



ENGLISH
HERITAGE

Nature Strategy

2022–2025



This strategy sets out English Heritage's vision and action plan to respond to the ecological crisis and create an estate rich in history and nature.



Hadrian's Wall at Birdoswald Roman Fort, Cumbria

Nature is in decline in our country. The causes are diverse, and they are being accelerated by the climate crisis. Since the 1970s 35% of native British species have declined, with 13% at risk of extinction according to the *2019 State of Nature Report*.

Much of our estate has not been subject to some of the key causes of this decline – in particular, it has avoided the worst of damaging agricultural practices which have become widespread in the last 50 years. But there is still so much more we can do to make sure that nature thrives at the sites in our care. This strategy sets out vital actions that will increase biodiversity, protect wildlife and showcase how organisations can combine the conservation of cultural heritage with the conservation of natural heritage. English Heritage will become a leading advocate for nature in the heritage sector, and we will be seen by our partners as a positive force in the fight against the climate and ecological crises.

The timescale to achieve our vision aligns with our Sustainable Conservation Strategy, and the action plan contained in this document will be delivered during the current organisational strategy period of 2022-2025. Meeting the challenge set out in this document will enable us to deliver on our organisational values of Responsibility and Quality.

A photograph of Dover Castle, a large stone fortress with multiple towers and battlements, situated on a grassy hill. In the foreground, several sheep are grazing in a field of tall grass. The sky is filled with soft, pinkish clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is a blend of historical architecture and natural landscape.

PROJECT FOCUS

Conservation grazing at Dover Castle

We work with graziers to help manage our land for heritage and nature. At Dover Castle, the Kent Wildlife Trust's flock of Herdwick sheep is helping to restore chalk grassland for scarce species such as early spider orchid, lesser calamint and wild cabbage. They also do a great job in preventing tree growth across the extensive earthworks so the landscape can tell its story. The sheep protect the below-ground archaeology from damage by tree roots and nibble the ivy at ground level before it can damage the castle walls.

Nature in our care

We care for more than 420 sites across 32km², or 7,900 acres of land. Of these sites, 81 have a nature designation.

These include:

- 5** Ramsar sites, an international designation for globally important wetlands
- 8** Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), a European designation for non-avian wildlife
- 8** Special Protection Areas (SPA), a European designation for birds
- 36** Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a national designation for sites of ecological and geological significance.
- 45** County Wildlife Sites (CWS), a regional designation for sites important for nature.

In addition, wildlife surveys show that our sites contain many species of national conservation concern, including red squirrels at Belsay Hall, Castle and Gardens; gannets, puffins, fulmars and razorbills at coastal sites like Tintagel and Dunstanburgh Castles; and the ferns, mosses and liverworts that grow on and around many of our historic ruins. Our sites are home to wildlife of all sizes and types, and we will build on the work we already do to turn many more of them into vital habitats for bugs, butterflies, bats and amphibians, molluscs and more.

Summary of 2021 Nature Conservation Designation Audit.

This table sets out the scale of designated wildlife sites across the English Heritage estate.

Site designation	Number of sites	Total area (ha)
RAMSAR Sites	5	29.5
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	8	1284.75
Special Protection Area (SPA)	8	70.33
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	36	1389
County Wildlife Sites (CWS)	45	Currently unknown

Improving our SSSIs

We are responsible for the management or partial management of 36 SSSIs, which together makes up 43% of the land in our care. Of these sites, only 17 are rated by Natural England as being in favourable condition. Natural England's 2020 target is to have 95% of the country's SSSIs in favourable condition. Some of the challenges these sites face are outside our control, such as pollution in water courses, but in some instances, we can make positive changes to our management that will benefit wildlife.

