FUTURESCAPES
SPACE FOR NATURE, LAND FOR LIFE

NORTHERN IRELAND
It’s a good start. But the challenges grow, and the new agenda is being set by a wide range of issues. These include adapting our landscapes to the changing climate and so giving wildlife the space to move and establish new ranges, protecting the natural systems that give us our soil, clean water and natural defence against damaging floods and a host of other ecosystem services. What is absolutely clear is that the task is well beyond any single organisation. Futurescapes is the RSPB’s distinctive framework for contributing to the revolution in landscape-scale conservation that is needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

At the heart of any successful conservation initiative are the people who make it happen. Forging partnerships, and developing a shared understanding and passion to shape a better future for us and the natural world that shares our pressured islands, will be the starting point of our Futurescapes programme.

One of my favourite places is Lakenheath Fen – it’s an RSPB nature reserve. Fifteen years ago, it was a carrot field and now it supports nesting bitterns and cranes.

My pride in our achievements at Lakenheath is matched by a realisation that it is nowhere near enough. 2010 was the year that the decline of biodiversity should have been halted; it’s a target missed. The price of failure will be an increasingly impoverished landscape, failing to respond to the needs of the natural world with more and more wildlife driven down by climate change and the pressure of our own needs. That loss will make us the poorer and will condemn future generations to landscapes with less biodiversity and nature increasingly cocooned in nature reserves.

Futurescapes is a vision we want to share and deliver in every corner of the UK. Not everything will happen at once. This is the start of a new love affair with our precious landscapes – a new love of life.

Dr Mike Clarke
RSPB Chief Executive
The RSPB’s Futurescapes programme is working for a thriving countryside cherished by all.
A NEW APPROACH
Futurescapes is the RSPB’s contribution to landscape-scale conservation, a growing movement among UK conservation groups to provide rich habitats for wildlife and diverse, green spaces for people to enjoy in our countryside, not only in protected areas but far beyond. Futurescapes is a partnership effort among the RSPB, fellow environment organisations, local communities, businesses and government bodies to develop a vision for a wildlife-rich countryside in selected areas and to work together to achieve it.

THE CHALLENGE FOR WILDLIFE IN A CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE
Thanks to decades of habitat loss, the most threatened and vulnerable of the UK’s species are hemmed into the last remaining rich fragments of habitat, mostly in protected areas. Many species that are more widespread have undergone dramatic declines, as the broader fabric of the countryside provides fewer of their food and shelter needs. We have yet to halt biodiversity loss and the 21st century holds many more challenges for wildlife. Even with dramatic action to tackle greenhouse gas emissions, the UK will experience significant climate change by the end of the century; climate change impacts are evident already in the natural world and are set to grow.

THE LANDSCAPE-SCALE APPROACH
It is clear that current conservation effort is not enough. Species’ decline and loss is still happening, and wildlife will need even greater protection if it is to adapt to climate change. We need to devote more space to wildlife. Our countryside is already used for a range of important activities, including agriculture, forestry, recreation, housing and water management. While we can, and must, make key wildlife habitats bigger and more resilient, a lot of the extra space for wildlife needs to come from finding ways to meet wildlife’s needs alongside other uses of the countryside. We need to learn how to make the best of our land for multiple objectives. Sometimes that will mean a change in current land uses. It will not just be wildlife that wins. By taking a landscape-scale approach for wildlife, we can improve other natural services provided by the land. Depending on the site, these could include carbon storage, water management and recreational value, alongside food production and other important economic benefits.

FUTURESCAPES
Futurescapes is the RSPB’s boldest, most ambitious programme yet. It aims to tackle challenges to wildlife and society in the following important ways:

Build partnerships among the RSPB and other environmental groups, local communities, the private sector and relevant government authorities to develop a shared vision for a countryside fit for people and wildlife, now and in the future – and to work together to deliver it.
Create more space for nature, by increasing the size of areas that are managed primarily for nature conservation.
Making the countryside a better place for wildlife to adapt to climate change, by making wildlife habitats more resilient to climate change and by managing land in ways that help species move in response to climate change.
Putting nature conservation at the heart of human responses to new pressures on the countryside, such as bioenergy production and new infrastructure development.

The RSPB already has nearly 40 Futurescapes initiatives underway around the UK – from the Flow Country in the far north of Scotland to the uplands of Sliabh Beagh in the west of Northern Ireland. In these places, we are working with others to integrate sound environmental stewardship with countryside management and planning for the challenges of tomorrow. We plan to expand our Futurescapes programme to more than 80 places.

