Nature Recovery Plan

The Biosphere has launched an ambitious new Nature Recovery Plan as part of our contribution to tackling the ecological emergency here in northern Devon

Aligning with the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the Prime Minister's pledge for 30% of the UK land to be protected by 2030. The plan includes five action plans which details the priorities for the key land types in the Biosphere.

SUMMARY

1.This plan is the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere's response to the global ecological emergency. It sets out the priority actions required from 2021-25 to move towards our 2030 Vision for nature's recovery across northern Devon. It covers the terrestrial, freshwater and the intertidal habitats of the Biosphere's core area, buffer and transition zones, while actions for the marine environment are set out in the Biosphere'sMarine Natural Capital Plan.

2.The plan addresses the root causes of nature's decline by prioritizing making more and better space for nature over 30% of the Biosphere in the areas where it will make most difference, and building nature's recovery into productive farming and forestry across the entire landscape as well as in towns and villages.It will help address the climate emergency through increasing natural resilience (adaptation) and carbon storage and sequestration (mitigation).

3.The plan presents actions to support communities and businesses, and particularly farmers and landowners/managers to be at the heart of nature's recovery. Responsibility for promoting delivery of the actions lies with the Biosphere's partners through its Nature Improvement Group which will monitor and report on implementation. Progress will be assessed annually and an evaluation will take place in 2025, when the plan will be fully updated for 2026-30. Meanwhile, the plan will remain a "living" document, being strengthened as new information becomes available.

4.The following five action plans detail the priorities for the key land types in the Biosphere. Priority actions within each plan include: a) safeguarding and enhancing existing areas of wildlife-rich habitats and restoring / wilding /creating new areas to make larger and better connected habitat networks; b) actions to enhance populations of priority or declining species (including Devon Special Species) and to reintroduce species that have been lost (subject to detailed feasibility studies and licensing); c) enabling actions through policies, regulations, incentives and community engagement; d) monitoring and research.

COAST:

●Restore wildlife-rich clifftop grassland, heath and scrub habitats.

●Improve dune habitats and increase populations of rare species by promoting dynamic

processes and controlling invasive plants.
●Achieve good water quality status for the Taw/Torridge estuary.
●Create or re-instate wildlife-rich dynamic coastal grazing marshes, particularly at Braunton and Chivenor Marshes; and create reed beds along the estuary.
●Promote conservation measures for coastal birds including the natural re-colonisation of the coast by choughs; sustain biosecurity on Lundy to support the ongoing recovery of seabirds and other ground nesting birds; facilitate the return of breeding white-tailed eagles to Lundy.
●Reduce human disturbance at all high tide estuary wader roosts; establish disturbance free zones around the estuary for breeding ringed plover, oystercatcher, curlew, lapwing and shelduck; and reduce seal disturbance at Morte Point.
●Pursue options to re-establish breeding ospreys and white storks around the estuary, and there-introduction of water vole at Braunton marshes and elsewhere.
●Safeguard the important roost of greater horseshoe bats at Braunton, address threats to the scribble lichen and fringed shield lichen at Berrynarbor; and consider re-introduction of the beach comber beetle if found to be extinct at Braunton Burrows and Woolacombe, its last sites in England.
●Promote measures to reduce disposal of plastics into the environment.

GRASSLAND AND ARABLE:

Almost all of the land covered by this action plan is being used for agricultural production. The focus is tosupport farmers with incentives and advice to: a) retain and manage existing areas of wildlife rich habitats; b) restore or convert some areas of their land back to wildlife rich habitat; c) integrate measures for nature’s recovery into the rest of their productive land. Specific priorities include:
●Ensure all existing high quality semi-natural grassland, heathland and bracken habitat is under favourable long-term management.
●Convert substantial areas of intensive grassland or arable land into habitats of higher wildlife value.
●Encourage in-field and boundary trees, including wood pasture and traditional orchards, following silvo-pasture and silvo-arable practices as appropriate.
●Take significant areas of land out of farming for wilding, targeting areas in the Less Favoured Area and those with high-risk soils.
●Encourage farms to move towards regenerative agriculture practices.
●Reduce or eliminate the use of chemical wormers and pesticides/biocides.
●Create wildlife ponds and scrapes; buffer hedges, rivers and ditch margins from the impact of fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide applications; and implement insect-and bird-friendly measures into both pasture and arable land.
●Introduce special conservation measures for key declining farmland species such as

breeding lapwing, curlew, harvest mouse, brown hare and broken-belted bumblebee.

