securing and enhancing sustainable environmental land management. It works alongside incentives and regulation by changing the way people act and influencing the decisions they make.

Natural England recognises that working in partnership with farming bodies and conservation organisations can effectively reinforce and extend our advice messages.

The advice events that launched the new High Weald HLS target area in the South East region offer a good example of these principles in practice. Over 60 farmers attended the two events, held in March 2009. Natural England advisers explained the rationale for selecting the Weald as a HLS target area, and encouraged attendees to apply for HLS. Representatives from a

### Partners



range of partner organisations including RSPB, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Sussex Otters and Rivers Partnership and the Butterfly Conservation Trust spoke at the events to explain the importance of specific scheme options for the various BAP target species HLS is aiming to conserve, particularly featuring tree sparrows and water voles.

The advice provided by Natural England and our partners at the two events resulted in 11 pre-application visit requests; 4 of those are now developing HLS applications, the remainder have commissioned Farm Environmental Plan surveys to shape their applications. Additionally, those applications received include the specific management options highlighted at the events as important for local target species.

Case study:

## Higher Level Stewardship on Commons

Money from the Rural Development Programme for England delivered through the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme plays a central part in securing biodiversity and improving the condition of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

This year Natural England secured agreements which increased the total of England's agricultural land in agri-environment schemes to 6.1 million ha (65% of the agricultural land area). Bringing common land under agreement makes a major contribution to our outcomes for the natural environment but presents a number of challenges.

We have been working with the Dawnay Estates and the North York Moors National Park Authority to bring 4,500 ha – or about 6,000 football pitches – of Danby Common into Environmental Stewardship. This is the first Common in the North York Moors

National Park to be brought into agreement and it will benefit from £2 million worth of support as a result. Common land agreements, like Danby, are especially complex as local people have a stake in the future of the moor. At Danby there is a Court Leet – a centuries old commons system. Local involvement and support is crucial. Over the next ten years, the funding will be used to regenerate moorland by introducing and carefully managing sheep, heather burning regimes and improving information for visitors. As there are a number of land managers involved, the money is paid to a nominated agreement administrator who acts on behalf of the Danby Moors Environmental Stewardship Scheme Partnership.

Yorkshire's moorland is iconic, much loved by locals and visitors, and provides some of the country's best Open Access opportunities. Most is protected for its

wildlife and landscape value; designated as either Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area or Special Area of Conservation. Its peaty soils also have a significant role in locking up carbon, which is vital in helping us to better manage climate change.

The moors are central to the local economy, helping to support farming and sporting businesses.

**Controlled sheep grazing helps to regenerate important heather moorland**



#### Partners





Camley Street Nature Park,  
King's Cross, London.

Outcome 4

## A **secure** environmental future

Decisions which collectively secure the future of the natural environment

## Why we are doing it

- Because the factors that affect the natural environment are complex and changing rapidly.
- To ensure the information and evidence is available to monitor, anticipate and plan for major changes that will affect the natural environment.
- To clarify our vision for the natural environment and engage people in debating the future choices this involves.

Walking at Adstone Hill, Shropshire.



## Highlights in our third year

- Successfully influenced the Climate Change Act, particularly the establishment of a new legal framework for delivering sustainable adaptation and influenced the EU's developing climate change policy, successfully achieving key amendments on adaptation in the European Parliament's report on climate change.
- Commissioned research, with Defra, looking at the non-market benefits of Environmental Stewardship, and the potential design and use of biodiversity offsets.
- Established an integrated horizon-scanning initiative with Defra Delivery Network, and produced the first synthesis report which combines futures findings from horizon-scanning and scenarios.
- Published a review of the role that land and marine managers can play as 'carbon managers' by protecting and enhancing vital carbon stores, especially in peatlands.
- Calculated that our current delivery of Environmental Stewardship reduces agricultural greenhouse gas emissions in England by 11% per year and so makes an important contribution to meeting the UK's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction target.
- Completed a synthesis of existing land use evidence and strategies, which identified gaps and issues and informed the Foresight project and our drafting of an initial land use strategy.
- Developed draft climate change adaptation strategies in four landscape Character Areas (Cumbria High Fells, The Broads, Shropshire Hills and Dorset Downs) to demonstrate how locally-based action on the ground can deliver a natural environment resilient to climate change.

## Case Study:

### Climate Change: Character Area Pilots

In March 2009 we published climate change adaptation strategies for four Character Areas; the Broads, Cumbria High Fells, Shropshire Hills and Dorset Downs. The reports identify local management responses that will better enable the natural environment, and our enjoyment of it, to adapt to changing climate conditions.

