

Making the Link

twenty-five years of Wildlife and Countryside Link



Wildlife and
Countryside



In the beginning

Wildlife and Countryside Link¹ is now twenty-five years old. So how did it begin and what has it achieved? This document tells you more about how the member organisations, their representatives and Link staff have helped run and develop Link, not as an organisation in its own right but as a collective, and reflects some of its many achievements over a quarter of a century. Environmental organisations have long recognised the value of a national coalition for increasing public awareness and support, for exchanging best practice and for championing their cause. In 1980 Wildlife Link took over from two umbrella bodies that, in their time, had served wildlife and the environment well - the Council for Nature² and the Council for Environmental Conservation (CoEnCo)³. Its formation was a response to increasing evidence of damage to wildlife and the environment, and to a more demanding political climate.

It was clear that the defensive and narrow protectionist stance that had dominated previous coalitions had to change to one where a healthy natural environment was championed as a central requirement of a modern and healthy society, and where campaigning had to move from a threat to a solution-based approach.

The UK's voluntary environment and animal welfare groups agreed to establish Link in August 1979, but it was not until March 1980 that it held its first formal meeting under the

auspices of CoEnCo. Link was based upon a principle already established in the USA by a coalition group called 'Monitor'. Records describe Lord Peter Melchett, its first Chairman, as having been "the driving force behind getting the organisation going despite considerable establishment bias". He was convinced, from his experience as a junior Minister, that delegations putting forward a consensus view were usually more effective.

A sister organisation - Countryside Link - was formed in 1982 to look after the interests of the countryside but it was to be a further eleven years before the two organisations joined forces and Wildlife and Countryside Link was born.

In the intervening years Link has championed many environmental causes and has grown into a respected and powerful mechanism for collective action with 37 member organisations supported by more than eight million people.

Link provides a friendly interdisciplinary forum for sharing information and knowledge, creating synergy - turning joined up thinking into joined up action and experience into policy.

Arlin Rickard
Director,
Association of Rivers Trusts

Membership of Link enables the Badger Trust to join a forum where information and expertise is shared by those who work to conserve the Natural Environment.

Richard Turner
Vice Chairman,
Badger Trust

¹ Throughout this document reference to 'Link' is a reference to Wildlife Link, Countryside Link or Wildlife and Countryside Link depending on the context.

² The Council for Nature was established in 1958 as the umbrella body for natural history organisations, although its remit later widened to absorb environmental and wildlife issues. It co-ordinated the hugely successful Nature Weeks in 1964 and 1966 which increased public awareness of wildlife, was a co-sponsor of the *Countryside in 1970* conferences inspired and chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh and co-ordinated the Parliamentary campaign that led to the Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act 1975. In 1979, the year of Wildlife Link's formation, the Council for Nature was disbanded.

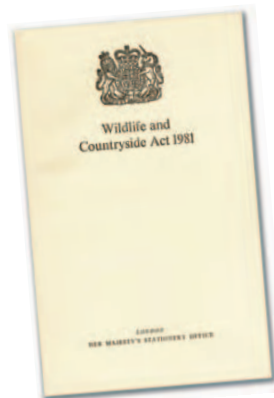
³ The Council for Environmental Conservation was set up in 1969 as an umbrella body for everything environmental other than natural history. CoEnCo's finances became increasingly tight and it was disbanded in 1982.

1980

- Inaugural meeting of the Wildlife Link Committee on 26th March - on the agenda: the Government's delayed Wildlife and Countryside Bill, halting grey seal culling, whales, Foreign & Commonwealth Office forest clearance proposals and future European action on trade in endangered species
- A UNEP World Conservation Strategy is launched in 32 capital cities
- Graphic presentation on habitat loss in Europe by Sir Peter Scott at Link's prestigious international conference on European Habitat Protection calling for new European laws

1981

- Post Office issues stamps for launch of **Butterfly Year** organised by the entomological societies
- Otters are found in only 6% of sites surveyed in England
- **The Wildlife & Countryside Act** - the nation's first comprehensive wildlife law - receives **Royal Assent** after sustained and intensive Link lobbying and Parliamentary debate on unprecedented numbers of amendments improves the final legislation





Woodland Trust Picture Library

“ Link gives us a stronger voice to influence government through joined up working with other NGOs and provides valuable updates on cutting edge conservation issues. ”

Amy Coyte
Chief Executive,
Bat Conservation Trust

“ Link has enabled us to broaden our understanding and influence of new legislation and has strengthened our relationships with a wide range of conservation bodies. ”

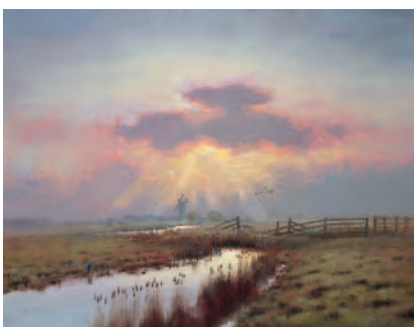
Dave Turnbull
Chief Executive,
British Mountaineering Council

“ Membership of Link allows the British Ecological Society to collaborate with other conservation organisations to support environmental policies that are based on sound science. ”

Paul Hutchinson
Interim Executive Secretary,
British Ecological Society

1982

- Wildlife Link is established as an **independent unincorporated association**
- Government agency - the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) - calls for voluntary phasing out of lead weights in angling after **Mute Swan deaths spark public concern**
- Link criticises slow Government implementation of Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and highlights the destruction and serious threats to five of the UK's most important wildlife sites, including Halvergate Marshes, in a major report
- **Countryside Link is formed** to improve liaison between the voluntary countryside sector and the Countryside Commission



David Dane 01692 584938

Later in the year grant aid is denied for drainage of 3,000 acres of Halvergate Marshes SSSI in Norfolk, using the new 1981 Act

1983

- **Axe fails to fall on NCC** after strong support from Link and others
- Continuing catastrophic loss and damage of Britain's wildlife habitats is condemned by Link as **timetable slips for re-notification of the country's top sites and resources and manpower fail to materialise**

A view from the first Chair

Laying the foundation



Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (FoE) through the 1970s, and the failure of the existing liaison body, the Council for Nature, to accommodate these changes. That in turn stemmed from the Council slowly becoming more of an end in itself, less a service to its member organisations - a common and damaging fate for many liaison and co-ordinating bodies.