TOWNS AND VILLAGES:

●Plant 10,000 new urban trees on public land by 2025 with the aim of doubling urban tree canopy cover by 2030.

●Manage road verges, urban waterways and the Tarka Trail for wildlife, and create new wildlifec orridors to link green spaces.

●Improve gardens, business premises, school grounds, churchyards and public spaces (parks etc) for nature by creating wildflower meadows or patches, ponds, log piles and small woodlands. Include features such as nest boxes, native trees and shrubs (such as the rare Devon whitebeam).

●Help declining swifts and house martins through nest box schemes, provide safe roosts for bats and help hedgehogs by providing hedgehog highways.

●Promote and practice minimal use or avoidance of pesticides, herbicides and peat-based products.

●Ensure that any new development leads to net nature gain through planning policy and adopting
Building with Nature
standards and best practices.Include provision for bats, swifts and house martins in housing development plans.

TREES, WOODLANDS AND HEDGES

●Increase tree canopy cover, by creating many new nature-rich woodlands and encouraging trees outside woodlands. Give emphasis to broadleaved expansion but including some conifers. Encourage transitional woody habitats including expanding woodland edges and scrub.

●Bring existing woodlands, including plantations on ancient woodland sites, into appropriate management to improve biodiversity.

●Control non-native invasive plants and take measures to reduce damage by deer and grey squirrels.

●Integrate more trees on farms through agroforestry (silvo-pasture and silvo-arable).

●Promote hedge creation and restoration to achieve at least 10km of hedge per square kilometre across enclosed parts of the Biosphere. Bring existing hedges into favourable condition for wildlife.

●Create or restore standard orchards that are managed for nature.

●Complete a feasibility study and preparations for reintroduction of pine marten and red squirrel

●Conserve Devon Special Species including hazel dormouse and hole-nesting birds (willow tit, pied flycatcher) where natural cavities are lacking; extend the distribution of Devon whitebeam

WETLANDS AND WATERBODIES

●Restore and re-naturalise riverine floodplains to create wildlife-rich mosaics of wetlands, scrub and wet woodlands, and establish natural buffer strips along river and stream corridors. Re-naturalise/wild areas of species-poor habitat on the Taw and Torridge headwaters.

●Protect, restore and create new wet woodlands, species-rich wet grasslands, ponds, scrapes and reed/sedge beds.

●Restore blanket bogs, mires and wet heathland on Dartmoor and Exmoor both for wildlife and as carbon and water stores.

●Reduce point source and diffuse pollution into rivers and streams and buffer them from road and urban run-off; strengthen citizen science and “eyes on the river” to track river quality.

●Improve river spawning habitat for salmon and other fish species by removing barriers to migration and making habitat improvements; promote voluntary 100% catch and release for river angling.

●Improve habitat connectivity to allow species like the marsh fritillary and narrow bordered bee-hawkmoth to spread; provide nest sites / boxes for willow tit in wet woodlands that lack natural nest sites.

●Reintroduce beavers and water voles in the Biosphere river systems working closely with land managers; supplement the remaining natural populations of freshwater pearl mussel through captive breeding; maintain healthy populations of the area’s iconic otters.

●Promote biosecurity measures for, and control of, non-native invasive species, including preventing further spread of the North American signal crayfish in the Torridge.

5.The plan does not attempt to cost the individual actions but recognizes that a blended stream of funding from different sources will be required for implementation (some of which is available now, and some which will emerge during the plan period). Some actions will require targeted project funding, and the identified partner organisations will work together to secure this. Innovative funding streams such as green finance, carbon and biodiversity trading are also expected to play an increasing role, topping up funds from more traditional sources such as existing and new agri-environment schemes, voluntary inputs and private financing