



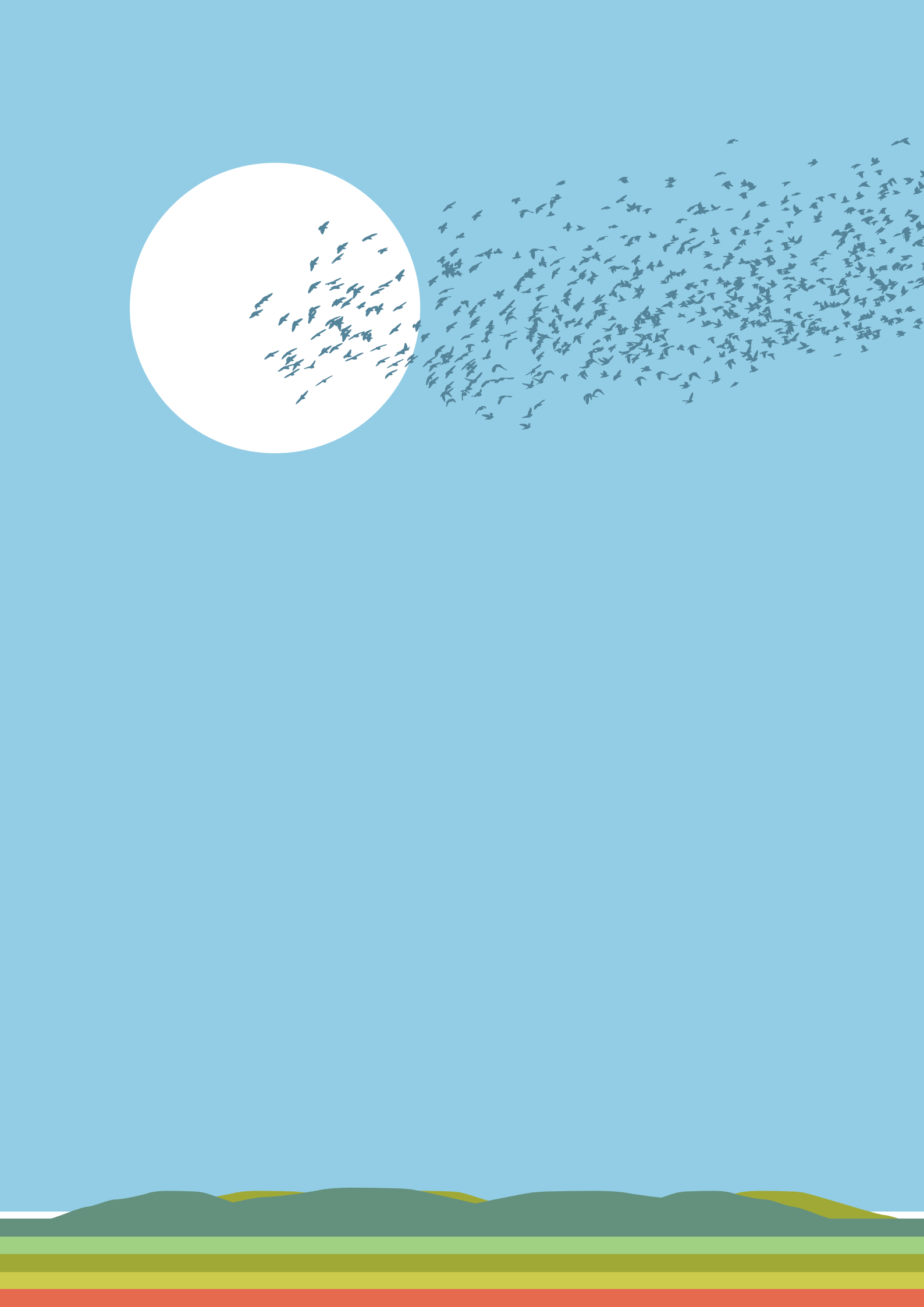
Towards a

# *Wilder* **SOMERSET**



*Wilder*  
**FUTURE**







# Our vision for a Wilder Somerset

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**O**ur vision for Somerset is a county teeming with wildlife valued by everyone. We see landscapes full of flowers, accompanied by a chorus of birdsong and buzzing with insects. We envisage habitats, green spaces and natural places of all shapes and sizes that are enjoyed, shared and cared for by people and their communities, woven together into a rich, living tapestry – an environmental life support network for the entire county. We picture a healthy and resilient environment where the needs of wildlife, people, and local economies are balanced in a way that will support our lives now, and those of our children in the

