

# **DEVON ENVIRONMENT FUND**

## **SCOPING REPORT**

**May 2020**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Why Devon?

- Devon is the one of the largest counties in Britain by size and one of the least densely populated. It's predominantly rural with two coastlines, bordering the Atlantic and the Channel.
- It has twice as many tourism businesses than the national average and four times more farming. Conventional farming results in degraded soil, increased run-off, flooding, and biodiversity loss.
- Meanwhile, Devon's marine environment is suffering from industrial pollution, run-off, sewage, sea level rise, over-exploitation of fisheries, and plastic pollution – leading to degraded marine habitats.
- The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. To rectify this, experts recommend we return a third of all space on land and in the sea to nature.
- As a rural county with an abundance of space, Devon's goal should be higher. **An appropriately ambitious target would be for half of Devon's land and sea to be 'managed for nature' by 2030.**
- Increasing biodiversity in Devon would benefit three major sectors of the local economy:
  - **Good for tourism:** opportunity to run wildlife safaris, educate around nature, promote staycations and the value of our native wildlife, and tap into a renewed appreciation of nature since Covid-19.
  - **Good for agriculture:** farming with nature increases wildlife, carbon sequestration, and soil and crop quality; and reduces flooding, soil erosion, and pollution – better for wildlife and people.
  - **Good for fishing:** collaborative management of the fisheries for biodiversity gives fishermen more autonomy, they work less and catch more, and can then sell 'reserve seafood' for higher profits.
- Most Devonians are passionate about their natural environment because it's an important part of what makes their home special, so they want to protect it.
- There are many wonderful, grass roots community projects happening in Devon, but there's plenty of scope to make them far more numerous and help them to be more impactful.
- **The overarching goal of the Devon Environment Fund is to connect the funders with the 'doers'.** A little funding goes a long way to help these groups realise their goals, and enable them to expand or share best practice to replicate the benefits in neighbouring areas.
- While many environmental initiatives focus on single issues, the DEF intends to support projects that fall into three broad themes: landscape regeneration, river catchments, and marine conservation.
- The DEF will operate holistically, seeking opportunities to amplify positive impact and achieve multiple interconnected tangible outcomes for Devon's natural environment.
- Examples of projects the DEF is keen to support:
  - **Regenerative Agriculture:** Projects that support farmers to adopt regenerative farming practices to sequester carbon, enhance soil quality, prevent flooding and soil erosion, and increase biodiversity.

- **Rewilding:** Projects enabling landowners to experiment with rewilding initiatives, such as restoring meadows or reforesting via natural processes for more resilient, biodiverse woodlands.
- **Biodiversity:** Projects that reintroduce key species to their natural habitat to restore biodiversity, and projects that create and connect wildlife corridors on private and public land.
- **Blue Carbon:** Innovative marine permaculture or aquaculture projects that increase marine biodiversity, sequester carbon, and promote sustainable artisanal fishing practices.
- **Plastics:** Educational projects with tangible outcomes such as 'seabins' in ports and 'plastic fishing' ribs that collect waste from difficult-to-reach corners of coastline.
- **Carbon Audits:** Enabling local businesses to become carbon neutral/positive by reducing emissions and off-setting by funding local, tangible, nature regeneration/carbon sequestration projects.

