

# Reversing the Nature Crisis: Silent spring or Adlestrop?

## **Introduction: Silent Spring**

“There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. Then a strange blight crept over the area. Everywhere was a shadow of death. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh. No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.”

Those are the opening lines of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, the 1962 book that sparked the modern environmental movement. Sixty years on we are closer than ever to that silent spring happening. Since we humans and everything we cherish depends on nature, we have the strongest possible interest in avoiding that outcome.

But if we are going to fix the problem, we need to start by understanding what the problem is, its magnitude, and what’s causing it.

That is why the Environment Agency has today published a major new report on the state of our nature. It looks in particular at what is happening to our plants and animals (trigger warning: it’s shocking), explains what these do for us (apart from bringing us joy at their beauty), and sets out how we can turn things around.

Our report focuses on England, but you could write this report about almost any other country in the world right now and while the details would all be different, the underlying picture would be the same – awful.

## **What’s happening: the story so far**

People have affected the environment in England for millennia. Most of our untouched natural wilderness had probably already vanished from Britain by the time the Romans arrived. Even then our forebears were not living sustainably, cutting down forests and starting to degrade nature. The Industrial Revolution made things worse, by triggering the start of climate change as coal was burned to power machines, and by starting to put much more pollution into environment. That accelerated the degradation of nature on which our plants, our wildlife and all of us ultimately depend.

But it wasn’t until the second half of the 20th century and our own lifetimes that things really started to go downhill. Our report collects the evidence. Species-rich grasslands such as meadows have decreased in extent by around 97% since 1930. Lowland heathlands now cover only 20% of the area they did in the 19th century. The loss of wetlands, one of the richest habitats, has also

been severe: we have lost 99.7% of our fens, 81% of our grazing marshes and 44% of our lowland bogs. Almost all our ancient trees have gone too: up to 70% of our remaining ancient woodlands have been deforested or damaged, mostly during the past century.

The loss of meadows, wetlands, woods – the decline in those precious habitats has had its inevitable consequence: an equally shocking decline in the plants and animals that depend on them. Since 1970, 41% of our species have decreased in abundance and 15% of all our native species in the island of Britain are now threatened with extinction.

The position is even worse for the mammals, birds, butterflies and moths designated as priority species – those about which we have the greatest concern. They have declined in abundance overall by 61% since 1970.

Since that date butterflies and moths have decreased in average abundance by 16% and 25% respectively; a third of pollinator species have declined; water and wetland birds have declined by 14%, woodland birds by 25%, and farmland birds by 55%. A third of farmland specialist species – those that depend on a narrow ecological niche, like grey partridge, turtle doves, tree sparrows and corn buntings – have declined by more than 90% since 1970.

It's no better for our mammals: several species have undergone drastic reductions in population sizes. Hedgehog numbers have fallen by approximately 66% since 1995 and water voles have done even worse, falling by 78%. Overall, a quarter of mammals in England are now threatened with extinction. Let me say that sentence again in case you missed it: a quarter of mammals in England are now threatened with extinction. If that doesn't make you angry, you haven't been paying attention.

The story is a bit better in our waters, partly as a result of all the work the Environment Agency has done over the last three decades to clean up our rivers. Freshwater invertebrates, on which a lot of other aquatic life depends and which had previously declined to a low in the mid-1990s, have shown a recovery in recent years. Not so some other species like salmon though: in 2019, only 16% of our rivers met the minimum population targets for salmon conservation, the lowest score since monitoring began in 1993.

Meanwhile, things aren't any better on the ground. 18% of plants and 15% of fungi and lichens are at risk of extinction in Great Britain.

## **Why this is happening**

Why is this happening? It's the result of a combination of factors: unsustainable use of our resources, changes in land use, pollution, the modifications we have made to our rivers, urban development, etc, much of which has been going on for centuries but which is now having a cumulative effect.

What's making this even worse is something relatively new – the climate emergency. Changing climate patterns are disturbing species and the warmer temperatures that climate change is bringing is threatening the existence of

some of those species. Example: lakes. When the water temperature in a lake gets to 17 degrees C, they are likely to suffer from algal blooms which lead to a deterioration in water quality, less life in that water and less diversity in the life that remains.

So there are a range of factors in the nature crisis we are now witnessing. They all, however, have one thing in common: they are down to us, the humans.

### **Why is this a problem?**

Why should we care about biodiversity? Does it really matter if the vole goes the way of the dodo? It would be a shame to live in a world without tree sparrows, but we could surely manage without them, couldn't we? Here's why it does matter: the biodiversity crisis is a crisis because it won't just kill the plants and animals it is killing. It will kill us too.

