

Environment Secretary to set out plans to restore nature and build back greener from the pandemic

- Speech will include a new world-leading target on species populations for 2030 aimed at halting species decline.
- Action plan to treble tree planting by the end of this Parliament will be backed by over £500 million of climate finance.

Plans to boost biodiversity, protect our peatlands and create new woodlands will be set out today by the Environment Secretary, George Eustice, in a speech outlining the government's ambitions to restore nature and safeguard our environment for future generations.

Speaking from Delamere Forest, he will announce new measures to tackle climate change and the biodiversity crisis and deliver our net zero commitment, including steps to take forward recommendations from the Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity.

He will also announce amendments to the Environment Bill, including a historic new legally-binding species target for 2030 which will drive action to halt the decline of nature and wildlife.

The Environment Secretary is expected to say:

We will be amending the Environment Bill to require an additional legally binding target for species for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature.

This is a huge step forward, and a world leading measure in the year of COP15 and COP26 as we build back greener from the pandemic. We hope that this will be the Net Zero equivalent for nature, spurring action of the scale required to address the biodiversity crisis.

Further details of the Government's new peat action plan will be announced, setting out a framework to improve the management, protection and restoration of both our upland and lowland peatlands. As England's largest carbon store on land, peatlands play a vital role in trapping carbon, helping to control flooding and encouraging plants and vegetation that act as homes for wildlife, but when damaged, for example when mined for compost, they can end up emitting their carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

A new Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme will support the restoration of 35,000 hectares of degraded peatland in England, backed by over £50 million between 2021 and 2025.

The Environment Secretary will also confirm that the Government will ban sales of peat products by the end of this Parliament, subject to public consultation this year.

Plans to treble tree planting rates in England during this Parliament will be funded through £500 million from the Nature for Climate Fund while a major new multi-million pound tree planting grant – the England Woodland Creation Offer – will provide greater financial incentives for landowners and farmers to plant and manage trees.

The Environment Secretary is also expected to say:

Today, I am also outlining measures to better protect our existing trees and woodland and set us on the path to ensure that we have at least 12% of woodland cover by the middle of the century.

It is our ambition that all woodlands in England will improve the environment, acknowledging that our woods and trees are vital habitats. The iconic oak tree alone supports 2,300 species, of which 326 are dependent on oak trees for their survival. Trees are also important for sequestering carbon. Indeed woodlands currently sequester about 4% of the UK's gross emissions.

At least three new community forests will be created through a new programme, Trees for Climate, to allow more people to be closer to nature and enable the planting of 6,000 hectares of new woodland by 2025, building on the 500 hectares planted in the last year.

To tackle the loss of native species in this country a new Species Reintroduction Taskforce will take forward work around the reintroduction of species which have been lost to England – such as wildcat – and the introduction of declining species into new areas to help populations recover. This could include the reintroduction of beavers in some parts of England. The Government will publish a consultation this summer on its approach to this and the management of beavers in the wild.

The Taskforce will bring together experts, landowners and NGOs to share knowledge, assess and prioritise species for reintroduction and to develop partnerships for delivering high-quality projects.

Also making speeches today are Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England and Sir William Worsley, Chair of the Forestry Commission.

Natural England Chair, Tony Juniper, said:

A new target for Nature recovery enshrined in law will be a powerful new driver for coordinated action, as was found on cutting greenhouse gas emissions following the passage of the Climate Change Act. Meeting a stretching Nature target can be done, so long as we can join up different policy areas, such as farming, housing

development and infrastructure, while also improving overall environmental quality in terms of air and water pollution.

Natural England stands ready to work across Government to help make it happen, including through the delivery of an ambitious Nature Recovery Network that will see not only the improvement of our vital protected areas and the restoration of lost habitats, including woodland, wetland and heaths, but also the return of lost species.