GOVERNMENT ACTION NOW
The RSPB calls on the UK and devolved Governments to:

recognise the importance of the landscape-scale approach to nature conservation to build on and complement work on protected areas and targeted species conservation. To take the intellectual lead in driving forward this approach, at the UK level and in the devolved nations
ensure appropriate policy and planning frameworks are in place to facilitate landscape-scale conservation introduce innovative mechanisms for funding landscape-scale conservation, make existing funding mechanisms work harder for wildlife and ensure that public spending does not have negative impacts on the natural resource base
pilot their own landscape-scale initiatives and share learning with others.
THE BASICS

Nature conservation is a long-term game, and an eye to the future is always necessary as we try to predict threats and ensure our work leaves an enduring legacy. We do this because we love nature and know both its current and future value to society.
Our wildlife is under huge threat. Species are becoming extinct at a rate of two each year, and even once-prolific species, such as the common frog, are under threat. Only where threatened species have been the subject of targeted conservation efforts and reintroductions, have they fared well. Not only have we failed to halt biodiversity loss, but the threats from a changing climate, and increasing pressure on land, are huge. Business as usual is not an option.

We must turn this into an opportunity. Historical habitat loss and fragmentation has in many areas of the UK led to islands of nature surrounded by a landscape of limited value to specialised wildlife. As biodiversity continues to decline, the situation worsens, with remnant populations of once-common species hemmed in by inhospitable land. Nature conservation must be delivered at a much larger scale and in a more successful way alongside other land uses in the wider landscapes, if we are to return to an era of increasing or even stable wildlife. We must provide space for nature to thrive and adapt to a changing climate.

Futurescapes, the RSPB's landscape-scale programme of conservation work, is a major part of our response to these challenges. The programme is a new way of doing nature conservation, at a greater scale and in a more ambitious and integrated way than ever before. It is also an invitation to other organisations and individuals to join us, as together we create, restore and improve habitats across the UK. The programme is about real improvements on the ground, making a real difference for the natural environment.

WHY WE NEED A LANDSCALE-SCALE APPROACH

The landscape-scale perspective is not new to the RSPB. We have long been advocates for large-scale habitat work, and have been putting these ideas into practice on and around flagship reserves including Abernethy, Forsinard Flows, Minsmere and Lakenheath Fen for years. In 2001, we set out the case for landscape-scale conservation in Futurescapes: large-scale habitat restoration for wildlife and people. It is now clear that we need to think even bigger than was envisaged only a decade ago, if we are to turn the tide of biodiversity loss.

We need to learn new lessons, including how to carry out specialist nature conservation across wider landscapes, and how to provide more space for nature to thrive and adapt to a changing climate. Our choices of Futurescape locations are based on our long experience throughout the UK as conservationists and land managers, and are concentrated in those areas where we feel that, with partners, we can make the biggest contribution to nature conservation.

The increase in the scale is significant. Approximately 50 of our Futurescapes cover nearly 1 million hectares (ha) compared to our current reserves' holdings of 150,000 ha. The Futurescapes programme will work beyond such sites in partnership with other organisations and landowners. The range of these partnerships is already impressive across the UK, and we will continue to seek out those who want to pool skills, resources and knowledge to build a better future.

Governments' collective failure to halt biodiversity loss should be a wake-up call across the UK. Redressing the failure will not be an easy task and depends upon genuine political leadership. Landscape-scale conservation needs concerted governmental support to make it happen. The challenge for UK governments, NGOs and other organisations is clear: we must work together, supported by adequate policies and funding, to create a countryside fit for wildlife and people, now and in the future.
The UK already has valuable systems in place to conserve nature – including legal protection for important wildlife sites, the statutory duties of our nature conservation agencies to protect species and bring habitats into favourable condition, agri-environment schemes to enhance habitat on farmed lands, and the range of vital privately-funded efforts, led by conservation organisations, to help threatened species to recover their foothold in a damaged environment.

If strengthened, all these components of nature conservation can provide a solid foundation for the landscape-scale approach to conservation.

There is no time to waste, either. Such are the pressures on the UK countryside that developing a landscape-scale approach to conservation must go hand-in-hand with strengthening these vital building blocks: protecting, expanding and reconnecting sites, recovering threatened species and enhancing the farmed environment. Only then will we succeed in producing a countryside fit for wildlife in the 21st century.

