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Reversing nature's decline and promoting equity in the green transition



Introduction

Nature in the UK is in decline. Since 1970 UK species have declined by 19% on average, and nearly 1 in 6 species are now threatened with extinction.¹ Most people connect with nature close to home but funding to manage our 27,000 urban parks and green spaces has been drastically reduced over the last 15 years while more modern housing developments are creating neighbourhoods with 40% less green space than those of previous planning periods.²

The UK is blessed with organisations working to stem this decline, to help nature recover and to ensure everyone has access to good quality green and blue spaces to support their health and wellbeing. Despite many successes, the long-term trend is in the wrong direction and more capacity and investment is needed in the face of a growing climate and nature crisis.

This will only be achieved if nature recovery becomes a national mission, embraced by people of all ages and backgrounds. To do this the nature sector needs to diversify. Too many people feel the environmental movement is not for them while many with a desire to help find it difficult to access opportunities.

New to Nature was created to test new approaches to addressing these issues.

³ State of Nature – Natural England (blog.gov.uk)

² Exposed: The collapse of green space provision in England and Wales | New Economics Foundation

What is New to Nature?

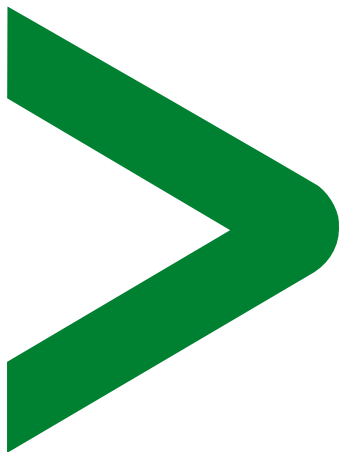
New to Nature is a national programme of paid work placements designed to boost the capacity of environmental organisations while delivering life-changing career opportunities for people from under-represented groups.

New to Nature has so far provided 95 work placements across more than 80 not-for profit employers in a range of landscape and nature roles, targeting young people who are disabled or from a minority ethnic or economically disadvantaged background.

The programme has been delivered through a partnership of Groundwork, Youth Environmental Service, The King's Trust, Disability Rights UK, and Mission Diverse. The first 95 placements were funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of celebrations to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the King's Coronation.

The New to Nature model is made up of the following elements.

- > **Varied opportunities hosted by committed organisations** – using a competitive expression of interest process to ensure placements are attractive and high quality.
- > **Targeted and inclusive recruitment** – implementing outreach strategies, building partnerships to attract applicants from priority groups and promoting best practice in recruitment.
- > **Waged work placements with financial support** – creating full time, 12-month roles, paid at the Real Living Wage, with a personal budget to address any barriers to work.
- > **Ongoing training and networking** – including an employment coach to help develop longer-term career aspirations, a training budget, and a peer development programme.
- > **Host capacity-building and networking** – a training programme and peer network, supporting organisations with their commitments to becoming more diverse and inclusive.
- > **Evaluation and learning** – gathering and disseminating feedback, evidence and learning to inform future practice across the sector.



A New to Nature Impact report highlighted that:

- > **86%** of New to Nature Trainees recruited were from 'priority groups', with **54%** from more than one priority group, demonstrating the intersectionality of characteristics and the multiple barriers this creates.
- > **92%** of New to Nature Trainees report that they are now confident of finding a job in the field they want to be in.
- > **88%** of Placement Hosts will make or have already made recommendations for change within their organisation based on their New to Nature experience.

Of the first **95** Trainees to complete their placements, **64%** are now in employment (either through the organisation who hosted their placement or in other roles), **6%** have achieved other outcomes (including progressing into education, training, or independent travel), and **30%** are actively searching for opportunities.

What has been learned?

From discussions with trainees and their host employers we are able to draw a number of conclusions.

There is appetite within the nature sector to address a lack of diversity and to make careers in nature more attractive and accessible.

Demand for New to Nature placements significantly outstripped the funding available, and employers engaged positively in our community of practice.

There is appetite amongst young people from under-represented groups to pursue a career in nature, but a range of barriers make this challenging. Many trainees told us that they have been seeking the opportunity to work in an environmental job but have identified few opportunities. Common barriers include a lack of paid work experience, the need (or perceived need) for technical qualifications, and a lack of mobility.

New to Nature has represented more than just a job for trainees and has delivered a range of outcomes for participants. Trainees reported increased confidence in their job prospects, improved skills, and improved wellbeing.

Delivering a coordinated national programme has helped maximise impact.

Trainees have benefited from a core learning programme, regional meetings, peer consulting, and joint celebrations, establishing mutual support mechanisms and building lasting networks, and employers have embraced an ethos of shared endeavour to change perceptions about the sector.

The nature sector requires further support to embed and accelerate change.

Lack of resources and low staff turnover present barriers to diversifying the sector, particularly amongst smaller organisations. 95% of New to Nature host organisations would like to continue to offer New to Nature placements, but many can't do that without wages being subsidised.

What needs to happen next?

The nature sector needs to increase its capacity and diversity if we are to reverse nature decline in the UK. Creating accessible pathways into nature jobs has potential to deliver high quality careers for people who are currently under-represented in the sector. A more representative nature workforce will, in turn, help encourage a wider variety of people to connect with and benefit from nature, helping to address current inequalities.