future. The natural world is at the heart of our wellbeing and prosperity; we depend on it and it depends on us. To realise this vision we all need to do more, and faster.

Somerset Wildlife Trust is coming to the end of its five year strategy. Moving forwards we want to ensure that we use all our resources wisely so as to have the greatest impact for the natural environment of our beautiful county and our wildlife. We would like all our key stakeholders, decision makers, members and supporters to help us develop a new strategy that will achieve this. We want to understand better how we can support people to take bigger steps on a shared journey towards a Wilder Somerset.

## County scale challenge, within the global picture

Somerset is a county blessed with a variety of stunning landscapes home to an enormous variety of wildlife. We are lucky to have five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty wholly, or in part in Somerset, and of course the wild landscapes of Exmoor National Park. We have recently completed a biotope (habitat) survey of Somerset's Brilliant Coast and have found a huge range of amazing wildlife from Strawberry Anemones to Small-spotted Catsharks. The internationally renowned wetlands of the Somerset Levels and Moors provides habitats for a diverse array of breeding waders, Water Voles, eels, a carnivorous sundew plant and many thousands of invertebrate species. These amazing natural spaces however are surrounded by wildlife-poor areas where wildlife is struggling.

Globally nature is in trouble. Biodiversity is declining rapidly across the world with a recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services highlighting 1 million species at risk of extinction. In the UK 56% of all species (plants, invertebrates, mammals, fungi, birds, trees) are in decline.

Despite huge efforts by ourselves and other statutory and NGO partners, biodiversity and, more critically bioabundance (the number of species) continues to decline across Somerset in all but a few protected sites, and even wildlife in protected sites is threatened by the loss of species in the wider landscape. There are fewer wild places, and those that exist are smaller, less wild and

more polluted, making it harder for wildlife to survive.

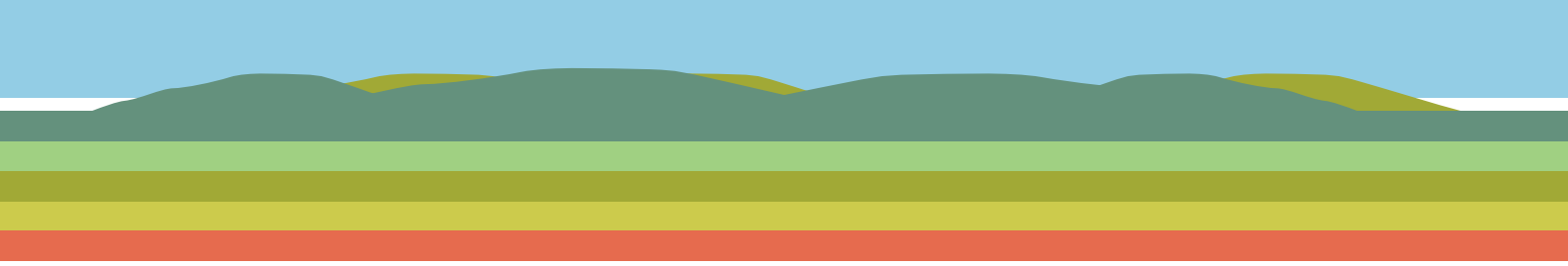
Climate breakdown is exacerbating these pressures, further threatening the survival of many species. We're living in a warming world which is triggering extreme weather events, sea level rise, slow but sure changes in life-cycle timings and altered species distribution and migration patterns. We simply need to do more. And faster.