The formation was a slow and difficult process - getting an initially reluctant but crucially important Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) on board was the key. In that process, its then Parliamentary Officer, Stuart Housden, played an important role, supported by Tim Sands from the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT). WWF (as so often) provided sufficient funds to make it happen. In the end, everyone gave up some precious independence for the good of the cause. The proposed Wildlife and Countryside Bill, the Nature Conservancy Council's (NCC) unimaginably weak position on site protection and determination to ignore divided NGOs, the vital flow of information on site destruction and damage from the NCC's Chief Scientist, Derek Ratcliffe - those provided the stage on which Wildlife Link went forth, and prospered.

Peter Melchett

A founder and Chair of Link, 1980 - 1988

Mrs Thatcher's election in 1979 played a small part in Wildlife Link's formation. It left me without a full-time job after nearly five years as a Minister - and keen to do more work on nature conservation (I was already a Trustee of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)). So when Joanna Gordon-Clarke (whale campaigner) and Richard Fitter (international conservationist) asked me if I'd be interested in chairing a co-ordination body for conservation NGOs that did not yet exist, I said 'yes'.

The real genesis of Link was the growth in influence of environmental groups like

“As a young organisation, Link keeps us informed, avoids us duplicating effort and helps us to promote policies that benefit thousands of invertebrate species.”

Matt Shardlow
Conservation Director,
Buglife - the Invertebrate
Conservation Trust

“Our partnership with Link allows us to make well-informed input into crucial policy issues that would otherwise be difficult for a small NGO.”

Dr Martin Warren
Chief Executive,
Butterfly Conservation

1984

- Link supports NCC's *Nature Conservation in Great Britain* - a strategy for the future of the nature conservation movement - that leads to an improved relationship between the two bodies
- In a report *Badgers, cattle and bovine tuberculosis* Link responds to a Government three-man review team with calls to redirect funds away from killing badgers to research to find a vaccine to protect them from the disease



Colin Vardell

1985

- Link acquires its first computer
- European Community finally agrees the regulation allowing grants to be paid to farmers for **Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)**
- Link runs an aggressive campaign and helps generate public support for David Clark MP's successful **Private Members Bill** tightening up the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, making provision for mapping of habitats in National Parks, tightening up the law on badger digging and baiting and placing a requirement on the Forestry Commission (FC) to 'achieve a balance between producing wood and conservation'
- Link publishes report to show effects of pesticides on wildlife, including bats, grey partridge and the wild rose as Parliament debates the Government's Food & Environment Protection Bill
- A Link report *European Wildlife Convention: Report on the problems in the UK* highlights the Government's failure to implement the Berne Convention leaving species such as the otter, merlin, corncrake, great crested newt and smooth snake inadequately protected. The report is dismissed by the UK Government but welcomed by other Governments and NGOs across Europe



© Steve Moore/SNH

Public outcry at the damaging effect on the countryside of uncontrolled afforestation in places like the Flow Country in Scotland - including the need to restrict automatic tax incentives - is given added focus in Link's critique *Afforestation in the UK* and the sustained campaign of its member organisations.

“ Link has proved invaluable for CPRE as a means of sharing policy intelligence, debating the issues and, where necessary, presenting a united front to decision-makers. ”

Shaun Spiers
Chief Executive,
Campaign to Protect Rural England

“ Through Link the Council for British Archaeology joins with other environmental NGOs to sustain the historic dimension of the environment for the benefit of all. ”

Dr Gill Chitty
Conservation Coordinator,
Council for British Archaeology

“ For an umbrella body of members with shared goals but diverse interests, Link has done an exceptional job particularly for small organisations such as ourselves. ”

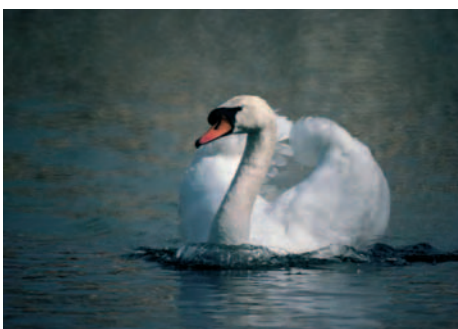
Kathy Moore
Chief Executive,
Council for National Parks

1986

- Government publishes draft regulations on the sale and import of anglers' lead weights
- Link pressure helps win International Whaling Commission moratorium on commercial whaling
- Link's *Local Authorities and Wildlife* report urges Government to strengthen its advice on nature conservation in its proposed revision of planning guidance to local authorities
- The **Agriculture Act 1986** places a duty on the Minister to achieve a reasonable balance between farming and conservation and to designate ESAs after lobbying by Link of Ministers and Parliament

1987

- **Scottish Environment Link** is formed
- **European Year of the Environment**
- World Commission on Environment and Development unveils its report *Our Common Future* - the so-called **Brundtland Report** - calling for nations to commit to sustainable development
- Government finally publishes revised guidance on **planning and nature conservation** showing evidence of Link lobbying



Mike Richards/RSPB Images

Link's First Campaign

lobbying for the first comprehensive wildlife legislation

The late 1970s saw a spate of international agreements, including the Berne Convention and European Birds Directive, building up pressure on the British Government to introduce its own wildlife bill. The need to quantify just how bad things had become for wildlife in the British countryside in the thirty or so years since the Second World War galvanised voluntary organisations to conduct a co-ordinated campaign of unprecedented focus and ferocity. Link made the public aware of the need for action and boldly criticised the Government's figures on site damage and the inadequacy of its response.

In June 1979, the Government finally agreed that it would find time for a bill to 'strengthen the protection afforded to wildlife and their habitat, and to embrace (our) international obligations'. However, it proposed just a few sites for enhanced protection. Link warned that special treatment for a few 'super' Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Government's reliance on a purely voluntary system for the rest was simply not enough. Link demanded prior notification by landowners of potentially damaging activity on all SSSIs as a minimum.