What's more, investment in building a workforce with nature skills will support other growing sectors of the economy. Nature matters to the way we manage our water supply, generate our energy, produce our food and construct new housing developments. Bringing new talent into these sectors with the core skills they need to progress is an urgent priority.

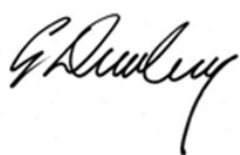
Unlocking this potential requires action on three fronts.

The Nature Sector

- > We need to create more genuinely entry level positions – both for young people and career changers – opening up pathways into the sector.
- > We need to listen to feedback about barriers to recruitment, simplifying our processes, working harder to reach new audiences and removing unnecessary obstacles such as the insistence on qualifications or the expectation of undertaking voluntary work.
- > We need to continue collaborating and sharing learning to ensure good practice is embedded across the sector and larger organisations are sharing power and resources with more specialist groups, in particular those led by people from under-represented groups.

Funders and supporters

- > Charitable funders should create an expectation that environmental organisations create entry-level roles or traineeships when delivering funded programmes, similar to the 'social value' requirements placed on businesses bidding for public contracts.
- > This needs to be accompanied by a recognition that trainee wages are a legitimate and important cost in funding proposals.
- > Businesses should consider how they might collaborate with each other and with the nature sector to support the wage cost of traineeships as part of their ESG commitments.
- > Core funding is required to support the infrastructure costs of a coordinated programme, ensuring trainees are effectively recruited, supported and are able to progress in their careers beyond the first year.



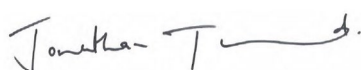
Graham Duxbury
CEO, Groundwork UK



Kamran Mallick
CEO, Disability Rights UK



Billy Knowles
Director, Youth
Environmental Service



Jonathan Townsend
CEO, The King's Trust



Cleo Morris
Company Director,
Mission Diverse

Governments and mayors

- > The need for more nature-based jobs was highlighted in the recommendations of the Green Jobs Delivery Plan developed under the last government – this plan should be reviewed and published as a resource for the wider sector.
- > Delivering a 'National Nature Service' should be a priority for the new government as part of its National Wealth Fund, Jobs Bonus and Youth Guarantee.
- > Nature jobs and waged placements should be a priority within national employment support programmes and regional plans for skills and growth.

Only by combining our efforts will we transition to a low-carbon, nature-rich economy whilst ensuring no-one is left behind.

Endorsed by

Jamie Agombar	Executive Director	SOS-UK
Martin Baxter	Deputy CEO	IEMA
Charlee Bennett	CEO	Your Park Bristol & Bath
Richard Benwell	CEO	Wildlife & Countryside Link
Harry Howell	Director of Land and Nature	National Trust
Matthew Bradbury	Chief Executive	Nene Park Trust
Helen Brown	Trust Manager	Water of Leith Conservation Trust
Paul Burton	Chairperson	The Garden Gate Project
Sam Butler	Head of Communications	CPRE
Lisa Chilton	Chief Executive Officer	National Biodiversity Network Trust
Caty Collier	Interim Chair	Green Synergy
Jim Cokill	Director	Durham Wildlife Trust
Steven Cotton	Founder and CEO	Grow UK
Susan Davies	CEO	Scottish Seabird Centre
Steven Donagain	CEO	Hill Holt Wood
James Dymond	Director	Bradgate Park Trust
Paula Grant	Chief Officer	Vountary Action North East Lincolnshire
Sally Hayns	CEO	CIEEM
Amelia Health	Co-Director	Forth Rivers Trust
Dr Keith Hendry	Chair of Trustees	Mersey Rivers Trust
Ed Ikin	Chief Executive	The Ernest Cook Trust
Steve Jones	Director of Fundraising & Operations	ORCA
Jonathan Louis	Co-Director	Forth Rivers Trust
Sue Medway	Director	Chelsea Physic Garden
Virginia Morandi	Director	Fruit Works Co-Operative
Kate Norgrove	Executive Director of Conservation, Advocacy and Policy	WWF UK

Dr Rose O'Neill	Chief Executive	Campaign for National Parks
Gill Perkins	CEO	Bumblebee Conservation Trust
Wendy Robinson	Chair	The Aire Rivers Trust
Quinn Runkle	Director of Education	SOS-UK
John Sanders	Co-CEO	Mersey Rivers Trust
Sheila Sharp	Director of Engagement & Fundraising	Northumberland Wildlife Trust
Dr Jo Smith	CEO	Derbyshire Wildlife Trust
Beccy Speight	CEO	RSPB
Kit Stoner	CEO	Bat Conservation Trust
Ali Talbot	Chief Executive	Green Synergy
Gemma Tandy	Head of Professional Programmes	Royal Horticultural Society
Pete Tatham	CEO	Hyde Park Source
Jessica Thompson	CEO	City of Trees Trust
Jo Webb	Chair of Trustees	Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
Nikki Williams	Director - Campaigning and Communities	Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
John Witchell	Chairman	Ulster Wildlife



To find out more about Groundwork,
please get in touch:

www.groundwork.org.uk

Groundwork UK
Suite B2, The Walker Building
58 Oxford Street
Birmingham, B5 5NR

- ☎ 0121 236 8565
- ✉ info@groundwork.org.uk
- ✕ [@groundworkUK](https://twitter.com/groundworkUK)
- f [/groundworkUK](https://www.facebook.com/groundworkUK)
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