### Why the Conservation Collective?

- The Conservation Collective (CC) has developed a toolkit for replicating a proven model of environmental philanthropy around the world. The model turbocharges the work of local environmental champions. It empowers communities through a bottom-up integrated approach, strengthening them in order to create long lasting change. It provides neutral alliances of relevant stakeholders, fostering collaboration among civil society, and sharing best practice.
- The funds in the CC connect those that care passionately about a place, with those working hardest to protect, sustain and restore it. By building clubs of people dedicated to protecting their patch, the CC has a track record of mobilising funding from those who might not always be traditional environmental funders. The local funds provide a proven and transparent channel for donors to see tangible changes brought about by their direct funding. They host annual events, and open an important dialogue between those who can bring funds, and often leverage their own personal networks to drive the success of local environmental agendas, and those on the ground best positioned to execute projects.
- Some examples of impact achieved by projects enabled by Conservation Collective funds:
  - **Ibiza & Formentera** - A Posidonia map app which has led to a reduction from 25% to 7.4% of damage caused by boats anchoring on the precious Mediterranean seagrass.
  - **St Vincent & The Grenadines** - A total ban on the killing of sea turtles and parrotfish. Increased protection for the endangered Pink Rhino Iguana and Union Island Gecko (CITES 2019).
  - **Aeolian Islands** - The removal of over ten tons of 'ghost nets' from the Tyrrhenian Sea in two years that were then transformed into Econyl yarn, an infinitely recyclable nylon used in fashion.
  - **Cyclades** - An educational programme focussed on sustainable fishing and creating an alternative income source through fishing tourism to 92 fishermen across 10 Greek islands.

### How you can help regenerate nature in Devon

You can make a meaningful difference and help restore Devon's beautiful natural environment by contributing funds to the DEF and/or designating land for DEF projects.

For more information please email [jade@conservation-collective.org](mailto:jade@conservation-collective.org) or visit [www.conservation-collective.org](http://www.conservation-collective.org).

## THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN DEVON

Tucked away on the South West peninsula, straddling two coastlines, Devon is one of the largest, least densely populated counties in Britain. Its diverse mix of landscapes encompasses two moorland National Parks, five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, one UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and a patchwork of woodlands, wetlands, meadows, hedgerows, rivers, and estuaries – many of which are designated SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and habitats of international importance.



Many globally threatened species are found locally, including the European eel, freshwater pearl mussel, short snouted seahorse, and pink sea fan. Additionally, the area is important for many of England's 'natural treasures' including Atlantic ferns, mosses, breeding sea birds, veteran trees, and wintering and passage water birds. It also provides a stronghold for rare species such as the greater horseshoe bat and dormouse.<sup>1</sup>

The quality of Devon's natural landscape has afforded it one of the largest visitor economies in Britain. There are twice as many tourism businesses in Devon than the national average, attracting visitor spend of almost £2.5bn per year and employing 12 per cent of the county's workforce.<sup>2</sup> People come to Devon for its spectacular coastlines, picturesque countryside, and exceptional locally grown artisanal food and drink, which is abundant due to its fertile soils and favourable climate. Devon's natural assets are vitally important to the local economy whilst under continuous pressure for change from development, changes in land management practices, and the effects of climate change.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.naturaldevon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Wildlife2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.radioexe.co.uk/news-and-features/local-news/report-reveals-state-of-devons-economy/>

Agricultural activity dominates Devon's rural landscape. The county has four times more farming than the national average,<sup>3</sup> which has contributed to the decimation of wildlife habitats. Since the 1950s, many of the county's trees, hedgerows, meadows, and wetlands have made way for large fields of 'green concrete' to accommodate conventional farming practices - such as mechanical and chemical farming, and intensive mono crops and grazing - resulting in degraded soil, increased run-off, flooding, and sharp declines in biodiversity.

During this period, Devon's marine environment has been adversely impacted too. Just 20% of Devon's estuaries and 66% of its coastal waters are now assigned 'good' status, the remaining are 'moderate'.<sup>4</sup> The main pressures on Devon's estuaries and coasts are industrial pollution, run-off and sewage contamination, sea level rise, over-exploitation of fisheries, and plastic pollution – all of which lead to degraded, fragmented, and lost marine habitats and reduced ecosystem resilience.

Skies full of birds, meadows thrumming with clouds of insects, and rivers and seas teeming with fish are now distant memories. Like the rest of the world, Devon is facing a nature and climate emergency that can be attributed to a culture that has uncoupled itself from the natural world. Forgetting humanity's long-standing reciprocal relationship with nature, we have prioritised short term convenience and profits over the long term health and vitality of interconnected ecosystems.