Proximity to designated sites outside of our management

In addition, many more of our properties are next door or close to designated sites. For instance, Helmsley Castle in North Yorkshire is next to Duncombe Park SSSI and National Nature Reserve (NNR), and Boxgrove Quarry in West Sussex is next to Halkner Chalk Pits SSSI. This proximity presents us with important and exciting opportunities. Following the principles set out in the UK Government's *Making Space for Nature Report*, our sites can play their part to enhance this network of wildlife sites through the creation of buffer habitat, green corridors and stepping stones to help increase biodiversity and support wildlife to spread out and move across the countryside.

Improving our information

Our strategy will be supported by all the wildlife information we have collected and recorded. There are gaps in our records, and more work is needed to understand why our sites are important for nature. As we build on our existing wildlife data, we will also make this information accessible for English Heritage staff to use to inform the management and find appropriate ways of sharing it with our visitors to enhance their enjoyment of their visit. Growing our understanding of the habitats and species on our sites will help us make more informed decisions about current and future management; help us tailor those decisions to the specific needs of the wildlife and built heritage on the site; and ensure that outcomes for cultural and natural heritage are aligned.



The Quarry Garden at Belsay Hall, Castle and Gardens

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Bat conservation at Berry Pomeroy Castle

Berry Pomeroy Castle has some of our most significant medieval wall paintings. Like most of our roofed properties, it is also a haven for bats. At Berry Pomeroy, bat faeces is adversely affecting the integrity of the paintings. We have identified how we can adapt the building to protect the paintings while ensuring the bats can continue to access the maternity roost in the roof space.





Kenilworth Castle and Elizabethan Garden, Warwickshire



Our vision

Our nature conservation vision is...
an estate rich in history and nature.

The cultural heritage value of our estate is well recognised and conserving the culturally significant assets in our care is central to our purpose as a charity. It's important to note that the heritage significance of a place is not solely derived from its built and archaeological features. Historic England defines significance as 'the sum of the cultural and natural heritage values'. Natural heritage is therefore not just 'added value' for our sites.

We must therefore give natural heritage due consideration when managing our sites and start to understand what this means for our Sustainable Conservation Strategy and Asset Management Plan (SCAMP). Delivering our SCAMP in synergy with this Nature Strategy will challenge us to fine-tune our approach and develop new ways of measuring and monitoring what cultural and natural heritage and sustainable conservation means to us.

The environmental histories of our sites

We'll improve how we think about and communicate the environmental histories of our sites.

The landscapes in our care have been shaped and managed over generations by the people who have lived and worked in them. They have supplied food, textiles, medicines, building materials and fuel, as well as spaces for work, worship, relaxation and recreation. Some of our industrial heritage sites and their historic pollution have helped to create some of the earliest invertebrate-rich brownfield sites now common in our towns and cities.

Working in partnership

Although there is much we can do on our own, our efforts will have a far greater impact if we work in partnership with others. We will strengthen existing partnerships, forge new ones, and capture as much knowledge and expertise as we can.