Forestry Commission Chair, Sir William Worsley said:

The climate emergency means we need new trees, woodland and forests more than ever before. They are vital for absorbing carbon dioxide, but also for providing homes for wildlife, helping reduce flood risk, to offering huge benefits for our health and wellbeing. The plans announced today are hugely exciting and map out how trees will be part of the solution to getting to Net Zero.

Today's announcements are part of the Government's commitments to drive international ambition on action to tackle climate change and work towards nature-based solutions ahead of the G7 Climate and Environment Ministers' meeting taking place this week, the upcoming 15th UN Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (Convention of Biological Diversity COP15), and the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) which will be hosted in Glasgow later this year.

In the run-up to the summit, the UK is focused on four goals to drive progress: securing global net zero, protecting communities and natural habitats from the impacts of climate change, mobilising finance and working together to accelerate action.

The Secretary of State and the Chairs of Natural England and Forestry Commission will speak from Delamere Forest from 1:30pm (Tuesday 18 May) at an online event hosted by The Wildlife Trusts. The event will be live streamed from 13:30pm and hosted on [The Wildlife Trusts' YouTube channel](#).

Craig Bennett, chief executive of The Wildlife Trusts, said:

Today we face a twin nature and climate emergency – these crises are entirely interlinked and one cannot be tackled without addressing the other. It's essential that we stop nature's decline and restore 30% of land and sea by 2030 – doing so will help wildlife fight back and enable repaired habitats to store carbon once more. Vast, landscape-scale restoration projects need funding by government to help us reach this target because, at the moment, only 10% of our land is protected for nature and only half of this is in a good state. Nature Recovery Networks need to be at the heart of our future planning system so that our new nature places

are carefully mapped out, joined up and put where they will work best for nature and people.

Today's announcement follows the recently launched Queen's Green Canopy – a unique, UK-wide tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, by inviting people to "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee".

Read the [England Trees Action Plan](#) and [England Peat Action Plan](#).

[New legislation to help transform opportunities for all](#)

The Skills and post-16 Education Bill will be introduced in Parliament today (18 May), underpinning the government's skills and training revolution.

The Bill comes as [new figures](#) show that further and technical education provision is already estimated to boost the economy by £26 billion. This sets the stage for a new outlook for post-16 education where every young adult has a range of opportunities open to them, removing the illusion that a degree is the only path to a good career.

The reforms outlined in the Bill will help to create more routes into skilled employment in sectors the economy needs such as engineering, digital, clean energy and manufacturing, so more people can secure well-paid jobs in their local areas, levelling up the nation and supporting communities to thrive.

A range of policies are already in place to deliver the Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, as [set out by the Prime Minister](#) last year. Today, a new fund has been launched to future proof post-16 provision with a £83 million Post-16 Capacity fund.

Providers are invited to bid for a share of the fund, which will support projects to create more space for areas where there is due to be a demographic increase in 16-19 year olds in the 2022/23 academic year. This could include building more classroom space or technical teaching facilities, so providers can continue to offer places to every young person who needs one.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Talent is everywhere in our country and the Skills and post-16 Education Bill marks a significant milestone in our journey to transform the skills, training and post-16 education landscape and level up opportunities across the country.

This legislation will be vital so we can make sure everyone can gain the skills they need to get a great job locally and businesses have access to the qualified employees they need to thrive.

We're also investing £83 million to create more classrooms and high-quality teaching facilities, to ensure that colleges can keep up with demand and offer a training place for all 16-19 year olds that want one.

The key measures introduced in today's Bill are:

- Embedding employers in the heart of the skills system, by making it a legal requirement that employers and colleges collaborate to develop skills plans so that the training on offer meets the need of local areas, and so people no longer have to leave their home-towns to find great jobs.
- Supporting the transformation of the current student loans system which will give every adult access to a flexible loan for higher-level education and training at university or college, useable at any point in their lives.
- Introducing new powers to intervene when colleges are failing to deliver good outcomes for the communities they serve, and to direct structural change where needed to ensure colleges improve.