Despite this bleak picture, there are many bright spots of hope. We're experiencing a groundswell awakening; widespread recognition that thriving natural systems are crucial for our basic survival and an appreciation that spending time in nature is beneficial for our health, wellbeing, and community spirit. People are also making the connection between nature and climate change; gaining a new understanding of the multi-dimensional, interconnected benefits of restoring natural habitats – such as sequestering carbon, defending against floods, enhancing soil and water quality, and enabling biodiverse species to thrive - which in turn offers us the chance to connect with other species and experience deep feelings of joy, wonder, and awe.

## **SOLUTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Until now, most environmentalism has emphasised 'doing less harm' and 'being sustainable', but today's multiple crises have rendered these strategies redundant because they don't go far enough. Moreover, their focus on preventing negative activity failed to capture the imagination of the majority who preferred not to think about inconvenient truths.

Our climate and nature emergencies have provided the impetus for many more people to take action because humans love a deadline. The compelling concept of 'regeneration' – by proactively restoring natural ecosystems - has reached the mainstream, and is igniting passion and inspiring people from all sections of society to join the movement to repair the damage we've caused. Our research has shown there is strong demand for simple, practical ways people can get involved and make a difference, particularly when it's on their doorstep and they can see the tangible benefits of reviving nature for themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.naturaldevon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Landscape.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.naturaldevon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Water-Environment.pdf>

To reverse the UK's status as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world bold action is required. Experts advise we need to at least double the space we give to nature, increasing it to a third of all space on land and in the sea.<sup>5</sup> As a rural county with an abundance of green space, Devon's goal should be higher to compensate for more densely populated areas.

**An appropriately ambitious target would be for half of Devon's landscape and seascape to be 'managed for nature' by 2030.**

Key to enabling this shift is the UK Government's new Agriculture Bill which will introduce a new 'public money for public goods' approach. The Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM) will pay farmers in return for providing environmental benefits such as clean air, reductions in environmental hazards and pollution, thriving plants and wildlife, clean water, enhanced landscapes, and measures to minimise the effects of climate change.

While top-down legislation and projects delivered by national and local governments, large charities, and NGOs are vitally important for raising public awareness, influencing policy, and securing budgets to deliver long term strategies; their bureaucracy, overhead costs, and fixed ideas about outcomes can often inhibit their ability to respond with agility to issues on the ground.

Many small grass roots organisations have sprung up all over Devon to address a number of local environmental concerns. Run by people who are passionate about the state of the environment on their patch, who live and breathe the issues and have a vested interest in achieving maximum impact. A little funding goes a long way to help these groups realise their goals, and enable them to expand or share best practice to replicate the benefits in neighbouring areas.

As the nature and climate emergencies intensify, a growing number of people want to get involved in the solutions, with more of them drawn to the most inspiring, impactful, and rewarding activities that help revive and restore nature. Rewilding, reforestation, regenerative farming, and marine permaculture are among the top new aspirational trends. There is an opportunity to harness the enthusiasm of the younger generation in particular to reconnect with the land, discover more wholesome ways to feed themselves and their communities, and give back to nature.

Increasing biodiversity in Devon will benefit three major sectors of the local economy. It's good for tourism because it provides the opportunity to run wildlife safaris, educate around nature, promote staycations and the value of our native wildlife, and tap into the public's renewed appreciation of nature since the Covid-19 lockdown. It's good for agriculture because farming with nature increases wildlife, carbon sequestration, and soil and crop quality; while reducing flooding, soil erosion, and pollution – bringing many benefits for wildlife and people. It's also good for fishing because collaborative management of the fisheries for biodiversity gives fishermen more autonomy, once biodiversity has increased, they can work less and catch more, and then they can sell specially labelled 'reserve seafood' for higher profits.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://theecologist.org/2020/apr/06/restore-nature-and-wild-places>

Early signs suggest that Covid-19 has prompted even more people to take stock, re-evaluate their priorities, and see the value in simple things such as taking time to notice wild flowers and birdsong. There is now a greater recognition of the link between healthy nature and healthy humans. The anticipated economic fall-out from the pandemic will undoubtedly result in many people losing their livelihoods. This presents an opportunity for local organisations to step in, offering meaningful ways for members of their communities to channel their new-found time and energy into playing an important role in the massive regeneration effort required to restore nature's equilibrium.