Despite intense Link lobbying around Christmas 1979, the Government's agency - the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) - sided with the Government. NCC responded to Link's Chairman by saying that Link's demand

for comprehensive protection of all SSSIs would lead to 'an unacceptable polarisation of landed interests'! But the Bill was postponed and, during the summer of 1980, Link undertook a major press campaign and intense behind the scenes lobbying of key players, including farming and landowner interests. By the time Link met NCC again, just before the Bill's second reading, the NCC was on the back foot. It agreed the proposals to protect only a selection of SSSIs 'did not go far enough' and asked Government for 'further measures to safeguard SSSIs'.

During the Bill's passage it became clear that Link's claim that site damage was more serious than the Government had admitted was true, with eight per cent of SSSIs being damaged rather than four. This was the final nail in the coffin for the Government's position. Finally the most comprehensive piece of wildlife legislation, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, passed into law after over 200 hours of debate and over 2,000 amendments, giving greater protection to all SSSIs - thanks in large part to Link.

Postscript: It was nearly twenty years before a Government was persuaded - largely due to another successful Link campaign (see Page 14) - that further improvements were required if our wildlife and wildlife habitats were to receive the protection they deserve.

The remarkable and probably unique Link partnership facilitates large and small organisations to share expertise and experience, influence governments' policies and achieve their common goals.

Jennifer Lonsdale
Director,
Environmental Investigation Agency

Link has catalysed common action that has helped transform how we regard nature. Challenges remain but the stage is set for a brighter greener future.

Tony Juniper
Chief Executive,
Friends of the Earth

1988

- Success when tax incentives for conifer afforestation are removed in the budget, and a general presumption against afforestation of the English uplands and a new SSSI to stop afforestation of over 400,000 acres of the **Flow Country** of Caithness and Sutherland are announced... but the Secretary of State for the Environment, Nicholas Ridley, receives a strongly worded letter from Link opposing his proposal to **sell-off the country's National Nature Reserves**
- Link fights the British Government's negative attitudes to the European Commission's **draft Habitats Directive**, meeting the Minister and preparing evidence to the House of Lords' European Communities Committee
- Link report, commissioned by its Seals Group, **Marine Mammals and Fisheries - a study of conflicts with fishing gear in British water**, calls for greater collaboration between all concerned, sparks questions in the House of Commons on 'incidental take' of marine mammals and leads to high level meetings with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Office

1989

- **Wales Environment Link** is formed
- Prime Minister's Royal Society 'green' speech the previous autumn, including a call for action on **global warming and destruction of the ozone layer**, provides a springboard for increased public interest in all things environmental... and the Government **drops plans to privatise National Nature Reserves**
- Link's newly formed Air Pollution Group highlights the **effects of acid rain on wildlife**
- After a Ministerial meeting, Link presses home its case against the **break up of NCC** and holds a well-attended conference - **Future Structures for Countryside Protection in the UK** - and publishes proceedings



The Wildlife Trusts

Dead Grey seal with gill net wounds



©NTP/L

“ The massive threats facing our climate, oceans and forests make the exchange of information and ideas and policy co-ordination increasingly important. Link provides that vital service. ”

Stephen Tindale
Executive Director,
Greenpeace UK

“ As the newest member, we are delighted to have been accepted by the family and look forward to working collaboratively for wildlife and the environment. ”

Linda Bennett
Director,
Hawk and Owl Trust

“ As a small organisation, Link provides us with both a valuable means of being kept informed and an effective conduit for making our views heard. ”

Dr Tony Gent
Chief Executive Officer,
The Herpetological Conservation Trust

“ Link is an excellent vehicle ensuring effective combined action and information sharing, furthering our combined goals for animal welfare and conservation, nationally and globally. ”

Phyllis Campbell-McRae
Executive Director UK,
International Fund for Animal Welfare

1990

- Northern Ireland Environment Link is formed - National Link bodies for the first time in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- Despite achieving some significant amendments, Link is disappointed as Environmental Protection Act is passed breaking up the NCC
- The first Environment White Paper produced by any British Government - *This Common Inheritance* - is published after a consultation period in which Link meets with Ministers and officials, prepares a seminal discussion document and holds a large national conference in York addressed by the Environment Minister, David Trippier



Tony Soper, TV Naturalist, Lord Ross, Chair of Link and Tim Sands present a petition signed by a hundred prominent people (and later published in *The Times*) to the House of Lords to coincide with the Committee stage of the Environment Protection Bill

1991

- Link publishes a benchmark report on the protection of the UK's most important wildlife sites - *SSSIs: A Health Check* - highlighting the continuing damage to SSSIs and calling for strengthened legislation
- A widely acclaimed *Charter for Environmental Education*, produced jointly with the NCC and recognised in *This Common Inheritance*, influences Government action, including increasing the profile of environmental education in the new National Curriculum
- Link's proposed changes to the Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty on Environmental Protection are influential in the UK Government's support for the Treaty Parties' decision to impose a fifty year ban on mining in Antarctica

“ Collaboration is vital in bringing light to important marine conservation issues - Link provides a forum to enable all parties to make a real difference. ”

Margaux Dodds
Director & Co-founder,
Marine Connection

“ Link has helped us influence Government through the sharing of information and expertise and by enabling us to unite with others around a common goal. ”

Sam Fanshawe
Director of Conservation,
Marine Conservation Society

“ Link enables The Mammal Society to focus on what we know best - mammals - while utilising the expertise and lobbying power of the larger Link members. ”

Georgette Shearer
Development Officer,
Mammal Society

“ Link provides both a place and a catalyst for wildlife and countryside organisations to work together - it sounds obvious but it wouldn't happen without it. ”

Fiona Reynolds
Director General,
The National Trust



Steven Kind/Woodland Trust Picture Library

1992

- **The Earth Summit** is held in Rio de Janeiro, the largest ever gathering of world leaders, and the Prime Minister signs the Convention on Biological Diversity
- **Protection of Badgers Act** receives Royal Assent - Link's Badger Group is reformed after three years to help co-ordinate lobbying on Roy Hughes MP's successful Badger Bill that makes it an offence in most circumstances to interfere with the badger's sett
- The largest research project so far in Link's history results in a major discussion paper - **Future Forestry** - describing a new direction for forest policy in England and Wales and raising the profile of forest conservation issues. It is submitted as evidence to the House of Commons' Select Committee on Forestry and the Environment
- Link's marine work gathers pace, building on its proposals on coastal zone management, it charts the way forward for **marine protected areas** and compiles a **Common Agenda** for a UK marine strategy
- One of Link's busiest years - its Cetaceans' Working Group organises eight delegations to embassies and stages a rally prior to the International Whaling Commission's meeting in Glasgow, attracting 4,000 supporters