## Somerset Wildlife Trust – What kind of organisation do we need to be?

Somerset Wildlife Trust is the only organisation in the county focused solely on protecting and improving habitats to benefit wildlife and people. We believe people are a part of nature; everything we value ultimately comes from it and everything we do has an impact on it. The natural world is valuable in its own right, and is the foundation of our wellbeing and prosperity; we depend on it and it depends on us.

Somerset Wildlife Trust is one of 46 independent charities working together as a movement to achieve our collective vision of people close to nature, with land and seas rich in wildlife. We are a science-led movement focused on restoring habitats to support a wide range of wildlife and restore natural processes that are essential for healthy landscapes, and provide vital services such as clean air and water, food, carbon absorption and flood alleviation.

Somerset Wildlife Trust hosts the Somerset Environmental Records Centre and we use the data collected by a wide



range of recorder groups, in addition to our own data collected at our reserves, to identify the species, habitats and areas where our work can have the most impact for nature. We work with a wide range of partners already but we know that for nature to recover in Somerset, for us to reverse the decline in biodiversity and for Somerset to adapt to the challenges of climate change, we have to develop a strategy that will involve everyone from individuals and local authorities, to businesses, farmers and environmental organisations. We can't do this alone.

## Taking the big steps Towards a Wilder Somerset

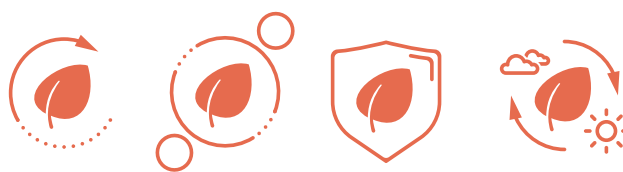
**If we were to choose two key priorities that would have the greatest impact to create a wilder Somerset, what might they be?**


- Adopting wildlife-friendly farming practices.
- Bringing more land under the protection of conservation organisations.
- Creating more opportunities for children and young people to enjoy and learn about the natural world.
- Providing more opportunities for people of all ages to be inspired by nature.
- Developing resilience to climate change by joining up landscapes across Somerset (e.g. nature-friendly gardens, hedgerows, nature reserves and farmland).
- Improving our towns for wildlife.
- Limiting threats to wildlife and wild places by encouraging environmentally sensitive

and sustainable development.

- Protecting our seas and marine and coastal wildlife.
- Building a county-wide movement of individuals, groups, businesses and politicians taking positive action for nature and to put nature at the heart of decision making.
- Addressing water quality issues through advice and holding authorities to account.
- Developing Nature Recovery Networks, including by joining up landscapes across Somerset, to enable nature to recover and move through the county.
- Exploring a rewilding approach; stepping back from the over-management of our countryside and allowing nature to return.

**The consultation process is far reaching but we will be exploring four main areas, three of which are aligned with our core charitable objects and one which affects them all, climate breakdown.**





# 1



## Helping **nature recover** across Somerset's landscape

Somerset Wildlife Trust manages 68 nature reserves across the county covering 1,700 hectares of land. Our reserves provide a vital refuge for a wide range of wildlife in Somerset's connected landscape; but we know that, while vitally important, it will **not be possible to reverse the declines of wildlife by protecting these sites alone.**

**I**t costs us over £700,000 to manage our nature reserves annually. At present over £500,000 of this comes from EU Higher Level Stewardship and Basic Payment Schemes that will no longer be available after Brexit. It is currently unclear what will replace the EU schemes – we need to prepare for potentially lower funding levels in the future.

If we are going to reverse decline and put nature into recovery we need to challenge ourselves to understand where we can best invest our time, effort and resources to have the greatest impact. To fully restore natural processes that better manage flood water, absorb carbon and provide space for wildlife, nature reserves cannot function in isolation.

We must increase the amount and quality of wild places and ensure that they are joined up, allowing wildlife to thrive and travel freely across wildlife-rich landscapes. Creating space for nature allows populations of species to thrive. We only focus on an individual species when they are particularly at risk and we are clear we can have an impact by intervening.