Connecting with communities and visitors

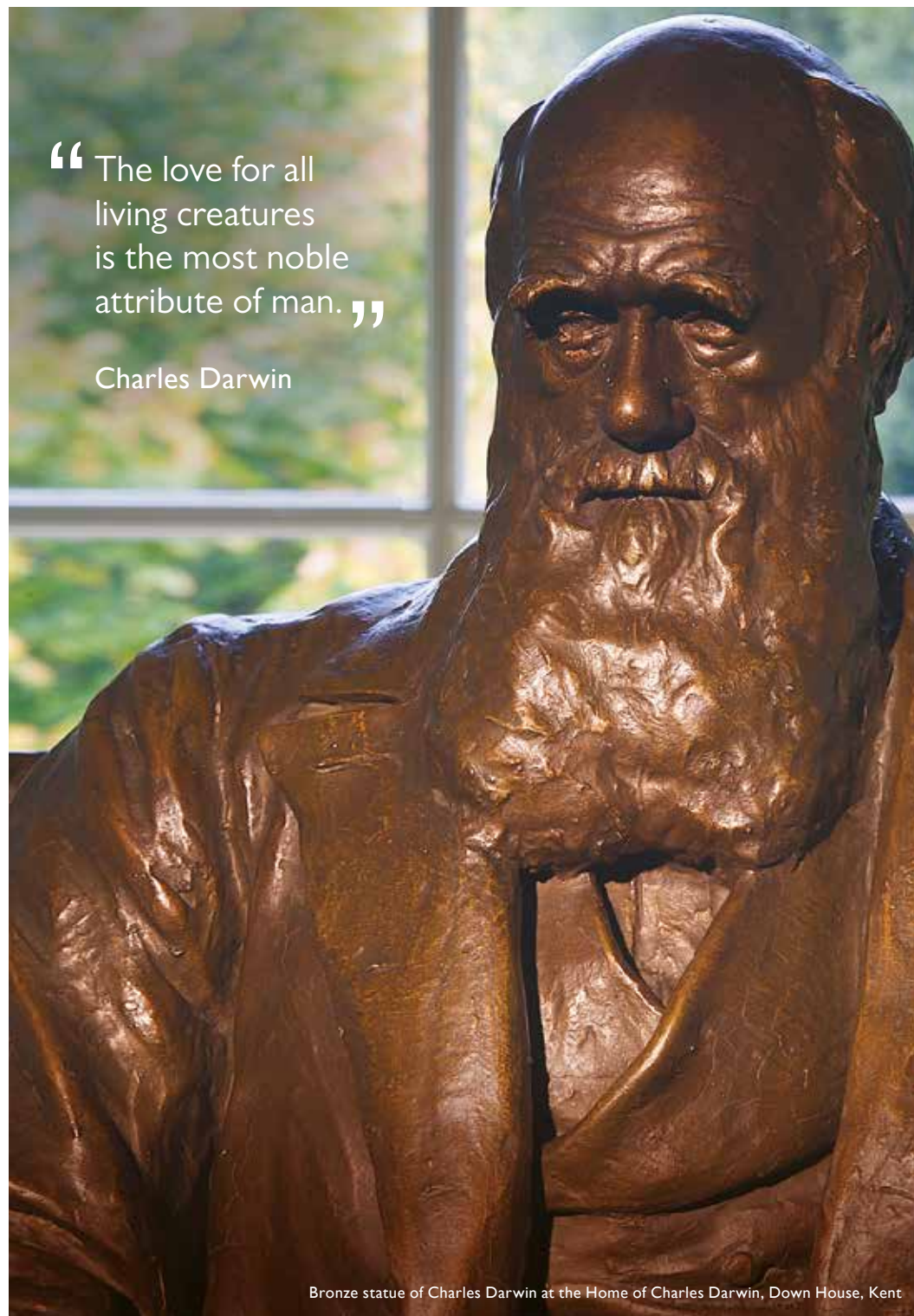
And what would be more appropriate for the charity that cares for Down House, the home of Charles Darwin. The grandfather of modern nature conservation, the man who gave us the principles that underpin our understanding of how all living creatures on our planet interact with their environment and each other.

Working together we will live up
to Darwin's legacy and care for...

an estate rich in history and nature

“The love for all
living creatures
is the most noble
attribute of man.”

Charles Darwin



Bronze statue of Charles Darwin at the Home of Charles Darwin, Down House, Kent



The greenhouse at the Home of Charles Darwin, Down House, Kent

Our priorities

Our vision will be achieved by aligning our work with four priority areas.

Each area includes a number of aims and actions which we will use to guide our effort over the current corporate strategy period of 2022 to 2025.

Protect

Enhance

Connect

Involve

Our priorities: Protect

We will protect the wildlife that already thrives at our sites *whilst balancing the respective conservation significances.*

Our key ecological responsibilities are defined within the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and care of the natural world will continue to be a key consideration for how we maintain, operate and invest in our sites. A priority of this strategy is to protect the wildlife that already thrives on and in our properties whilst balancing the respective conservation significances. Where conflicts are identified we will seek to agree acceptable solutions.