1993

- Wildlife Link merges with Countryside Link to become **Wildlife and Countryside Link**
- Link seminar with Transport 2000 leads to a **joint statement on road building and the environment** backed by 45 members from all Links published at the Climate Action Network's conference on **Transport and Climate Change**
- Continued marginalisation of the environment from mainstream agricultural policy in the newly reformed European Common Agricultural Policy prompts the Link paper **The Environment at the heart of CAP?** and the start of a sustained campaign for further reform

A new future for forestry

Link's Forestry Group was particularly active from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, campaigning during a time that saw remarkable changes in forestry policy.

The Forestry Commission's (FC) Broadleaves' Review in 1985 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1985 that gave the FC a new duty to take account of environmental issues, marked a turning point in post-war forestry policy. There was no longer an overwhelming emphasis on timber production through afforestation with exotic conifers as the main purpose for forestry in the UK.

Early in its life Link focused on the devastating environmental impacts of a tax regime that encouraged conifer afforestation, most notoriously on the environmentally sensitive Flow Country in Scotland. Later, in an influential report Future Forestry published in 1992, Link set out a vision for a new forestry strategy for Great Britain based on a balanced environmental, social and economic agenda.

Link's opposition to the privatisation of the FC's estate, mooted in the Forestry Review of 1993, helped to bring into focus the wider public benefits of the national forest estate for public access

and wildlife. Its campaign for a national strategy based on delivering public benefits rather than solely on timber production led to the UK Forestry Accord in 1996 and the England Forestry Strategy in 1998 which rejected the idea of single purpose plantations once and for all.

The other main element of Link's work was on independent certification of sustainable forest management. A Link delegation representing environmental and social interests helped to create the ground-breaking UK Woodland Assurance Scheme - a voluntarily agreed standard for sustainable forest management - negotiated with the forestry industry in 1999.

Forestry has been a constant theme for Link throughout its history. Its collective approach has been crucial in countering the trenchant voice of the forest industry's lobby on economic timber production and a positive force in negotiations and formal agreement with the industry over certification.

Dr Hilary Allison
Woodland Trust & current Chair of Link

“ Link has been ahead of the government in bringing together landscape, access and nature to good effect. We have especially valued joint work on common land. ”

Kate Ashbrook
General Secretary,
Open Spaces Society

“ Working with the Link partnership has helped to increase our effectiveness at engaging with policy issues directly affecting plant and fungus conservation. ”

Dr Jayne Manley
Director of UK Operations,
Plantlife International

1994

- Government publishes *Biodiversity - The UK Action Plan*
- Link helps secure a European regulation limiting the length of **drift nets in high seas** and runs a successful workshop to set a joint agenda across the statutory and voluntary sectors for **raising awareness of marine conservation**
- A new joint Links **Oil and Gas Consortium** opens up a dialogue with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for the first time and the majority of 'no-go' areas the consortium lists are not licensed by DTI in its 16th round of licenses for development
- Secretary of State for the Environment, John Gummer drops proposals for merger of **English Nature (EN) and the Countryside Commission**



Ladybird spider: A Biodiversity Action Plan species

1995

- Link's **Governance structure** is changed so that the **Chair of Link** is drawn from a member body as opposed to the Houses of Parliament
- Regulations to implement the European Union's (EU) Habitats Directive in the UK had been passed in 1994, but Link continues intensive lobbying as progress on establishing **Special Areas for Conservation (SAC)**, required under the Directive, is painfully slow. Link publishes *Marine Conservation and the Habitats Directive* to highlight a particular area of concern
- Government publishes White Paper on **Rural England** and Link expresses concern at proposals to relax planning controls. Link plans to maximise the value of the National Agri-Environment Forum proposed in the paper and to seek membership

The battle against whaling

“ We are a small organisation, but with a lot to say. Link gives us a powerful collective voice that cannot be ignored in the corridors of power. ”

Dr Steve Head
Director, Pond Conservation:
The Water Habitats Trust

“ Link has been vital in considering, broadening and advancing the campaign for greater public access to the countryside. The Ramblers value the Link coalition hugely. ”

Nick Barrett
Chief Executive,
The Ramblers' Association

Wildlife protection and conservation are amongst the hallmarks of many of the organisations that make up Link, and, for many, no issue has personified the fledgling environment movement more than the battle against whaling. The UK NGOs were significant in the whaling fight from before the earliest days of a nascent Link, but in many ways it was Link that magnified their capabilities through joint actions, co-ordinated efforts and cooperative planning of campaigns.

Twenty-five years ago, some thirteen plus nations were killing close on 18,000 whales a year. Today, thanks to the work of Link members, there are only three commercial whaling nations left. It's not over yet, but Link members have made a real impact in reducing this destruction of wildlife.

Link has historically provided two advisors to the UK government for meetings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Acting as part of the UK delegation, they play a crucial role in advising on conservation policy and facilitating a bond back to the wider Link membership.

Link briefings and campaigns provided to the conservation-minded governments remain the linchpins of many of the strongest conservation initiatives within the IWC. Indeed, knife-edge votes on maintaining the moratorium on commercial whaling, the establishment of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, and the addressing of welfare issues in the killing of whales have all relied on Link members for their success. At the present time, with Japan attempting to bring overwhelming pressure to bear on the IWC through introducing new members aligned to their views, Link members have been fundamental in keeping conservation-minded countries in the trenches and steadfast in their defence of the moratorium.