### **WHY THE DEVON ENVIRONMENT FUND?**

With so many positive activities already happening in Devon and the opportunity for many more, the overarching goal of the Devon Environment Fund (DEF) is to connect people with funds who care about Devon with the 'doers' who want to protect and restore Devon's natural assets too.

While many environmental initiatives focus on single issues, the DEF intends to support projects that fall into three broad themes: landscape conservation, river catchments, and marine conservation. It will operate holistically, seeking opportunities to amplify positive impact and achieve multiple interconnected beneficial outcomes for Devon's natural environment.

In addition, the DEF will:

- Offer a positive vision of Devon's future to make it a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Be ambitious with its nature regenerating goals and willing to take risks with innovative, experimental solutions
- Identify projects that require assistance to achieve their potential, scale up, or replicate their successes in other areas – employing a simple grant-giving process to respond quickly to their needs
- Consider supporting organisations that may not qualify for funding via traditional routes who need help to continue their important work
- Give rocket power to grass roots organisations by providing what they need to succeed (e.g. funding for administrative support, marketing, events, and educational activities; core project costs; knowledge, tools and resources; providing a network to connect likeminded organisations, etc.) – a little goes a long way with organisations run by passionate people
- Seek regeneration projects in Devon, with very tangible carbon positive, nature restoring benefits
- Measure the impact of projects funded to discover where to best place future funds
- Be accountable and regularly report learnings and success stories to all stakeholders

### **The DEF Steering Committee is comprised of:**

Ben Goldsmith - Chair and Co-Founder of the Conservation Collective

Jade Brudenell - Director of the Conservation Collective

Simon Nicholls - Founder and MD of Devon Power Renewable Energy

Mitch Tonks - Chef, Restaurateur and Sustainable Seafood Ambassador

Andreas Kodell – Co-Founder of the Cyclades Preservation Fund and MD in banking and finance



## ABOUT THE CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE

The Conservation Collective is a network of local philanthropic funds focussed on protecting, preserving and restoring the natural environment. The funds secure annual commitments from people and businesses that have a strong local connection, for the distribution to the best local environmental initiatives.

In 2010, Ben Goldsmith created the Ibiza Preservation Fund with a small group of friends, which has supported some of the most effective environmental projects and campaigns on the island. Since then, working with Jade Brudenell, Ben has co-founded similar funds in Mallorca, Menorca, Aeolian Islands, Cyclades Islands, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Last year they launched new funds in Sri Lanka, Barbados, and Greece's Ionian Islands. The pipeline is ever growing, because the model is simple and effective.

The Conservation Collective network is the umbrella for all these funds, helping to ensure best practice, effective grant-making, and other efficiencies. The governance structure is simple. A local Executive Director manages each organisation on the ground: identifying and developing grants and raising funds. They are a direct link with the local communities, often providing ad hoc advice and support through a project's lifetime, driving the environmental agenda forward, and building capacity. Their local presence and knowledge, field experience, and passion to protect their home environment is a key part of the model's success.

Each fund has a small board or steering committee, which comprises donors who wish to be actively involved in guiding the strategy. These groups meet regularly (mostly on conference calls) to discuss and approve grants, and provide fundraising support by leveraging their own personal networks. There is a Chair who spearheads the group and acts as a mentor to the local ED.

Each fund is apolitical, independent, not for profit, and privately funded.