To achieve our vision and deliver this strategy we must renew our commitment to the natural world and celebrate that our sites are also significant for their wildlife. We have a legal duty, but more importantly we have a moral obligation to protect and enhance the natural significance of our sites and understand and share how the National Collection can tell the story of human interaction with the living world. As we implement this strategy, we must actively seek opportunities and make positive choices to protect and enhance the biodiversity across the estate.



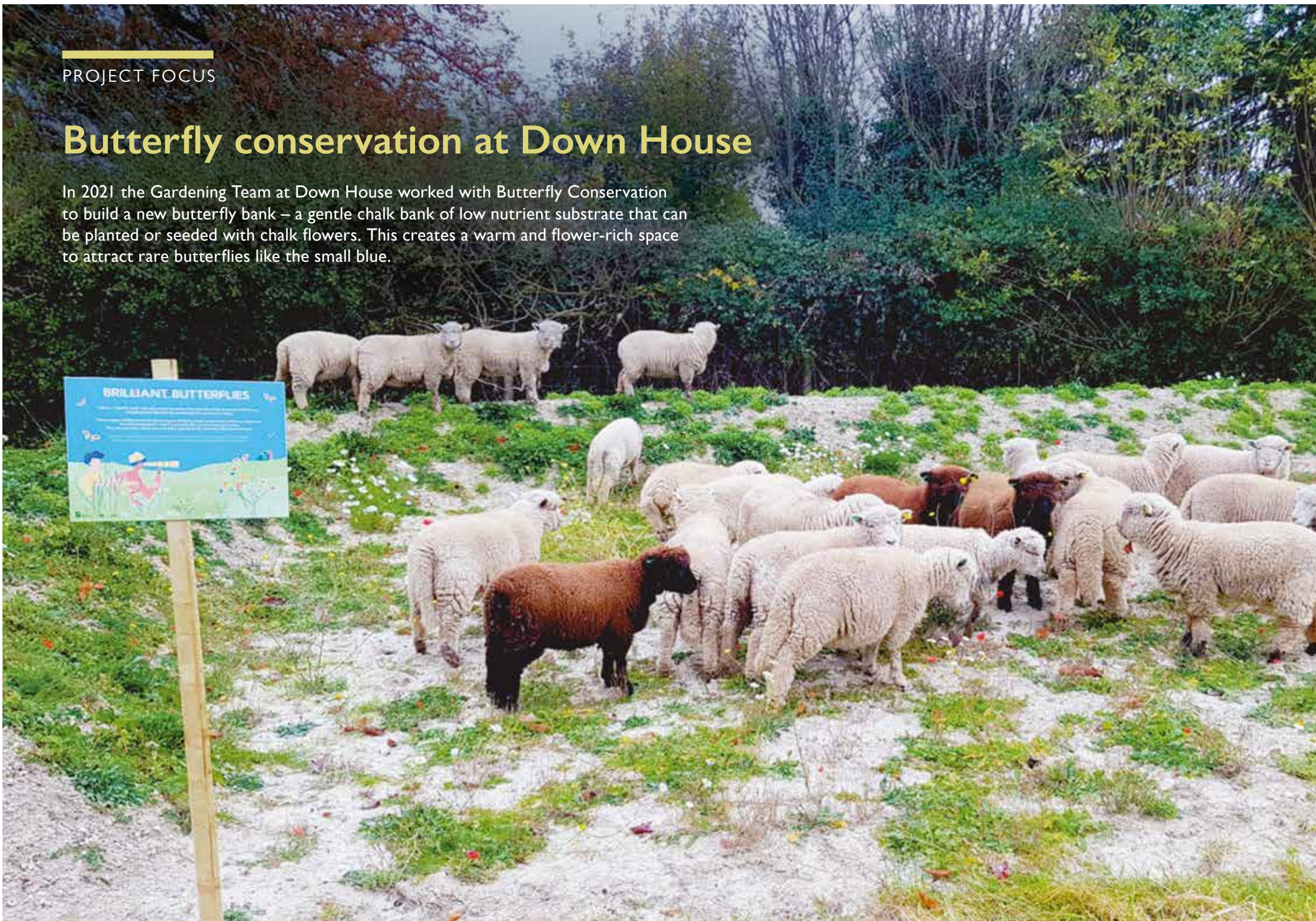
Edlingham Castle, Northumberland

Our priorities: Protect

Aim	Priority	Action	Lead/ Support
Our building maintenance will protect wildlife on our sites.	1	Develop a guide to common plants, lichens, mosses and liverworts on monuments and use this to plan our cyclical maintenance and project work to retain important populations on historic buildings.	Building Conservation/ Estates
	2	Develop best practice for the use of wildflower seed mixes and turfs for restoration and soft capping that ensures local provenance and is tailored to benefit the monument whilst complementing habitats.	Building Conservation/ Estates
	3	Review our approach to project planning to ensure we identify opportunities to go beyond compliance with protected species legislation and instead enhance populations of key species wherever possible.	National Projects/ Estates
	4	When investing in our sites, choose designs that benefit wildlife and the environment, e.g. sustainable drainage systems (SUDs), integrated water solutions, green roofs and walls.	Estates/ National Projects, Sustainability
Site management will be sensitive to the natural environment.	5	Carry out pilot projects with four agricultural tenants to realign their farming operations closer to our local nature conservation objectives.	Commercial Estate/ Estates
	6	Review our policy on the use of plant protection products and ensure we consistently manage our sites on an integrated management basis. We will always use chemicals as a last resort and when we do ensure they are as safe as possible for both the environment and the operator.	Gardens and Landscapes/ Estates
	7	Develop a set of principles to inform how we manage the grass on our sites to benefit nature, our buildings and visitors.	Estates/ Visitor Operations, Curatorial
	8	Produce guidance on vertebrate pest control and sport hunting. This will help us ensure we rigorously explore non-lethal measures and limit our harm to non-target species.	Gardens and Landscapes/ Estates
	9	Develop a policy on Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS), identify where we have them and where practicable remove them from our sites and - where appropriate - work with partners to remove them from the wider landscape.	Gardens and Landscapes/ Estates