Chris Butler-Stroud
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
and Chair of Link 1997 - 2000

1996

- Government endorses the main proposals in the **UK Biodiversity Steering Groups Report on biodiversity**, including welcoming the objectives and targets in an initial 116 species action plans and 14 habitat action plans
- **First World Oceans Day** - nationwide celebration of our seas
- Link Agriculture Group gains seven seats on the new agri-environment forum and launches a **Brighter Future for Green Schemes** outlining seven principles for improving agri-environment schemes
- Nearly two years of negotiations between representatives of Link and the Forestry Industry Council of Great Britain culminate in the launch of **The UK Forestry Accord** - a consensus about future direction for UK Forestry
- Despite a model campaign with extensive media coverage, Link fails to stop the **lifting of the ban on use of large mesh mono-filament gill nets** in Scotland increasing the likelihood of destructive harbour porpoise by-catch
- In order to publicise the arguments against seal culls, copies of the Seals Group's new publication **Seals and Fisheries - the Facts** are sent to fisheries organisations, press, Government and environmental groups

1997

- Launch of **Wildlife Charter** in House of Commons helps put pressure on the first Labour Government for eighteen years to fast track its manifesto pledge for wildlife law reform
- A number of Link proposals to **strengthen control of trade infringements** are included in new Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora's (CITES) Wildlife Trade Implementation Regulations
- Link's report, **The Great SAC Race - the way forward with the Habitats Directive in the UK**, identifies nearly 300 extra sites and 140 further boundary revisions it considers worthy of Special Area of Conservation status
- Link sparks further debate on upland farming with the publication of **Farming the Uplands in the next millennium** and proposals for an Upland Pilot Scheme to encourage and support the environment as well as rural businesses and new jobs

Chief Executives from six of Link Member organisations campaign against proposals for the Newbury Bypass





Mia Strickland/Environmental Investigation Agency

“ Link does what it says on the tin - builds common ground amongst NGOs; provides a forum for resolving differences, and a platform for influencing policy development. ”

Graham Wynne
Chief Executive, RSPB

“ The efforts of welfare NGOs, like the RSPCA, would not be nearly as effective at tackling cruel, exploitative and illegal wildlife trade without Link. ”

Jackie Ballard
Chief Executive,
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

“ Membership of Link is invaluable. Link ensures awareness of and facilitates informed contribution to vital policy issues, providing a professional, united front for wildlife NGOs. ”

Ali Hood
Director of Conservation,
Shark Trust

1998

- A year of campaigning for wildlife and countryside law reform - an Early Day Motion supporting a Wildlife Private Members Bill, including many of Link's 'asks', is signed by over half of all MPs. Link holds a seminar to share views on the Government's proposals for **greater access to the countryside** and is united behind the need for new legislation
- Link conference successfully raises awareness of the effects of **endocrine disrupting chemicals** in the marine environment
- Link publishes a statement of principles for ways the **aggregate planning** system should work as part of the Government's proposals to revise Mineral Planning Guidance (MPG6)



John Fairbairn

Early purple orchid

1999

- Link becomes a **company limited by guarantee**
- **Devolution of many aspects of Government responsibility**, including the environment, to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- Government announces over one and a half billion pound funding package over seven years for the **English Rural Development Plan**
- After Government announces a countryside and rights of way bill in the Queen's speech, Link is awarded **Green Ribbon Political Award** for its three-year wildlife reform campaign
- In new initiatives on planning, Link publishes **A Modern Planning System for wildlife and countryside** - a vision for a reformed planning system and sets ten tests to shape expected drafting of a revised Government Mineral Planning Policy document

Saving our seas

Marine wildlife is far less well protected than that on land. It was added at the eleventh hour and in a modest way to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and was left out altogether from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

For many years Link's Marine Taskforce has co-ordinated a sustained campaign by member organisations aimed at persuading the Government to introduce new comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas.

At first the task was simply to get the marine environment registering on the 'political radar' but, once this was achieved, the challenge has been to see the country's richest biodiversity asset fully protected and recognised in decisions about the future developments in our seas. Campaigning has focussed on increasing public awareness and on moving marine policy thinking forward through participation in Government reviews, such as the Review of Marine Nature Conservation, and through meetings with Ministers and officials from a range of Government Departments, the statutory nature conservation agencies and key industry stakeholders. Link has briefed parliamentarians, provided suggestions for parliamentary questions and campaigned for MPs' support for motions in Parliament.

Achieving solidarity on policy goals has not always been easy but member organisations' commitment to achieving a united approach has been uppermost throughout. This was demonstrated when a lobby of Parliament in March 2005, highlighting the need for legislation, was supported by over 300 representatives from bodies on Link's Marine Task Force, and later when 10 Downing Street was flooded with more than 160,000 representations supporting a bill.

All this work over the last ten years and more has culminated in a Government

commitment to introduce a Marine Bill during the current Parliament and support across the whole political spectrum. This is clearly the 'end of the beginning' - the future challenge for Link will be to ensure legislation is comprehensive and delivers the major improvements in the protection of marine wildlife that Link organisations, its supporters and the general public want to see.

Ben Stafford
RSPB & Chair of Marine Campaign



Link stages one of the largest wildlife lobbies of Parliament in support of new marine law - the 'end of the beginning' for Link's marine campaign: (Left to right: Paddy Tipping MP, Norman Baker MP, Tim Yeo MP)

© Cobbing/Link

2000

- **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** becomes law
- Link pressure helps change EU rules banning field margins wider than two metres that threaten miles of Britain's **hedgerows** so that Member States can decide themselves on the appropriate width
- **Link work on green taxes** receives mixed response when Government abandons plans for a fuel tax escalator and pesticides tax but announces that an aggregate levy will be introduced in 2002
- Link paper *The Rural Development Regulation - fulfilling the promise* focuses on the challenge and opportunities presented by drawing up and implementing rural development plans at a national and regional level

2001

- Link logo is redesigned and a **new identity** launched
- Launch of **Marine Charter** - a call for reform of the management and protection of our seas
- **Greenprint**, a ten point action plan for agri-environment schemes in England and the co-ordination of a **Green Group stakeholder meeting** with the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food are just two highlights in a busy Link year tackling the agricultural agenda
- Links across the UK issue a joint **agenda for change in land use planning** ahead of a Government Green Paper

Wildlife and
Countryside



Campaigning for the countryside



Woodland Trust Picture Library

It may have taken thirteen years for Wildlife Link officially to marry its Countryside partner but the two have depended on each other throughout Link's life. One of Link's great strengths lies in its diversity and nowhere has this been more true than in connecting the wildlife and countryside agendas. Bringing together the different approaches and constituencies has not been without its challenges and even finding a common language has been difficult at times. But together the wildlife and countryside voice has been stronger than when apart. Link has played an important, sometimes central, role in shaping the rural debate on issues ranging from hedgerows and National Parks through historic and coastal landscapes to rural development and farming policy. Perhaps most importantly, however, Link has shown how any serious attempt to improve the way we look after the natural world requires us to look at the bigger picture, join up our thinking and challenge comfortable organisational and professional silos even within ourselves. Within a decade it will be unthinkable not to develop policy and manage our land and coast with a view to promoting access, landscape and wildlife together and we can thank Link for helping pioneer the path.