SPECIES CONSERVATION

The landscape of the UK is a product of its management over a very long period. Over recent centuries, and particularly during the 20th century, our once-extensive tracts of semi-natural habitat, upon which so many of our cherished species depend, have suffered significant losses. What remains today are tiny, and highly fragmented, remnants of that once-extensive coverage; in essence, small islands of habitat. It is little surprise that species dependent on these habitats struggle to maintain viable populations. Specific interventions on particularly localised priority species such as the bittern, stone-curlew, cirl bunting and red kite have had a very positive impact on the populations of these species. However, declines in species dispersed across the wider countryside have yet to be successfully tackled. This has resulted in an increase in the number of red-listed species of conservation concern across the UK. In a managed landscape, targeted species recovery work will always be necessary to achieve conservation goals.

PROTECTED AREAS

The building blocks of nature conservation have been painstakingly assembled over the last 30 years, and the RSPB has been involved in many of them. The UK’s system of protected areas can be effective, however threats remain and this network of our finest wildlife sites remains incomplete, even though it is an essential part of the species recovery toolkit. The protected area network was established at a time when the wider countryside was in a considerably less impoverished state and these were qualifying sites rather than representative samples of a designation feature. These sites have subsequently become more isolated, and while many of them are now being helped to recover, more work will be needed to bring them into the required favourable condition. We therefore need the protected area network expanded, improved and properly conserved.
THE ROLE OF PROTECTED AREAS

The role of protected areas in this recovery is critical. The greater the area of SPAs, the stronger the recovery, especially for the rare and vulnerable species on Annex 1. This was evidenced by those countries that designated larger areas of SPAs having trends that were more positive.

As our climate continues to change, protected areas will play an even more important role in ensuring a future for wildlife. Tomorrow’s biodiversity can only come from today’s, so the role of protected areas in improving the conservation status of species is a vital first step in enabling adaptation. Designated sites don’t just protect the species that reside within them, but the underpinning environmental conditions or site function.

Many of our protected areas have been relatively undisturbed by human activity, and contain key environmental conditions such as low-nutrient soils, high water quality, and geologies and topographies that are now rare in the wider landscape. Conditions like these are the foundation of diverse ecological communities. They will continue to have a diverse ecology, as the species that make up those communities alter over time.

For these reasons, the protected area network will be central to the Futurescapes approach. While protected areas are at the core of all Futurescape initiatives, identifying the opportunity to support wildlife over a wider landscape does not imply or signal a new tier of designation.
ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION
The intrinsic value of wildlife, and society's ethical duty to conserve it, has been given expression by the environmental laws passed at EU and national levels over the past 30 years. The Birds and Habitats Directives in Europe, the Wildlife and Environment Conservation Orders and Conservation Regulations in Northern Ireland, and equivalent legislation in other parts of the UK have all set out safeguards which limit the degree to which human activity can be allowed to impact on the natural environment, and assigned responsibilities for its protection and restoration. This legislation has made a huge contribution to the conservation agenda and is responsible for much of what we hold dear today.

However, there remain areas where more positive use could be made of the existing legislative toolkit to bring about the changes needed to our countryside, eg creation and restoration of habitats outside our protected area networks to support species recovery. We need to build and sustain this success while at the same time ensuring the full national implementation of newer directives (eg the Water Framework Directive) and the integration of nature conservation into all regulation governing land use. Such careful integration can help avoid conflicts, delays and increased costs by ensuring nature conservation concerns are factored in at the earliest stage of planning land-use change.

CONSERVATION IN THE WIDER COUNTRYSIDE
The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides funding that can deliver environmental outcomes in the wider countryside. These benefits include those delivered through agri-environment schemes, such as increased habitat for farmland birds, and resource protection. However, the funding available for these schemes is currently inadequate, and the majority of funding is delivered as direct payments to farmers, for little public benefit return. In the current CAP framework, the increased funding needed for those public benefits could be achieved by a significant transfer of resources towards such schemes.

At the same time, agri-environment schemes must be shown to deliver real environmental improvements. Many are currently judged by how many participants they have, or how many hectares they cover. Success must be judged against clear objectives such as species and habitat recovery. Good scheme design and advisory capacity on the ground are essential to ensure public benefits are delivered. The RSPB's working arable farm in Cambridgeshire, Hope Farm, demonstrates that profitable, wildlife-friendly farming is possible, but more must be done to ensure schemes deliver on this potential in all situations.