If we are going to succeed in restoring the natural environment at the scale and at the pace necessary, we are going to have to change some of the ways we operate and we want to know your thoughts. Our nature reserves are vital core areas in the landscape but they are increasingly isolated as the biodiversity of the surrounding land deteriorates. We will have to decide whether to invest our time and resources in protecting isolated sites or focus on improving the wider landscape to improve the number of species everywhere; we can do this through increased advice services, delivering improvements on third party land and by buying low quality land for biodiversity and allowing nature to return.

## Where should Somerset Wildlife Trust invest our resources to have the greatest impact for wildlife in Somerset?

### How would you rank these in order of priority?

- Managing our current nature reserves.
- Prioritising our work on the most biodiverse yet most threatened landscapes.
- Focusing our work in the wider landscape outside of the protected sites where there is greater opportunity to increase biodiversity.
- Buying low quality land for biodiversity near to our reserves and let nature return.
- Working at a landscape scale, engaging landowners to manage their sites for wildlife and connecting spaces for nature.
- Supporting, inspiring and engaging others (individuals, businesses, farmers, community groups) to manage their land to benefit wildlife.
- Provide delivery services to other landowners to improve their land for biodiversity.
- Supporting and engaging with the areas that have the most outstanding wildlife such as National Parks and AONBs that have their own convening authorities.
- Prioritising work where no other leadership body (ie. AONB or National Park) is currently working.



# 2



## Inspiring and **connecting** **people** with nature

We know we cannot reverse the decline in biodiversity in Somerset without the support of the people who live and work here, yet as people **we are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature.**





*“No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”*

– SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

**W**e know that nature is good for us. Research shows that a healthy wildlife-rich natural environment is vital for a healthy human population. Children learn better when they spend time outdoors and we rely on nature for our food, water, clean air and many other services. Mostly these services go unrecognised and are taken for granted. To achieve real and lasting change we must make sure everyone feels connected to nature and values the natural world for their own sakes, and to protect and improve our environment for people and for wildlife.

We need to take people on a journey to explore and discover the wonders of Somerset's natural world for themselves and to act. We already have a large community of people working with Somerset Wildlife Trust, ranging from volunteers on our reserves and elsewhere, to our Area Groups connecting with people locally, to over 20,000 members, Patrons and legators; from our corporate partners to the vast recording community that provide us with the essential data needed to target our work.

We need to identify where we, as Somerset Wildlife Trust, can achieve the greatest impacts to inspire, engage and connect with Somerset's communities and we want to know your thoughts. We must make choices about our engagement programme; we could focus on delivering inspiring experiences (educational sessions, events programmes) in targeted areas or we could support communities, teachers and businesses to do this themselves.

Somerset Wildlife Trust, like most Wildlife Trusts, was established by a group of volunteers who cared passionately about the state of the natural world in Somerset. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Trust from our office volunteers, to our volunteer wardens and groups helping us manage our reserves to our Wildlife

Watch leaders, the recording community and Area Groups. Working together with this wide range of committed individuals towards shared goals, and inspiring new people to join us as volunteers must be a key focus for the Trust to achieve the greatest impact for nature.

High quality experiences in nature can inspire, change attitudes, motivate action and ultimately be a critical part of the movement to help restore our wild places and wildlife. Our reserves provide a great opportunity for people to experience nature, and we need to consider how we can give visitors the best experience possible. We also need to make sure that nature is on everyone's doorstep whether they are in the heart of the Levels or the heart of Taunton.