Tony Burton

Director of Policy and Strategy,
National Trust and Chair of Link 2000-2003

2002

- The World Summit on Sustainable Development is held in Johannesburg
- **Aggregates levy and Sustainability Fund** is introduced in April following pressure from Link's Mineral Sub Group
- Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announces a **new strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food** following the Curry Report, in line with Link's position and this is followed by a favourable spending review after a postcard campaign urging the Prime Minister to fund implementation of the Curry Report
- Link successfully campaigns to secure **greater protection for many species** through CITES and the Convention on Migratory Species: six great whale species listed

Dan Burton: www.underwaterimages.co.uk



The Basking Shark is added to the protected list following quinquennial review of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, to which Link had submitted detailed evidence and receives CITES Appendix II listing at COP 12 in 2002 along with big leaf mahogany after Link lobbying

2003

- A **Biodiversity Task Force** is established by Link to pick up the reins of the Biodiversity 'Challenge' Group
- Link co-ordinates major input into the debate behind the Government's proposals to **modernise delivery of its rural policies**, including the establishment of a new Government 'integrated' agency
- Link secures better protection of **freshwater habitats** through amendments to the Water Act 2003

The second major campaign

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

“ Link has prevented us tripping over one another and enabled us to present a united force on key conservation issues over the last 25 years. ”

John Everitt
Head of Conservation Programmes,
The Wildlife Trusts

“ Link has been the trusted cornerstone in the task of convincing the UK to take an assertive role in the conservation of cetaceans at the IWC. ”

Chris Butler-Stroud
Chief Executive,
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

By far Link's largest campaign before the millennium came after 16 years of frustration as important wildlife habitats continued to be lost and damaged because of inadequate and weak legislation. In the end the nature of the campaign was very different to that in 1981.

Lobbying of political parties prior to the general election of 1997 meant that the labour party, destined to form the next Government, had committed itself in its manifesto to better protection of wildlife - coded language for new SSSI law. The issue this time was not if legislation would be passed but when and in what form.

Soon after the election, in November, Link launched a Wildlife Charter and embarked on a massive campaign to underline the urgency of the situation. For the first time, a large number, rather than small groupings, of Link's member bodies came together to organise diverse activities. These ranged from a mass rally in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons - covered on prime-time TV news bulletins - to the presentation of a quarter of a million signatures to Number 10 Downing Street.

The huge amount of effort and resources paid off. In its manifesto the new Government had also pledged to

legislate on its long-held desire to open up access for the general public to more of the countryside - the so-called 'right to roam'. The Government decided to combine both access and wildlife proposals and, in the Queen's Speech in November 1999, announced that it would introduce a bill in the coming session.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Bill provided a great test of the Link 'family'. Increased access could potentially pose a threat to wildlife, disturbing breeding birds and eroding sensitive wildlife habitats. Opponents of the Bill would exploit such divisions. The Link process, however, was up to it, providing a confidential forum in which negotiations between Link's countryside and wildlife interests could continue - out of the limelight. Mutual respect between the two sides developed and a united position in support of increased access, but with wildlife safeguards, was reached and universally backed by all Link members.

During this highly successful campaign there was, importantly, no loss of identity for member organisations along the way and Link was able to galvanise public support for new countryside laws using its highly flexible and adaptive mechanisms for collective work to exceptionally good effect.

2004

- Water guidance reflects Link pressure on water pricing with the Office of Water Services, including over **three and a quarter billion pounds for environmental improvements** and nearly half a million pounds for nature conservation
- Sustainable development is a key part of the **Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004**, as a result of a Link Campaign
- **Sustaining Biodiversity: revitalising the BAP process** is launched at a Parliamentary reception chaired by Peter Ainsworth MP, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee and addressed by the Environment Minister, Ben Bradshaw and Link develops a paper on **Biodiversity in a Changing Climate**



CITES CoP13 - Bangkok Thailand - Link is represented on Government delegation



Link welcomes MPs' support for better protection of our seas as Early Day Motion calling for comprehensive marine legislation is signed by more than 300 MPs - the third highest in a Parliamentary Session

A personal perspective on this major campaign from Tony Juniper, Chief Executive, Friends of the Earth

In the early 1990s individual organisations in Link, including my own, were campaigning vigorously in their own right to close loopholes in the laws protecting biodiversity in the UK. The issue was being kept in the headlines and we were winning sporadic specific victories but a major breakthrough still eluded us. In 1996, during the climax of the campaign to stop the proposed Newbury Bypass being built across three SSSIs, I took on the role of Chair of the Link legislation group. The aim of the group was simple - to ensure the enactment of new laws that would help prevent the further loss of wildlife.

Chairing this group was one of the most rewarding roles I've had as an environmental campaigner. Combining the expertise, the communications reach and supporter base of the organisations involved - big and small - transformed the political situation. Link's 'Wildlife Charter', the basis for our policy demands, helped to catalyse common action and consistent lobbying to the point in 1999 where the Government included countryside legislation in its Queen's Speech. By then we had joined forces with campaigners pressing forward the access agenda, and in 2000 we were all able to welcome the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (or CROW, as it became known).

Since then policy announcements and official decisions have confirmed the power of Link's collective success. Official decisions turning down damaging road proposals have been brought about by CROW while new targets to ensure that SSSIs are in good condition came with the political momentum it created. As long as its members can agree joint positions and common campaign agendas Link can be hugely powerful.