Butterfly conservation at Down House

In 2021 the Gardening Team at Down House worked with Butterfly Conservation to build a new butterfly bank – a gentle chalk bank of low nutrient substrate that can be planted or seeded with chalk flowers. This creates a warm and flower-rich space to attract rare butterflies like the small blue.



Our priorities: Enhance

Enhancing biodiversity at our sites is a vital part of creating an estate rich in nature and history.

Our resources are limited, and we will prioritise investments that deliver the greatest impact.

The 2021 nature audit and our work with partners will help us understand which of our sites have important roles in contributing to landscape-scale ecosystems. We will also need to collaborate with colleagues across the organisation to ensure that beneficial changes to site management are balanced with the conservation needs of historical features and the needs of our visitors.



Marble Hill, Twickenham

Our priorities: Enhance

Aim	Priority	Action	Lead/ Support
To expand and utilise existing wildlife information and use this to tailor our management and project work.	1	Collate the wildlife information we already hold, making it accessible to those that manage our sites.	Estates/ Gardens and Landscapes
	2	Source additional wildlife information requesting data from Natural England on our SSSIs and local biodiversity record centres for our important sites for nature.	Estates
	3	Identify sites with species of national conservation concern and begin the process to review our management and make necessary changes to protect and where possible enhance these populations.	Estates/ Curatorial
To review the management of our sites and make changes to benefit nature.	4	Carry out wildlife condition surveys at sites identified in the 2021 wildlife site designation audit and use the information to improve their management.	Estates/ Curatorial
	5	Collate existing wildlife management plans for our sites. Prioritising SSSIs, we will review these and secure support from Natural England for our management approach.	Estates/ Curatorial
	6	Learning from our work to enhance the nature conservation value of our sites, we will build a toolkit of habitat management principles, and support staff to apply these principles at other suitable sites.	Estates/ Gardens and Landscapes
To develop and implement monitoring programmes.	7	Building on existing wildlife surveys we will establish monitoring programmes at priority sites, using consistent approaches to monitor key species and habitat features. This will help us to better understand the biodiversity value of our sites and monitor the impact of changes in our management.	Estates/ Gardens and Landscapes