That's because nature is indivisible and interdependent. Nature provides us with a host of things we depend upon, such as clean water, clean air and food. No nature, no food. It's vital in providing resilience to climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide, regulating local climatic conditions and providing flood protection. No nature, no climate shield. And as humans we depend on green and blue spaces for our own health and well-being. No nature, no us.

### **What we do about it**

Are you depressed enough yet? Don't be because we can turn this round. Just as we can successfully tackle the climate emergency by doing the right things, we can successfully tackle the biodiversity crisis too.

Nature is indivisible. What happens in one part of our blue planet affects all the other parts. So the solution to the biodiversity crisis has to start at the global level. The framework for that already exists: the international Convention on Biological Diversity, which has committed all its signatories to protect our natural diversity, and to enhance it wherever possible. At the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15) due to take place later this year, governments from around the world need to agree a new set of goals for the next decade with strong monitoring to measure progress on the ground in reversing nature loss.

### **What the government is doing**

We need action at the national level. The UK government, with other leading nations, made a commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030: or in other words to become Nature Positive. Many organisations, the EA included, have made a commitment to be Carbon Neutral by 2030. I would (and do) get out of bed every day to achieve that. But I would leap out of bed to help the planet become Nature Positive.

We could achieve that goal in this country. We know what we need to do: nurture our protected species; sustain our protected areas; better protect wildlife habitats outside those areas; restore our damaged habitats and

create new ones; start to knit together nature networks across the whole country; build a nature positive approach into our planning and development; stop the pollution which damages our habitats; tackle the climate emergency which is accelerating the biodiversity crisis and vice versa; and wherever we have a problem, employ nature based solutions as the default to solving it.

And much of this not only can be done, by governments national and local, by businesses, by landowners, by others; much of it is already being done. And what gets measured gets done. That is why we welcome the lead the UK government has given others by requiring, in the new Environment Act, the setting of a legally binding target on species abundance in England for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature.

## **What the EA is doing**

The Environment Agency is playing its part. We protect species and the habitats on which they depend. Example: our work to ensure that the abstraction of water (which we regulate) does not damage wildlife or habitat – and when we think it will, we are reducing or in some cases stopping that abstraction by adjusting or turning off the licences that allow it. We create and restore habitat: over 1,100 hectares last year (2021/22). We use our role as a statutory planning consultee to ensure that new developments don't damage the environment, and we are influential: almost all planning decisions (over 98%) are in line with our advice. We are tackling the pollution that hits our wildlife, including by reducing the amount of air pollution from the industries we regulate. We are improving our waters on which so much of nature depends: we enhanced over 1,500 kilometres of rivers and streams last year. We are tackling the climate crisis, by regulating down most of the emissions that cause it, by helping people and nature become more resilient to its effects by building flood defences and by helping planners, developers and communities create better and more resilient places. And we are increasingly using nature-based solutions as the default.

Example: Steart Marshes on the Severn Estuary. If you visited Steart and didn't know what it was, you would think it was just a beautiful bit of marshland with some nice birds. It is all of those things. But it is a lot more too. It is also the UK's biggest coastal realignment scheme which reduces flood risk to 100,000 homes and businesses – a benefit valued at £5 billion – and has created 250 hectares of new intertidal habitat. The new marshland is home to a variety of species including great crested newts, otters, butterflies, and wintering and breeding birds. It is also a place where people can enjoy nature, a benefit to the local rural economy, and a carbon sink, locking away carbon and reducing the extent of climate change. It's a massive success for our partners with whom we designed and built it, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and local communities. And it's a great example of how nature-based solutions can deliver multiple outcomes, including but not limited to tackling the biodiversity crisis.

Second example: Keeping Rivers Cool. If warm lakes are bad (algal bloom, as I mentioned) then warm rivers are bad too, killing off the wildlife in them. Our Keeping Rivers Cool project (the clue is in the name) uses trees to shade streams and prevent some of the warming that happens on hot sunny days,

reducing the impact on trout and salmon and other species. The shade from trees can reduce temperatures in small rivers on average by 2 to 4°C (compared to unshaded streams), sometimes by more on the hottest days: and that can make all the difference to the wildlife. Since the programme began in 2012, the Environment Agency, Rivers Trusts and Wildlife Trusts have planted more than 500,000 trees along our rivers and streams. This doesn't just help the wildlife and tackle both the causes and consequences of climate change, though it does. It is also providing other benefits, such as reducing erosion, intercepting sediment and pollutants, and making the rivers nicer places for the humans as well as all the other forms of wildlife that benefit.

## **What we can all do**

So the EA is doing its bit. But none of us is as good as all of us. We are all contributing in some way to the biodiversity crisis, and we all have a role to play in tackling it. There are simple steps we can all take, most or all of which will also help us address the climate crisis too. Walk, cycle or take public transport instead of driving. Have less stuff, and reuse or recycle as much of it as you can. Use water wisely. If you have a garden don't concrete over it: keep it green and put in a pond. Only eat sustainably sourced food. Make sure your pension is not invested in businesses that are trashing the planet. Think about how your footfall resonates on this earth.