### **Where can Somerset Wildlife Trust have the greatest impact in engaging, inspiring and connecting communities to take action for nature?**

#### **How would you rank these in order of priority?**

- Providing more practical conservation volunteering opportunities.
- Supporting community groups to work with us towards our shared goals through training, fundraising support and a shared vision.
- Investing in the support and development of our Area Groups to engage more people in their communities.
- Providing more educational experiences for children and families.
- Campaigning for more environmental education as part of the national curriculum.
- Supporting communities to engage in the planning system to stand up for nature.
- Supporting communities to create and manage wild spaces where they live.
- Supporting wildlife gardening across the county.
- Creating wildlife experiences on people's doorsteps.
- Bringing people to our nature reserves to discover the wonders of the natural world themselves.
- Improving the visitor experience on our nature reserves with facilities such as toilets, cafés, shops, cycling and walking routes.
- Opening an environmental education centre for schools and colleges to visit with a full education programme.
- Running a wide ranging events programme providing opportunities for people of all ages to develop skills and understanding about Somerset's wildlife.
- Providing opportunities for people to improve their health and wellbeing through connecting with nature.



# 3



## Standing up for Nature

**Wildlife and wild places across the county are under a wider threat** from issues such as damaging agricultural practices, including increased pesticide use and intensive dairy farming, and rising household numbers, from approximately 244,000 in 2019 to 285,000 in 2041\*.

\*ONS 2016-based household projections.

**T**o restore nature at scale in Somerset, our core focus, it is vital that we work with Somerset's local government, businesses, economic and political leaders to highlight the value of nature in Somerset in ways that are relevant to them. Understanding the social and economic importance of nature is a good way to encourage strong leadership for Somerset's natural environment.

To make a truly catalytic change in the way people think about and stand up for nature will require a shift of emphasis for the Trust. Environmental success happens when people work together to achieve it, for example the campaign led by the Wildlife Trusts to establish a network of Marine Protection Zones nationally has only been possible due to widespread public support and engagement with MPs. We believe we need to mobilise support across the county to create an effective movement for wildlife.

## How can Somerset Wildlife Trust most effectively Stand up for Nature?

### How would you rank these in order of priority?

- Campaigning for national and local policies that set clear targets for biodiversity and recovering nature at scale (strong Environment Act, Agriculture Bill).
- Engaging proactively with the planning process to ensure nature is at the heart of decision making and developments.
- Working with the farming community to support and identify wildlife-friendly farming practices.
- Providing advice and information to individuals to take action in their own lives and at work to stand up for nature.
- Demonstrating the value and importance of the natural environment to Somerset's decision makers and to the economy.
- Creating a movement for change through a network of Nature Champions willing to stand up for wildlife locally and supporting each other.
- Working with partners to explore new ways to invest in our landscapes that support realistic, sustainable and long-term funding models for nature's restoration.
- Supporting and training communities to protect their local wildlife sites and stand up for nature.

## How would you get involved in creating a Wilder Somerset?

### Which of these would you choose to do?

- Standing up for wildlife by engaging with your MP and local decision-makers.
- Engaging with the planning process to support environmentally friendly developments.
- Volunteering for Somerset Wildlife Trust.

- Organising local activities in your area to connect people with nature.
- Managing community spaces for the benefit of nature in your community.
- Supporting Somerset Wildlife Trust at work by fundraising, becoming a corporate member or exploring other ideas through your employer.
- Creating space for nature at work.
- Becoming a Nature Champion for Somerset Wildlife Trust in your local area and community by:
  - Building your identification skills & recording your local wildlife;
  - Fundraising for Somerset Wildlife Trust;
  - Giving talks about wildlife and the Trust;
  - Running wildlife walks;
  - Supporting Somerset Wildlife Trust Area Groups.

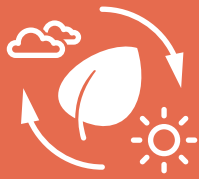
## How can Somerset Wildlife Trust best support you to work towards a Wilder Somerset?

### Which of these would be best for you?

- Providing training sessions on engaging with the planning system.
- Providing practical conservation training.
- Offering a wide range of volunteering opportunities.
- Providing advice on managing land in a wildlife friendly way.
- Offering paid for services to deliver improvements to your land for wildlife (create a pond, bring woodland into good management, create a wildlife area).
- Delivering an environmental education programme for children.
- Delivering an environmental education programme for adults.
- Providing ideas, advice and support for you to manage your garden and land for wildlife.
- Offering a range of inspiring events and activities to build your knowledge and skills about Somerset's wildlife.