PROJECT FOCUS

Chough reintroduction project at Dover Castle

At Dover Castle, we're working with Wildwood Trust and Kent Wildlife Trust to restore earthworks and grasslands to provide important habitats. In turn, this will support the reintroduction of a nationally scarce bird called the chough. A striking type of crow with red legs and red bill, legend has it that the species originally got its colouring by walking in the blood of Thomas Becket as the archbishop lay dying in Canterbury Cathedral.



Our priorities: Connect

It can be easy to see our sites as discrete, isolated parcels. But nature doesn't recognise the boundaries between our sites and their surrounding landscapes.

Wildlife needs healthy habitats in which they can thrive, and wider environments through which they can move.

To sustain and support biodiversity over the long term, our nature conservation work must take this ecological interconnectivity into account and adopt a landscape-scale approach.

Given the scale of the declines in nature across England, we understand the need to continue to work with existing partners and create new partnerships.

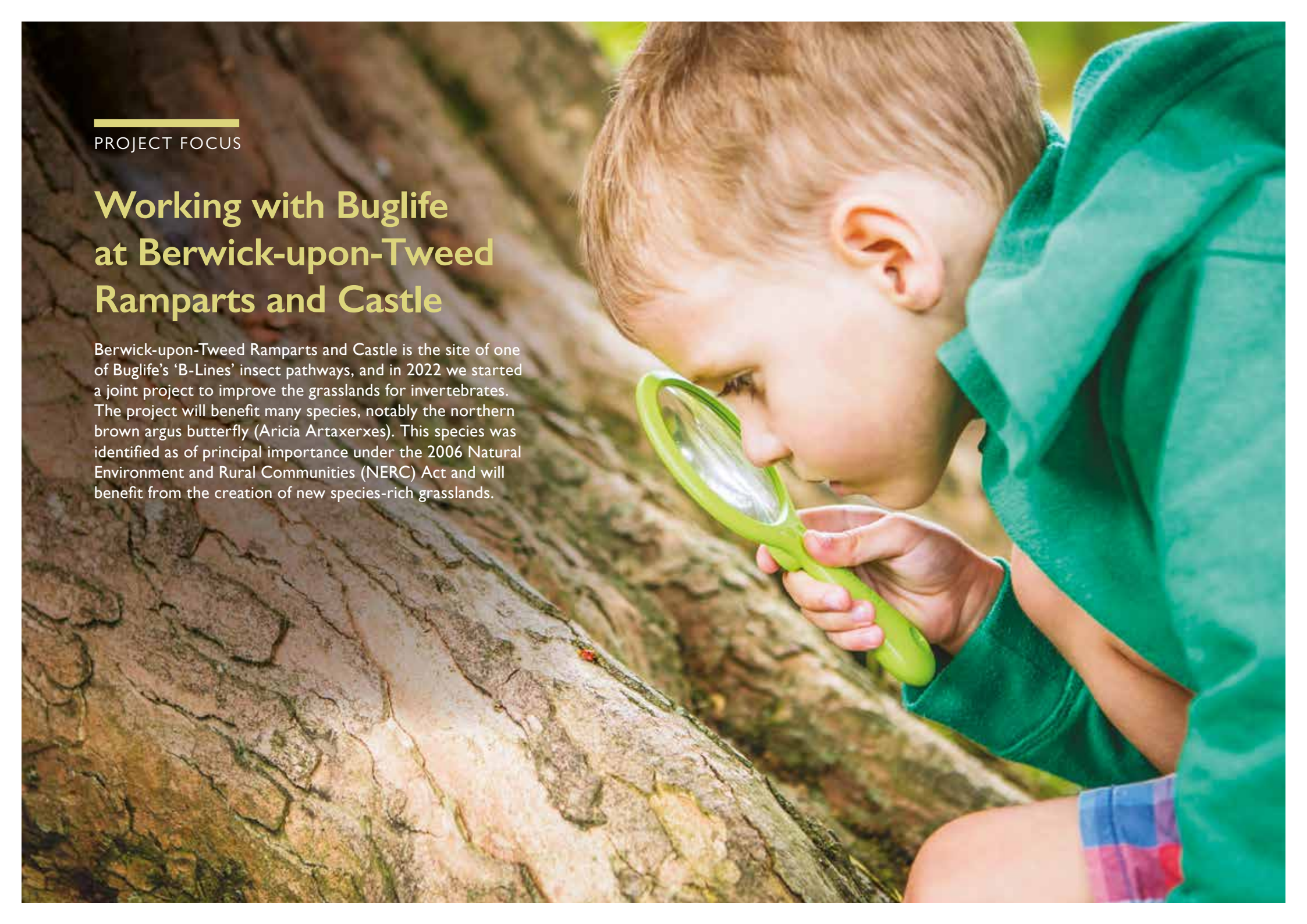
Our work will be influenced by the Environment Act which came into law in 2022. Although much of the new legislation is yet to be applied, it sets out clear targets to protect and restore nature and presents a number of opportunities for English Heritage to secure resources to support our efforts.