## PROJECTS ENABLED BY THE CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE

Here are some examples of impact achieved by other funds in the Conservation Collective network:

- **Ibiza & Formentera** - A Posidonia map app which has led to a reduction from 25% to 7.4% of damage caused by boats anchoring on the precious Mediterranean seagrass.
- **St Vincent & The Grenadines** - A total ban on the killing of sea turtles and parrotfish. Increased protection for the endangered Pink Rhino Iguana and Union Island Gecko (CITES 2019).
- **Aeolian Islands** - The removal of over ten tons of 'ghost nets' from the Tyrrhenian Sea in two years. The nets were then reclaimed and transformed into Econyl yarn, an infinitely recyclable nylon used in the fashion industry.
- **Menorca** - A pilot scheme which resulted in Ciutadella fish market making biodegradable materials for fish wrapping a requirement to having a stand. Mahon, the island's capital, is now considering doing the same.
- **Cyclades** - An educational programme focussed on sustainable fishing and creating an alternative income source through fishing tourism to 92 professional fishermen across 10 Greek islands.
- **Mallorca** - A reduction in the use of plastics in agriculture by swapping to bioplastics made from potato starch. In 2019 this saved 1550kg (62 linear km) of mulching plastic.

## PROJECTS THE DEVON ENVIRONMENT FUND COULD SUPPORT

Most Devonians are passionate about their natural environment because it's such an important part of what makes their home special, so they want to protect it.

There are already many wonderful, grass roots community projects happening in Devon, but there's lots of scope to make them far more numerous and help them to be more impactful.

Examples of projects the Devon Environment Fund is keen to support:

- **Regenerative Agriculture**
  - Projects that inspire and support farmers to adopt regenerative farming practices to sequester carbon, enhance soil and crop quality, prevent flooding and soil erosion, and increase biodiversity.
  - There is plenty of scope to expand local knowledge and action. The new Agriculture Bill's focus on 'public money for public goods' to deliver environmental land management will accelerate progress
- **Rewilding**
  - Projects that enable landowners to experiment with rewilding initiatives. 'More Meadows' is run as a passion project, sharing best practice to help others. With funding and administrative support there's scope to increase impact and return many more patches of land to vibrant meadow.
  - Also, educational projects that encourage and support more landowners to experiment with reforestation via natural processes rather than planting saplings - resulting in more natural, resilient, and biodiverse woodland; at lower cost and with no need for plastic tree guards.
- **Biodiversity**
  - Projects that reintroduce key species to their natural habitat, to rebalance biodiversity in wilder areas of woodland and along riverbanks, such as pine martens and beavers.
  - Also, projects that create and connect wildlife corridors on private and public land, along rivers, hedgerows, woodlands, etc.
- **Blue Carbon**
  - Innovative marine permaculture or aquaculture projects that increase marine biodiversity and sequester carbon, such as seaweed farms, off-shore shellfish farms, and seagrass restoration.
  - Also, projects that collaborate with fishermen to promote sustainable practices whilst delivering higher profits - so they work less and earn more – via a premium 'reserve seafood' label.
- **Plastics**
  - Advocacy and high visibility educational projects with tangible solutions such as the 'seabin' which is popular in ports for highlighting the issue of marine litter.
  - Also, 'Till the Coast Is Clear' collects plastic from difficult to reach corners of South Devon's estuaries and coastline via rib. With support, they could run more educational/sustainable tourism 'plastic fishing' trips, and launch more ribs to replicate the model along Devon's coastlines.
- **Carbon Audits**
  - Providing CO2 emission audits to help local businesses identify how to quickly become carbon neutral or even carbon positive by reducing emissions, increasing efficiency, and off-setting any difficult-to-eliminate emissions by funding local, tangible, nature regeneration and carbon sequestration projects.

## **HOW YOU CAN HELP REGENERATE NATURE IN DEVON**

If you would love to see strategic, targeted, tangible action to restore Devon's beautiful natural environment – on land, in the rivers and sea - you can make a meaningful difference by contributing to the Devon Environment Fund.

If you have land that you would like to manage for nature, we can link you with passionate knowledgeable people to help you with your nature restoration project, and help us achieve our goal of returning half of Devon to nature.

For more information please email [jade@conservation-collective.org](mailto:jade@conservation-collective.org) or visit [www.conservation-collective.org](http://www.conservation-collective.org)

*Report prepared by Amanda Keetley on behalf of The Conservation Collective, May 2020.*