Each strategy identified a range of adaptation responses, but some of which were common to all areas. These included:

- improving the condition of existing habitats – for example, healthy blanket bog will sequester carbon as well as reducing flood risk;
- restoring lost and degraded habitats and ecosystems – for example, restoring functioning floodplains in the Norfolk Broads to cope with changes in rainfall patterns;

- extending existing habitats into new areas – for example, to allow species to colonise new areas in response to climatic changes; and
- adopting sensitive farming methods – for example, leaving vegetated buffer strips around fields to reduce the erosive impacts of climatic change.

We are now working with local partners to implement the strategies and the project is being extended across England into five more pilot areas. The experience gained will inform our approach to adaptation in the rest of England, in particular, providing valuable evidence to underpin the implementation of adaptation strategies that will be required by the Climate Change Act.

## Case Study:

### Carbon management by land and marine managers

During 2008, we reviewed how land and marine managers can protect England's natural carbon stores and whether the carbon market could pay for restoring degraded carbon-rich habitats.

We found that:

- peatlands are England's most important carbon store, containing at least 300 million tonnes, but they also emit significant amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> when they are degraded;
- England's lowland fens are losing between 3–5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year, which is a similar amount to annual emissions from UK cement production. We do not know how much carbon is being lost from the uplands; and
- peatland restoration will reduce carbon losses, but how much methane is emitted when they are re-wetted is uncertain. More research is needed

before carbon revenues could be generated on a large scale.

The report was launched by the Secretary of State at a major Natural England conference in November 2008 and we are already implementing the report's recommendations. For example, we are funding research by Durham University to measure greenhouse gas fluxes and working with Defra to develop a national greenhouse gas monitoring programme.

These initiatives will shape future policy and underpin the role of peat in any future carbon markets. On the ground, we are delivering climate change mitigation through peatland restoration projects funded by Higher Level Stewardship and by contributions to partnerships, such as Moors for the Future in the Peak District National Park and Peatscapes in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Peatland restoration work, Peak District

Partners





Natural England will be a **distinctive public body** committed to the environment and people

## What we strive to do

- Be independent and trusted.
- Build consensus and lead opinion.
- Act as a catalyst for others and take action ourselves.
- Develop our people so that they can realise their potential.

Cat Bells, Lake District National Park.





Wasdale, Cumbria.

## Highlights in our third year

- We have achieved significant recognition across a wide range of audiences through our advocacy during 2008/09, particularly through the launch of our 'State of the Natural Environment' report and our 'Manifesto for the Natural Environment'.
- Work to establish Natural England as an environmental leader progressed well during the year. Volume across all media has increased on last year by 73%. Prompted awareness with the public has risen from 21% to 29% in the year – the fastest increase in this index in any organisation by Ipsos MORI.
- We highlighted the impact of climate change in the Uplands at a successful conference for stakeholders.

- Our stakeholder survey has demonstrated that our evidence base continues to earn the trust of our stakeholders, with 71% agreeing that we take evidence-based decisions.
- We exceeded our cash efficiency target by 14% delivering £5.7m together with a Voluntary redundancy programme which achieved a £4m saving in 08/09.
- We have reorganised the way in which we process Environmental Stewardship payments. We are processing significantly more schemes with the same resources and can demonstrate productivity gains in 2008/09 in excess of £7m. 96% of Classic scheme payments (£98m) were paid by November – 10 weeks ahead of target.
- We have delivered a 30% (c£3.9m) reduction in the administrative burden placed upon our customers through a mixture of consolidation of schemes and through changing the way we work with our customers. We have received positive feedback following a BERR-led review of our compliance with the ‘Hampton Principles’ on better regulation.
- We achieved a £3m growth in external funding spread across 50 different projects for environmental improvements.
- We have achieved a 19.8% reduction in carbon against our 2007 baseline. This exceeds our interim target for 2008/09 of 10%. We achieved level 2 of the Government’s Sustainable Procurement Flexible Framework.

- We signed up to the Health and Safety Executive's sensible risk management principles and revised our Health and Safety Policy. The number of incidents have reduced by 16%.
- We invested in team leader, manager and executive development and introduced a framework of Natural England behaviours.
- Consolidated our Partnership Agreement with the Trade Unions at a national level, demonstrating a 5 times return in benefits for each £1 invested in the relationship.
- Established a network of Diversity Champions and Ambassadors who are playing a significant part in setting the pace for diversity improvements in Natural England. Achieved the 'Two Ticks' Disability symbol at our first attempt – assessors said our application and supporting processes were exemplary and would be a role model for future assessments.





Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

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