Gainsborough Old Hall, Lincolnshire

Our priorities: Connect

Aim	Priority	Action	Lead/ Support
We will work with others to grow our impact.	1	Develop 4 new partnerships to create local landscape-scale nature conservation strategies.	Estates/ Sustainability
	2	Monitor the implementation of the Environment Act and the opportunities it presents and in particular Biodiversity Net Gain, Nature Recovery Networks and the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).	Estates/ Sustainability
	3	In order to maximise our nature conservation outcomes, we will identify and access new funding streams.	Estates/ Curatorial, Development
We will work to adapt to the changing climate in a way which realises the benefits and value that nature brings	4	Working with partners in the heritage sector, we will use climate hazard data and our understanding of site vulnerability to adopt and develop best practice approaches to adapt to climate change using nature-based solutions to mitigate the impact on the heritage assets and habitats in our care.	Sustainability/ Estates, Building Conservation, Curatorial
	5	Undertake Natural Capital Assessments (an approach to valuing the benefits the natural world provides) of our land. We will work to bring natural and cultural heritage capital approaches together in a pilot at Hurst Castle to better quantify the benefits provided by our sites, and we will use this case study to influence national policy on natural and cultural heritage capital.	Sustainability/ Curatorial, Estates

A young child with light brown hair, wearing a green long-sleeved shirt and blue and red plaid shorts, is leaning over a large, textured tree trunk. The child is holding a green magnifying glass over a small, red insect on the bark. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text 'PROJECT FOCUS' is in the top left corner, followed by the title 'Working with Buglife at Berwick-upon-Tweed Ramparts and Castle' in a larger, bold font. Below the title is a paragraph of text describing the project.

PROJECT FOCUS

Working with Buglife at Berwick-upon-Tweed Ramparts and Castle

Berwick-upon-Tweed Ramparts and Castle is the site of one of Buglife's 'B-Lines' insect pathways, and in 2022 we started a joint project to improve the grasslands for invertebrates. The project will benefit many species, notably the northern brown argus butterfly (*Aricia Artaxerxes*). This species was identified as of principal importance under the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act and will benefit from the creation of new species-rich grasslands.