## **Conclusion**

I started with a silent spring in which no birds sang. That is one future we can have, and will have if we fail to act. But there is another future we can have, a much brighter one, if we do choose to act. That's a future best encapsulated by another work of literature, a famous poem about the past which is also a kind of nostalgia for a future we would all like. It's "Adlestrop", by Edward Thomas, written in 1917 towards the end of a war that the poet himself tragically did not survive.

## **Adlestrop**

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—

The name, because one afternoon

Of heat the express-train drew up there

Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.

No one left and no one came

On the bare platform. What I saw

Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,

And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,  
No whit less still and lonely fair  
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.  
And for that minute a blackbird sang  
Close by, and round him, mistier,  
Farther and farther, all the birds  
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

So let's tackle the nature crisis. Let's refuse the silent spring. Let our future be Adlestrop.

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## [Trap and drag incidents on London Overground](#)

News story

Trap and drag incidents on London Overground, 23, 27 and 29 June 2022.



The train at Seven Sisters station (image courtesy Arriva Rail London)

At around 09:11 hrs on 23 June 2022, a person on the platform at Seven Sisters station placed their hand between the closing doors of a train which was about to depart. The train subsequently departed with the person's hand still trapped in the doors. The person ran alongside the train, freeing their hand after a few seconds, and the train stopped shortly afterwards.

At around 06:26 hrs on 27 June 2022, a person on the platform at Wembley Central station placed an object, which appeared to be a walking pole, between a set of closing doors on a departing train. The person tried unsuccessfully to remove the object, and the train departed with it still trapped in the doors. The train stopped after it had moved a short distance along the platform.

At around 13:46 hrs on 29 June 2022, a person on the platform at Crouch Hill station placed their umbrella between the closing doors of a train that was about to depart. The person tried to remove the umbrella but the train again moved a short distance along the platform with the item trapped in the doors before it came to a stand.

There were no significant injuries resulting from any of these incidents.

We have undertaken a [preliminary examination](#) into the circumstances surrounding these incidents. Having assessed the evidence which has been gathered to date, we have decided to publish a [safety digest](#).

The safety digest will be made available on our website in the near future.

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## [\*\*RSH publishes regulatory notice for Incommunities Limited following a breach of the economic standards\*\*](#)

Press release

The regulator has concluded that Incommunities Limited has breached the Rent Standard



In a regulatory notice published today (12 July), the Regulator of Social

Housing has concluded that Incommunities Limited has breached the Rent Standard.

Following a self-referral, RSH found that Incommunities had set rents incorrectly for hundreds of tenants. The housing association had wrongly classified some of its homes as supported housing. It also set some of its rents incorrectly on re-let, and did not cap rents on some of its homes in line with requirements. As a result of those errors a significant number of tenants have been overcharged.

Upon uncovering these issues, and in agreement with the regulator, Incommunities has committed to an external investigation into its rent-setting and is developing an action plan to ensure that errors are rectified and to minimise the risk of any repeat. This work will identify the full scale of the errors and the number of tenants who have been overcharged. The affected tenants will be reimbursed by the provider.

Maxine Loftus, Director of Regulatory Operations, said:

Incommunities' failure to set rents correctly has resulted in tenants being overcharged.

We will work with Incommunities to make sure it puts things right for its current and previous tenants.

More information about our findings in this case are available in the regulator's [regulatory notice](#).

1. RSH promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver and maintain homes of appropriate quality that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.
2. More information about how RSH regulates against its [standards](#) is available in [Regulating the Standards](#).
3. For press office contact details, see our [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email [enquiries@rsh.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@rsh.gov.uk) or call 0300 124 5225.



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# Extension to the tenure of the Chair of the Law Commission

News story

The Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice has approved an extension to Sir Nicholas Green's tenure as the Chair of the Law Commission.



The Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, has extended Sir Nicholas Green's tenure as Chair of the Law Commission from 1 August 2022 until a date three months from the announcement of the appointment of his successor.

The Commission was created by the Law Commission Act 1965 with the role of keeping under review the law of England and Wales with a view to its systematic development and reform. Commissioners, including the Chair, are appointed by the Lord Chancellor. The Law Commission's role is to promote the reform of the law to make it clearer, more modern and more accessible. The Commission's projects bring real benefits to the public, businesses or other organisations affected by old, complex and out-of-date law.