Many of the skills that employers are demanding require intermediate or Higher Technical Qualifications – [but only four per cent of young people achieve a qualification at higher technical level by the age of 25 compared to the 33 per cent who get a degree or above](#). Evidence also shows these qualifications can lead to [jobs with higher wages than degrees](#).

The measures in today's Bill will bring greater parity between further and higher education, and help to deliver the Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, ensuring everyone is given the chance to gain the skills they need, when they need them, as set out earlier this year in the Skills for Jobs White Paper.

New [analysis](#) by the government demonstrates the importance of further and technical education to the country's economic recovery, setting the stage for the latest reforms. An estimated £26 billion is expected to be generated from the training started by adults in further education in 2018/19 over their working lives.

[Supporting the ICC Prosecutor's](#)

ongoing investigations in Libya

Thank you, Mr President.

Mr President, I would like to offer my thanks to the Prosecutor, Madame Bensouda, for briefing us today on her 21st report on the situation in Libya.

The UK welcomes recent political progress in Libya, including the appointment of the interim Government of National Unity (GNU). As noted in UNSCR 2570, this government is charged with making the necessary preparations for inclusive, transparent and credible national Presidential and Parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021. As part of the process towards securing a sustainable political settlement, the GNU must start the process of national reconciliation and provide accountability and justice for atrocity crimes, and I encourage the GNU to work with the Office of the Prosecutor to achieve these goals and to facilitate the work of the UN Fact Finding Mission in Libya.

However, despite this progress, we remain gravely concerned by continuing reports of human rights violations and abuses. The UK fully endorses the Office of the Prosecutor's call for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya without delay, and that crimes committed by those foreign forces and mercenaries could fall under the jurisdiction of the ICC. The UK condemns all unlawful violence perpetrated by Libyans, and foreign forces and mercenaries, particularly against civilians.

Despite the October 2020 Ceasefire Agreement, the Prosecutor notes continued indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including the assassination of activists and human rights defenders. The UK condemns the deplorable killing of lawyer Hanan Al-Barassi on 10 November in Benghazi, and calls for a full, immediate and transparent, investigation in cooperation with the UN Fact Finding Mission in Libya. We also call for better protection of women human rights defenders in particular.

The security and justice sector remains dysfunctional. Both the Prosecutor and human rights organisations have continued to document evidence of the widespread use of violence by militias against refugees and migrants, including torture, physical violence, gender-based violence, forced labour, deprivation of food and water, and the murder of detainees.

We urge the GNU to take note of the Prosecutor's report and put an end to crimes committed in detention centres and investigate crimes committed at Mitiga Prison, and the Gernada detention facility. The GNU must also investigate and address violence against women and girls, including the fates of the female detainees at Al-Kuweifya detention centre, which remain unknown.

The UK is clear that civilians must be protected in conflict and that those responsible for violations of international law must be held to account. We are deeply shocked by the continuing discovery of mass graves in Tarhouna and

Southern Tripoli reportedly linked to abductions and killings allegedly committed by the al-Kaniyat militia – who the UK designated on its Libya Sanctions regime on 13 May. I encourage the GNU to take all possible actions to hold those responsible to account.

Mr President, we thank the Prosecutor for her update on the cases against Mr Qadhafi, Mr al-Werfalli and Mr Al-Tuhamy. The alleged killing of Mr Al-Werfalli before he was brought to justice only highlights the ongoing atmosphere of impunity in Libya. The Libyan authorities must investigate the alleged deaths of Mr Al-Werfalli and Mr Al-Tuhamy but also take the necessary action to arrest and surrender Mr Qaddafi to the Court. We reiterate our call for all relevant states, including states parties to the Rome Statute and non-states parties, to cooperate with the ICC in the arrest and surrender of warranted individuals.

The UK is committed to providing our full support in the Prosecutor's ongoing investigations in Libya, which are all the more important at this crucial time in the political process.

Thank you, Mr President.