“Being a member of Link has helped the Trust to make the transition to a campaigning body through shared knowledge, mutual support and co-ordinated action.”

Sue Holden
Chief Executive,
The Woodland Trust



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2005

- Link becomes a registered charity
- Promises to legislate on the marine environment are in Party manifestos of all three main political parties at the General Election and a draft Marine Bill is included in the legislative programme for the new Parliamentary session
- A new Environmental Stewardship Scheme is introduced which Link helped develop. Link particularly welcomes the introduction of Entry Level Stewardship - that allows, for the first time, nearly all the farmed land in England to be entered into an agri-environment scheme and gives more opportunities for landscape scale improvements
- After Link shares intelligence on the Government's modernisation plans for the countryside and lobbies in particular on its plans for a new Integrated Agency, the Government's Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill is published with core objectives for Natural England broadly in line with Link thinking
- Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation for England is published following public consultation, incorporating many of Link's key concerns



A view from the Chair

WSPA has benefited greatly over the years through Link membership, addressing global issues such as wildlife trade and whaling. Long may our fruitful collaboration continue!

Peter Davies
Director General,
World Society for the Protection of
Animals



Link provides a positive forum for NGOs to come together to support each other and provides a powerful platform for action on important environmental issues.

Robert Napier
Chief Executive,
WWF-UK

Link is a genuine partnership. No single member owns it. It provides an inclusive forum for sharing views and knowledge resulting in a powerful voice for conservation.

Martin Spray
Chief Executive,
Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Link helps YHA engage in the wider community of wildlife and countryside NGOs.

Roger Clarke
Chief Executive,
Youth Hostel Association

ZSL congratulates Link on developing a productive set of partnerships that have encouraged issues to be aired and presented in a coherent fashion to Government.

Dr Glyn Davies
Director of Conservation Programmes,
Zoological Society of London

Wildlife and Countryside Link's strength is that it has always had a 'personality' - friendly, focussed and inclusive. It has been blessed with young and talented staff and a constant stream of energetic, knowledgeable representatives united in a common cause - saving our beautiful and threatened natural heritage. As you have seen from this review, the years have seen Link grow in stature, earning the respect of politicians and agencies alike and the active support of the leadership of its member organisations. It has built on its successes and learnt from its failures.

Link has faltered most often when it has been in danger of replacing the work of member organisations - their individual expertise, numbers of staff and resources far exceed those of Link itself. It has been at its best when it has used the collective skills of its member organisations for common good and added value to their work, showing a united front to Government, plugging gaps in policy thinking and tackling the environmental threats of the future.

Link has had some outstanding successes influencing the course of Government policy, achieving new laws, landmark decisions and new ways of thinking. But Link cannot always be at the cutting edge

of policy development. With its diverse membership, agreement cannot always be reached on everything. Its strength has often been its ability to broker a consensus amongst as many of its members as possible. When there have been significant differences it has provided a forum for dialogue to continue and for compromises to be reached.

The cliché is that if Link didn't exist it would have to be invented. Thank goodness it has existed. In the past twenty-five years our natural world has been the richer because of Link. On occasions it has been a lone voice, it has promulgated policy years before it became fashionable. It has shouldered the responsibility for bringing about change on behalf of many and has helped realise the expectations of a generation that has fought for a better future for our environment.

There is much still to achieve. Government action has only recently caught up with last century's thinking. A new agenda is needed to move environmental policy forward. Wildlife and Countryside Link needs to be ready to play its part, to set the agenda and to meet the challenges of the next twenty-five years.

Dr Hilary Allison
Chair of Link, 2003 - present

From past Directors & Chairs

"I had a baptism of fire when I started working for Link in the autumn of 1982. On my first day I was surprised to learn that Link was to become independent of its parent body - CoEnCo - and would be moving offices. At the same time Link was providing co-ordination support to the NGOs interested in the agreements at the International Whaling Commission meetings but I arrived in the aftermath of a major, albeit temporary, falling out in the Whale Working Group. This was based, as far as I could tell, on a disagreement between pragmatism and fundamentalism mixed with the determination and strong personalities of the campaigners involved.

But it was also a time when the NGOs had flexed their muscles by working together on the passage of the landmark Wildlife and Countryside Bill. It showed what could be achieved by working together.

I found the influencing process - getting a glimpse of politics and government from behind the scenes - completely fascinating. It was an insight for me, for example, to attend a Link meeting when two Ministers, far from displaying collective Government, were virtually disagreeing in front of us about the way to protect badgers in a Private Members Bill clause. One illusion shattered! I also loved the communication and networking involved to keep the wheels of Link flowing.

All these experiences have stayed with me. Looking back it was one of my most enjoyable jobs bringing me into contact with a wide range of organisations and personalities."

Hazel Phillips

Secretary of Wildlife Link, 1982 - 1986

"Link basically made me believe that significant change was possible if you were focused, learned how to play the system and didn't give up. This now keeps me going when I feel overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge that climate change represents - previously in my role as campaigner at FoE and in my current role in a major energy company (where I am trying to green them from the inside). Link also improved my dinner party conversation as I often proudly claimed that 'harassing dolphins' was now illegal thanks in part to my efforts. Link introduced me to fabulously talented and committed people and gave me a unique introduction to the environmental sector and the many complex issues we are trying to address. Without it I may well have remained an unhappy fundraiser rather than an exhausted but never defeated campaigner for change."

Bryony Worthington

Principal Officer of Link 1999 - 2002

"I was secretary of Countryside Link just before the formation of Wildlife and Countryside Link. Countryside Link was formed to enable landscape, access and heritage bodies to meet the Countryside Commission at senior level, and we benefited from a frank exchange of views. It then broadened out to provide a facility for joint working with a range of bodies - an excellent precursor to WCL."

Kate Ashbrook

Secretary of Countryside Link, 1989 - 1992

"Link was my first proper job and turned out to be a much more of a life changing experience than I could ever have expected. I met some of the most charismatic and doggedly determined campaigners in the world, as well as experienced leaders, and learnt about organisations, change and diplomacy the direct way. This was invaluable for my subsequent roles at a Wildlife Trust, initially as an Assistant Director and then as its Chief Executive. Most vitally it armed me with the confidence to take on the challenge of heading up The Wildlife Trusts whose bottom-up federal nature is not dissimilar to Link's. I look back on my days at Link with fondness and with some remarkable experiences of human nature and passion about our cause etched clearly on my mind."