## **Sir Nicholas Green**

Sir Nicholas was appointed as Chair on 1 August 2018. Sir Nicholas is a former academic having lectured at the University of Southampton and the University of London. He was called to the Bar in 1986 and appointed Queen's Counsel in 1998. In 2013, he was appointed a judge of the High Court (Queen's Bench Division). In October 2018, Sir Nicholas was appointed a Lord Justice of Appeal. Sir Nicholas previously served as Chairman of the Bar Council and the Advocacy Training Council.

He declared no political activity.

## Kenya National elections conference: Jane Marriott's speech

Your excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya, the Chairman of the IEBC, the IEBC Commissioners, the Chief Justice, representatives of Independent Commissions present, candidates and leaders of political parties present, Ambassadors from various foreign missions present, the chief guest – Your Excellency the Chairperson of the Commission African Union, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen...

I am delighted to be here today, and want to thank the IEBC for inviting me to this important event.

The UK is a firm believer in responsible, accountable governments that govern for all their people. We also know that such democracy should never be taken for granted. Democracy needs nurturing, growing and people who believe in it.

For those who follow British politics, you will have seen some of the recent twists and turns in the UK's democratic story. They have been just as gripping as Kenya's own debates as we head toward six sets of elections in less than a month's time.

This will be Kenya's 3rd election after the promulgation of the 2010 constitution. Like every other election, the 9th August general election is an essential opportunity for citizens to elect leaders of their choice, as set down by their rights guaranteed in Kenya's constitution.

The UK shares a longstanding partnership with Kenya, and is a committed friend. We have a Strategic Partnership, agreed by His Excellency President Kenyatta, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson. It is a five year partnership deliberately designed to span Kenya's elections this year and the UK's Parliamentary elections, due before 2025. Because the mutual interests of our two countries is greater than whomever is in power, in either place.

Our fundamental interest is that Kenya becomes ever more stable and prosperous, and continues to be a leading democracy, setting standards across the region. We have enjoyed standing shoulder to shoulder on the world stage with Kenya – on climate change, on education, at the United Nations Security Council. And we want that modern friendship and partnership, based on mutual respect, to continue.

I want to be very clear, therefore, that the funding and organising of elections is a Kenyan responsibility. Who Kenyans elect is a matter for the people of Kenya. The UK respects Kenya's sovereignty. We remain neutral and

impartial.

At the request of Kenyan institutions, we have supported good governance through programming to provide technical support to build on lessons learned and improve standards, to help strengthen the democratic process. As I hope you know by now, the international community does not fund the core budgets of Kenya's institutions, including that of the IEBC.

We have been proud to support reforms that have led to stronger and more accountable institutions, including the IEBC, the Judiciary, and civil society organisations. We want to congratulate these institutions, which have demonstrated accountability in the execution of their mandates, and the delivery of services to Kenyans.

### **UK support to Kenyan elections**

In line with our commitment to helping strengthen governance institutions in Kenya, we have supported key electoral institutions to build upon the lessons from the 2017 general elections. Our three-year Kenya Elections Support Project (KESP), has provided targeted support at the request of the IEBC, in areas such as legal reforms, voter education, mobilisation for voter registration, strategic communications, and elections security management, which strengthens collaboration and coordination between the security agencies and the IEBC.

We have supported closer consultation, collaboration, and coordination amongst the key Government of Kenya electoral institutions. In this regard, we applaud the continued dialogue and engagement amongst the IEBC, Judiciary Committee on Elections, Office of Registrar of Political Parties, and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The work between these institutions is important in building confidence in the electoral process.

We are pleased to see the strides made by the IEBC to prepare for the 2022 general elections, in line with its Elections Operations Plan and its Strategic Plan.

### **Our message**

With 29 days remaining for the 9th August general elections, the world is watching the example Kenya sets. We all want to see free, fair, credible and peaceful elections – the contest and debate of ideas and issues, in a tone of friendship.

For our part, like the other speakers here, we encourage all sides in this election to use the remaining campaign period to preach peace, to act peacefully and to work in a manner that promotes confidence in the electoral process and electoral institutions.

As a friend of Kenya, the UK government calls on all present across all six types of election – and those whom they represent – to do their part in contributing to free, fair, credible and peaceful elections, before, during, and after the 9th August elections. We call on all candidates and political contestants to promote peace and unity, and not division or conflict.

As I said, the world's attention is on Kenya, and friends of Kenya such as the UK remain available to support the Kenyan people, the Government of Kenya and the institutions in their preparation for August's elections. I am confident that through this Conference, there will be renewed commitment by all stakeholders to commit to free, fair, credible and peaceful elections.

With these many remarks, I congratulate the IEBC for organising what I am sure will be a successful National Elections Conference.

The winner in the 2022 Kenyan elections should be the independent institutions reflecting the will of the people. To those working hard – day in and day out – to deliver this, I say thank you and good luck.

ASANTENI SANA