# 4



## Climate Change



Globally we are facing two inter-connected environmental crises: a climate emergency, declared by the UK Parliament and all county and district councils in Somerset; and **an ecological emergency with over one million species at risk of extinction.**

**C**limate change puts the health of our natural ecosystems at risk; increased drought and increased flooding combined with higher overall temperatures will inevitably change, and already is changing, the types and varieties of species that thrive in Somerset. We already know that some species hibernating patterns are changing, and some invertebrates life cycles are no longer synchronised with the bird species that depend on them. In the coming years we will face stark choices about building a resilient environment that is able to adapt to the changing climate or trying to preserve the species and landscapes we currently have. It may not be possible to keep some species thriving in the county as a result of inevitable climate change. We must face this reality which may mean choosing not to fight the inevitable. We must be honest about these choices and together agree how to adapt to a changing climate that means Somerset has wildlife-rich landscapes for future generations to enjoy.

As a mainly low-lying county, Somerset is one of the places in the UK on the front line of climate change that will be significantly impacted by sea level rises, storm events and droughts. We must engage with decision makers to consider a long-term vision for Somerset that adapts to climate change considering nature, infrastructure, housing and the economy.

Climate change mitigation means actions to reduce or prevent emissions of greenhouse gases. These actions can be technological; renewable energies, sustainable transport, sustainable agricultural practices or natural through restored healthy functioning ecological systems (woodlands for instance) that suck greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere.

Climate change adaptation refers to actions taken to adjust to a warming world and reduce the risks. Examples of adaptation include changing building design, focusing on different crops with better chance of survival, or preparing for rising water levels with flood defences. Natural adaptation methods improve the resilience of our ecosystems: well-functioning wetland habitats including making space for water on floodplains can provide natural flood risk reduction and planting trees in our towns and cities to provide much needed shade.