For the landscape-scale approach to conservation to bring the real benefits anticipated, current schemes need improvements in funding, design, delivery and co-ordination. A speedy improvement in delivery is vital as we look to the future and the uncertainties brought about by climate change.
Among the greatest challenges to managing the UK’s landscape in the future is climate change. Climate change is a huge long-term threat to wildlife. For every degree Centigrade that the Earth’s average temperature warms, another 10% of species are projected to be at higher risk of extinction globally.

While average global temperatures have risen 0.8 degrees Centigrade since pre-industrial times, warming has gone farther and faster in various parts of the globe, including the British Isles. The climate in Northern Ireland is already changing. Air temperature is rising and the number of hot days is increasing. Sea surface temperature in the UK’s seas has risen by around 0.7 degrees since 1980. While that may not sound like much of a change, the impacts on wildlife are already significant.

Warmer springs and hotter summers are causing some species to fall out of sync with their prey. For instance, on upland moors, milder spring weather has encouraged golden plovers to nest earlier than they did two decades ago. However, there is no longer enough food for the chicks to eat because craneflies, the mainstay of their diet, have not changed their hatching times. Meanwhile, hot summers are drying out cranefly eggs, leading to smaller populations of craneflies the following year.

Warming seas are disrupting the marine food chain. The abundance and distribution of cold-water plankton is changing so that numbers of sandeels, which rely on the plankton, are falling. Seabirds at the top of the chain, such as puffins and kittiwakes, are suffering huge breeding failures due to lack of nutritious sandeel food.

On our coasts, sea levels have risen 10 centimetres in the past century, mostly due to seas expanding as they warm up. Sea level rise is reducing the area of saltmarsh habitat on our coast – fertile feeding and breeding grounds for wading birds – and, in some cases, threatening human settlements.

We need to work hard to adapt to changes in the climate that are already underway and which challenge both nature conservation and human well-being. Already the RSPB has many projects underway, with others, to help wildlife adapt. For example, we are blocking upland peatland drains to help the water remain in the soils better over the summer months, and we are creating new coastal saltmarsh habitats through managed realignment schemes. But even with such conservation innovations underway, there are more negative impacts ahead for the natural environment as a result of climate change. Even bolder action is needed.

Even if today’s society musters tremendous political will to limit climate change, further warming is inevitable this century. As a result of greenhouse gas emissions in our recent history, a certain degree of warming is already built into Earth’s systems. As we look towards the century’s end, our future climate is highly uncertain and the localised impacts even more so. At a global level, future scenarios range from a further average temperature rise of 1.4 degrees Centigrade to 4 degrees or more.

Uncertainty about the nature and scale of future climatic change makes it difficult to project consequences for wildlife, but existing studies suggest alarming trends. Shifts in species distributions are the most studied, such as detailed in the Climatic Atlas of European Breeding Birds. Based on a scenario of mid-range emissions, the authors find that suitable climatic conditions for the average bird species will shift nearly 550 km north-east by the end of this century, be reduced in size by a fifth and overlap the current range by only 40%. Historic species population declines, coupled with the speed of these changes and a landscape with comparatively little semi-natural habitat, mean that many species will not be able to adapt in time without our help.
Dartford warblers need these special habitats to survive. In Spain and Portugal Dartford warbler numbers are already falling – just as the Climatic Atlas predicts they will. A warmer British summer and milder winter should encourage the Dartford warbler to spread here, but whether it flourishes is up to us. The climate may become favourable further north but will suitable habitat be available? A Dartford warbler can move north, but can hardly settle in a field of wheat.

At our nature reserve at The Lodge in Bedfordshire, we are returning a dark conifer plantation to heathland, removing trees and planting heather and gorse over more than a square kilometre. We will create the largest heathland in Bedfordshire – a welcome patch for Dartford warblers to settle as they expand north. This is just one example of a bird that we can support in a changed climate by making sure the right habitat is there.
EMERGING PRESSURES ON OUR COUNTRYSIDE

Our society will be pressured by new challenges in the decades ahead, and we will, in turn, place more pressure on the natural environment to meet our human needs. Demographic changes will drive increased demands for food, housing, transport and recreational uses of land. As detailed by the Foresight Group’s 2010 report: Future Land Use, Making the Most of Land in the 21st Century, the number of UK households will increase as people live longer, migrants contribute to our growing economy, more children are born and increasing numbers of people live in single-occupancy households. These pressures will be felt to differing degrees across countries and regions of the UK, but everywhere, the trend is in the same direction.