Stephanie Hilborne

Principal Officer of Link, 1995 - 1997

"I greatly value the time when I was Director of Link, I saw for real what it means for NGOs to be 'more than the sum of their parts', something which I draw on every day in my job as Manager for Sustainable Land Management for the Countryside Agency. I'll soon be joining up our Countryside Agency work with that of English Nature and the Rural Development Service as we prepare for Natural England, so the skills and art of consensus building I acquired with Link will be invaluable. Most of Link's work is in the background, informing, negotiating, editing joint responses but, without it, many high profile joint campaigns would not have been successful. Link's anniversary is a great time to recognise and celebrate what is a small but very effective organisation, and I hope Link continues to be effective many years to come.

Pippa Langford

Director of Link, 2002 - 2004

"For almost all my career in the environment Link has been a constant companion providing an essential corporate voice for the millions of people that NGOs represent"

Phil Rothwell

Acting Chair of Link, 1997

"Link is epitomised by the adage that 'we are greater than the sum our component parts'. It revels in the diversity of its members and this is what underpins its advocacy success. Since leaving Link in 1999, I have continued to contribute to and benefit from Link's activity either while at one of the smaller organisations, Plantlife, or while working for the RSPB. Link provides a unique service that we, and I would argue Government, cannot do without. Happy Birthday Link, and here's to the next 25 years."

Martin Harper

Principal Officer of Link, 1997 - 1999

"Wildlife and Countryside Link has been at the heart of rural policy thinking - cajoling, encouraging and demonstrating the need to think more carefully about the future of our rural landscape and recognise the public passion for its protection."

Tony Burton

Chair of Link, 2000 - 2003

"In a world full of conflicting agendas and a myriad of confusing approaches, there are some extremely powerful forces at work when organisations like Greenpeace, Plantlife International and National Trust gang up and get on the same page as all the other members of Wildlife and Countryside Link. Such a grown up approach from such diverse organisations is compelling and influential, and has real impact on those on the receiving end of the message."

Dr Jane Smart

Chair of Link, 1996 - 1997

"There is nothing those with power who are defending the status quo like more than for those advocating change in the public interest to argue amongst themselves. Some good causes get nowhere for this reason. Over the last 25 years, those arguing the case for our wildlife and countryside have had real successes - in part because they are right, in part because of the wonderful work of particular groups - and in part because Link has ensured the movement has remained a largely united and coherent, and thus a powerful force."

Lord Peter Melchett

Chair of Link, 1980 - 1988

From Partners

"English Nature congratulates Link on its 25th Anniversary. It has provided an invaluable forum for a wide range of voluntary organisations and over the years has helped to ensure that English Nature remains a focussed, well resourced, independent agency. Next year we will combine with parts of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service to become Natural England. We look forward to building upon our current relationship with Link as it provides a valuable sounding board, allows us to gauge public opinion on key issues and ensure that policies are well grounded and prepared in discussion with our partners in the voluntary sector".

Dr Andy Brown
Chief Executive, English Nature

"Wildlife and Countryside Link has made an invaluable contribution to Government over the last 25 years. It has worked constructively in partnership with Government on several key policy areas including the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and English Biodiversity Strategy, which have benefited enormously from the advice, support and wealth of expertise provided by Link and its member organisations. The co-ordination provided by Link is particularly beneficial to Government, enabling it to engage with and obtain the views of a large number of key stakeholders through one gateway.

We congratulate Link on 25 years of successful partnership working and look forward to continuing to work together on protecting and enhancing our biodiversity and natural environment".

Jim Knight MP
Minister for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity

"Link provides that vital link between environmental NGOs and the machinery of Government. It brings NGOs, small and large together to give a common authoritative voice on wildlife. I am sure the next 25 years will be as successful as the past."

Baroness Young of Old Scone
Chief Executive, The Environment Agency

"The Countryside Agency is very pleased to congratulate Wildlife and Countryside Link for all its achievements over the past 25 years. Link has been the cornerstone for its members' work raising the profile of countryside issues. We especially appreciate its valuable role in helping to protect England's valued landscapes. We are looking forward to continuing to work with Link in the future."

Dr Stuart Burgess
Chair of the Countryside Agency

Wildlife and
Countryside



Personnel

Wildlife Committee - Council for Environmental Conservation

Chair
Lord Peter Melchett 1980 - 1982

Secretaries
Sally Owen 1981 - 1982
Hazel Phillips 1982

Wildlife Link

Chairs
Lord Peter Melchett 1982 - 1988
Lord Stephen Ross 1988 - 1991
Lord Moran 1991 - 1992

Secretaries
Hazel Phillips 1982 - 1986
Jill Oliver 1987 - 1988
Peter Macdonald 1988 - 1992

Countryside Link

Chairs
Alan Mattingly 1982 - 1989
Andrew Purkis 1988 - 1992
Alan Mattingly 1992 - 1993


Secretaries
Fiona Reynolds 1982 - 1989
Kate Ashbrook 1989 - 1992

Wildlife and Countryside Link

Chairs
Lord Moran 1993 - 1995
Dr Jane Smart 1995 - 1997
Phil Rothwell 1997
Chris Butler-Stroud 1997 - 2000
Tony Burton 2000 - 2003
Dr Hilary Allison 2003 - present

Principal Officers / Directors
Peter Macdonald 1993 - 1994
Stephanie Hilborne 1994 - 1997
Martin Harper 1997 - 1999
Bryony Worthington 1999 - 2002
Pippa Langford 2002 - 2004
Alexia Wellbelove 2004 - present

Member organisations

Association of Rivers Trusts
where there's water there's life 



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Wildlife and Countryside Link brings together voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management and food production and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic environment and biodiversity. Taken together, our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK and manage over 476,000 hectares of land.

Current policy areas

- Farming and Rural Development, including Woodland
- Land Use Planning, including Minerals
- Wildlife & Trade, including Whales
- Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside
- Biodiversity
- Marine Nature Conservation, including Bycatch
- Water Policy



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Wildlife and
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