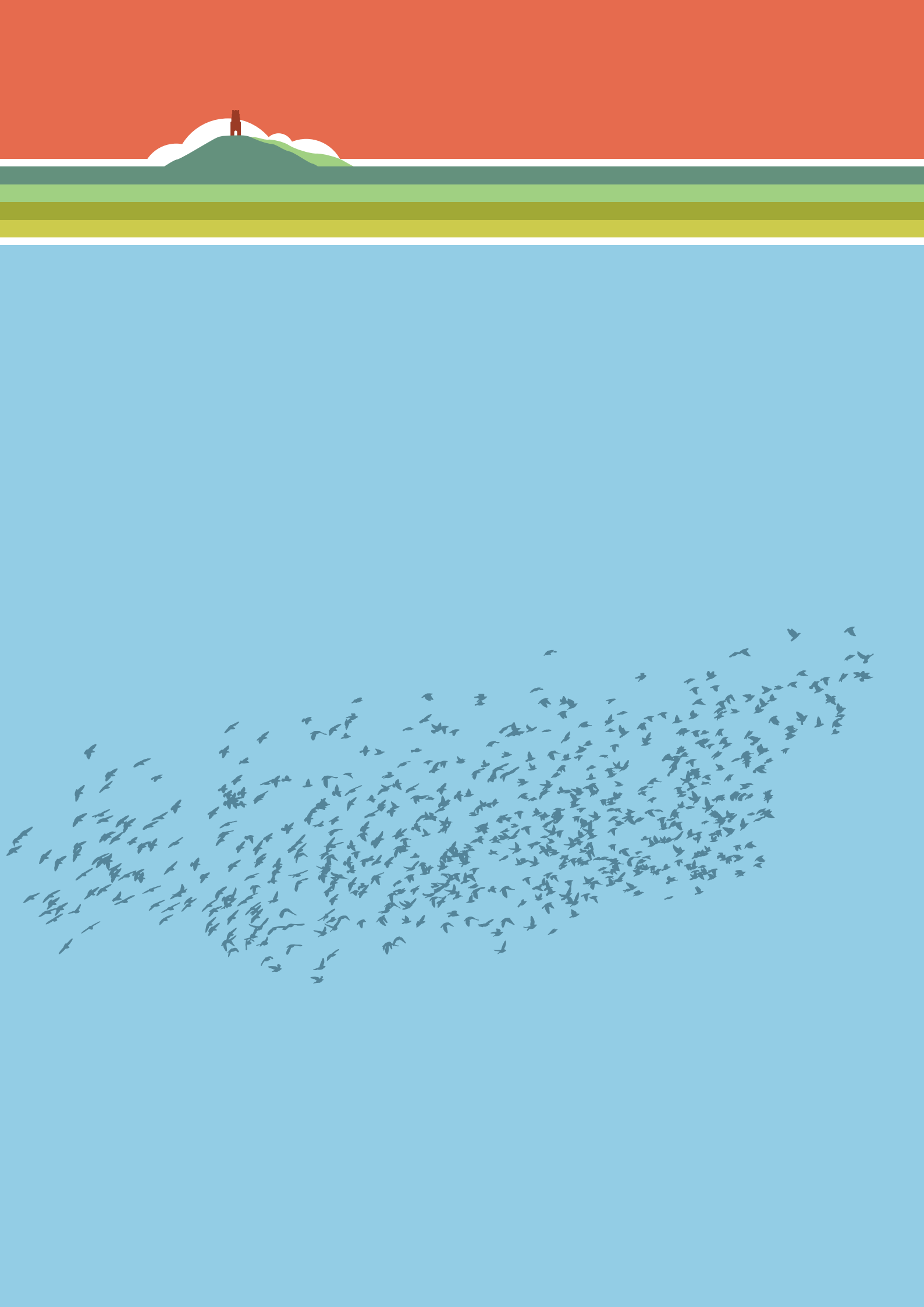
Whether aiming to mitigate against climate change or adapting to a changing climate, investing in nature's recovery at a landscape scale will have significant multiple benefits.



## Where do you think Somerset Wildlife Trust should focus its efforts to provide positive solutions to climate change, for the greatest impact across the county?

### How would you rank these in order of priority?

- Creating, restoring and managing landscapes and habitats that can capture carbon – wetlands, woodlands, saltmarsh, urban greening.
- Building resilience for our wildlife populations and vulnerable habitats by creating a strong network of well joined green spaces across the county so wildlife can move freely.
- Campaigning at a local and national government level to lobby for better regulation and funding with regards to sustainable agricultural and development policy.
- Working with farmers to encourage and support them to farm with wildlife and pollinators in mind, manage land in a sustainable way, to contribute positively as part of a nature recovery network, and to help provide natural landscape resilience to climate change.
- Encouraging members, supporters, and the public to improve the biodiversity of their own green space irrespective of size.
- Creating a next generation of wildlife and environmental campaigners and guardians through education programmes aimed at youth audiences and by providing education, training and leadership opportunities.
- Preparing our reserves for the climate changes that are inevitable by adapting habitats to form climate resilient ecosystems.
- Creating a county wide biodiversity and carbon offsetting option for investment in natural solutions to climate change from activities that continue to emit carbon.







# We must be bold, determined and positive

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We know that we must be bold in our approach and take action that will have positive and transformational impact on Somerset's natural environment. Somerset Wildlife Trust will take direct action to restore our natural world, but we cannot do it alone. We will continue to work in partnership and develop new collaborative approaches. We must inspire

action, engage others and support you. Collaboration is vital. **You** are vital.

Please share your thoughts with us about how Somerset Wildlife Trust can work to achieve the transformation we need to meet the dual challenges of the ecological and climate crises, and how we can work with and best support you.

Please go to: **[somersetwildlife.org/wildersomerset](https://somersetwildlife.org/wildersomerset)** to participate in our Consultation survey.

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