[Highways England flies to the rescue to save stricken bat](#)

The female adult Soprano Pipistrelle bat was spotted on the ground by eagle-eyed Highways England structural inspector George Webb on a routine inspection of the A303 Marsh junction underbridge just before Christmas.

[Watch the video.](#)

George immediately enlisted the help of Leonardo Gubert, Highways England's senior ecologist in the South West, who collected the stricken bat – one of the smallest species in the country – and transferred her to the Mid Devon Bat Rescue Centre for assessment.

Christened Noella on account of her seasonal discovery, the bat was found to have suffered rib and wing injuries in the presumed fall from her bridge deck roost.

In a state of torpor in the lead-up to hibernation, Noella was initially given a specially prepared rehydration solution and once placed in a room with other bats, she began feeding within a day.

Under the care of Kari Bettoney, the recuperation and rehabilitation continued through the winter weeks and months, and with her injured wing fully restored after physio and exercise, Leonardo has now released Noella

back into the wild and close to the habitat where she was first discovered.

It is thought she may be pregnant too, and will now have the chance to find a home to give birth to her baby.

He said:

She really was in a poor state, it was nice to give her a second chance and with the vital help of Kari, it was pleasing to be able to release her back into the wild.

Most bats are seasonal visitors to buildings, including highways infrastructure, and although they're unlikely to live in the same place all year round, they're creatures of habitat and loyal to their roosts so I released her close to the location she was found alongside the A303, and hopefully she'll find her way home and resettle.

Registered with the Bat Conservation Trust, Kari has operated the Mid Devon Bat and Dormouse Rescue Centre since 2014, and she added:

We're releasing a dozen bats back into the wild this spring and that's incredibly rewarding.

Without doubt, Noella would have died without the help of Leo and Highways England – she has been exercising in a flight pen, which has been fundraised for us, and we suspect she's carrying a baby, so effectively we've released two bats back into the wild.

Bats are diminishing in numbers – the colder weather we've been experiencing means less insects and less food for them – so it's encouraging that the females we're releasing will go on to have more babies.

Highways England works with a number of partner groups and agencies when animals are found alongside its road network, and the protection of wildlife species and their habitats is paramount in a lot of its work – from the planning of improvement and maintenance schemes to the design of major infrastructure projects.

Leonardo added:

When our modern road design, we include measures to help protect wildlife from live traffic as far as practicable, and our traffic officers are trained to handle and recover animals. We are always open to new technologies and innovations to help reduce the number of animals harmed on our network, and we undertake a lot of work to protect the habitats of bats and many other species.

Leonardo Gubert, Highways England's Lead Ecologist for the South West

For anyone who discovers an injured or grounded bat, the advice is to contact the National Bat Helpline on 0345 1300 228 or one of the 80 local bat groups across the country, such as the Mid Devon Bat Rescue Centre (07979 610452, 9am-6pm).

For anyone who does come across a bat requiring help, the Bat Conservation Trust offers the following guidelines:

- Using gloves or a cloth, place the bat in a box with small air holes
- Place a milk bottle lid with some water in it in the box
- Provide a cloth such as a tea towel for the bat to hide in
- Put the box in a warm place
- Call the Bat Conservation Trust's out-of-hours helpline on 0345 1300 228

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Austria: Readout of the Foreign Secretary's meeting with Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg](#)

News story

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab met Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg today in London.



The ministers agreed to continue close cooperation with the Western Balkans, to assist in tackling serious and organised crime and to promote stability in the region. They reiterated their shared support for the region's Euro-Atlantic integration and for EU-facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, and noted the importance of supporting media freedom in the Western Balkans.

They discussed the challenge posed by Russian malign activity and the importance of a robust international response, pledging to work together closely.

They noted the strategic challenge posed by China, agreeing the importance of holding China to its international obligations, whilst also securing its engagement on key global challenges such as climate change.

On climate, the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister discussed the importance of climate finance in delivering a successful COP26 and tackling climate change.

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