Our priorities: Involve

To deliver this strategy we will make visible changes to some parts of our estate.

We will make these changes carefully and bring the right people together when making decisions. Change is required, but we will ensure that staff and volunteers feel part of the change and are encouraged and supported to make their sites even better for nature.

We also want to engage our visitors with our work with wildlife and celebrate and share our nature conservation successes. We will find ways to communicate through static and interactive interpretation that complements our brand and strikes a balance with our focus on history.



Bug safari at Eltham Palace and Gardens, Greenwich

Our priorities: Involve

Aim	Priority	Action	Lead/ Support
We will involve our staff, volunteers and supporters in our nature conservation work.	1	Deliver three training events for staff involved in managing our green spaces to build our capability to improve how we manage habitats and engage with nature conservation partners.	Estates/ Gardens and Landscapes
	2	Set up four volunteer-led wildlife monitoring programmes at priority sites and use this data to evaluate nature conservation outcomes.	Estates/ Gardens and Landscape, HPD
	3	Building on the maintenance volunteer roles launched in summer 2021, we will create volunteer habitat management work parties guided by our habitat management toolkits and site management plans.	Estates/ Gardens and Landscapes, HPD
	4	We will explore how we engage our members with the stories of the work we do for wildlife on our sites. We will do this in an inclusive way that complements our brand identity	Marketing/ HPD
Our nature conservation successes are important and worth sharing. We will remain aligned with our brand values but also share our wildlife stories with our staff, volunteers and visitors.	5	Where nature enhances the visitor experience, such as the woodland walk at Oakhampton Castle or orchids growing on the motte at Clifford's Tower, we will explore the use of permanent and temporary interpretation and activities to highlight wildlife features to our visitors and showcase our nature conservation work.	Curatorial/ HPD, Marketing
	6	We will explore ways of adopting and promoting nature-friendly gardening, sharing information with visitors and partners on how we manage our gardens for their heritage and wildlife interest.	Curatorial/ HPD, Marketing

A scenic view of Wrest Park. In the background, a large, multi-story manor house with many windows is reflected in a calm lake. The lake is surrounded by lush green grass and trees. In the foreground, two ducks are standing on the grass near the water's edge. One duck is a male mallard with a green head and orange beak, and the other is a female mallard with a brown head and orange beak. The sky is clear and blue.

PROJECT FOCUS

Volunteer bird surveyors at Wrest Park

In 2021 Ian, Dick and Jason began monitoring the birds that use the grounds at Wrest Park. Rain or shine they survey the site weekly, and to date have recorded over 77 different species of birds. This data will help us improve the management of the grounds for nature while preserving the designated garden landscape.

Other available resources

We hold a variety of wildlife information about our sites which is available in the following documents.

These documents will be collated into one accessible space, but in the meantime, please contact the **Gardens and Landscape** or **Estate Management** teams if you require access to this information.

- English Heritage Site Nature Conservation Audit
- Wildlife Statements
- RSPB wildlife condition surveys
- Wildlife surveys and species records
- Conservation Management Plans
- Conservation Statements
- Landscape and Ecology Management Plans
- Ground Maintenance Contracts
- Garden Maintenance Plans
- Climate Action Plan



Learning about bees at the Home of Charles Darwin, Down House, Kent

Soft capping at Hailes Abbey

Soft capping is the placing of soil and vegetation on the tops of walls. Not only does it protect the wall from damaging water ingress, it also provides valuable, flower-rich habitats which are food sources for invertebrates and birds. We have already used the technique at a number of sites, including Hailes Abbey, and as we introduce it at other sites we will carefully select the flower mix to cope with local conditions and complement nearby habitats.





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For more information about our Nature Strategy,
please get in touch:

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English Heritage cares for over 400 historic monuments, buildings and places.
Through these, we bring the story of England to life for over 10 million visitors each year.

The English Heritage Trust is a charity, no. 1140351, and a company, no. 07447221, registered in England.

Step into England's story