Among these challenges, food security debates have the potential to become particularly heated. Not only a growing population, but also growing incomes and increased per capita consumption will drive up the UK demand for food, and changing consumer tastes could influence the type of food we want to buy. Future governments may let market signals for food and other crops govern farmers’ cropping choices, or they may introduce policy measures to advantage one crop over another, just as current policy incentives and government funding in Scotland is driving afforestation in large swathes of the landscape.

For food and more general agricultural policy, and policies across forestry, housing, transport, infrastructure and other sectors of the economy, it is essential that future policies take account of wildlife needs in a pressured countryside. The relevant policies may be at UK or devolved level, or they may relate to key decisions made at the EU level, such as Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, due in 2014.

Government policies to mitigate against climate change will also have profound implications for the way our land is used and managed. The actions we take could affect wildlife dramatically. At the heart of the UK’s climate change mitigation policy are its commitments to slash greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050, enshrined in the UK Climate Change Act (2008). The RSPB campaigned hard for these targets and we continue to press for medium-term emissions cuts in the UK of 42% by 2020. But we argue that the policies to deliver these emissions cuts must be made in a way that respects our most important wildlife sites and provides habitat in the wider countryside.

Producing feedstocks for bioenergy, minimising the emissions associated with agriculture, developing renewable energy schemes, constructing low-carbon transport infrastructure – these are all necessary measures that must be balanced carefully with the needs of wildlife and the natural world today. Without proactive measures to conserve important species and habitats and provide sympathetic land management, landowners’ responses to the climate crisis could have a bigger inadvertent negative effect on wildlife than climate change does directly.

For example, without careful policy decisions and adequate funding, the drive to increase bioenergy crops to support climate change mitigation could lead to vast areas of the landscape being covered in monoculture plantations with virtually no wildlife value – where there is the potential, instead, to develop many habitat features in a productive landscape. RSPB studies demonstrate how we have worked with developers to produce renewable energy projects and cropping systems with specific features to create and enhance wildlife habitat. In other words, we have gathered a significant body of evidence to demonstrate how our society can mitigate against climate change while protecting the natural world.
BARN OWL
As we plan ways to manage our cities, towns, countryside and coast to take account of climate change impacts, there are ample opportunities to develop solutions that benefit both people and wildlife. Adapting to climate change in ways that improve people’s economic security and recreation, and enhance wildlife habitats simultaneously, is at the heart of the RSPB’s approach. Sustainable flood risk management, upland conservation projects and improved agri-environment schemes are all examples of measures that help nature to help us.

Sustainable flood risk management is one of a suite of tools used to help communities cope with flood risk. It involves dismantling uneconomic flood defences, where appropriate, in areas where concrete river banks have speeded up the flow of flood waters, distributing the problem downstream. Carried out on a catchment scale, the need for hard defences is removed by providing upland flood water storage or re-meandering the river course. This helps restore the river to its natural state, providing benefits for people, habitats and threatened species. The RSPB is currently working in partnership with the Rivers Agency and other stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of such an approach in Northern Ireland.

The RSPB has worked for many years with governments to develop agri-environment schemes that provide wildlife habitat in productive lands. With an eye to the changing climate of the future, we will be advocating that these schemes are geared to ensure that wildlife is helped to adapt to climate change, partly by using existing measures to strengthen and protect existing populations, and partly by developing new measures that address future needs such as increased water retention to prevent drying of wetlands.

A changing climate in the UK, with warmer springs, hotter summers and a longer growing season, will encourage farmers to grow new crops. These could range from expanding the area of maize further north into the UK, to introducing more exotic crops such as sub-tropical fruits. Providing insect habitat among these crops may prove to be essential to their viability, as they will depend on wildlife to pollinate them.

While all the examples given here show clear win-win solutions for people and wildlife in a multi-functional landscape, they involve trade-offs in some form. These trade-offs among land uses will only become more acute in future decades.

Ecosystems provide a complex web of services for people, which cannot be easily replaced. They include providing the food, fresh water, fuel wood and genetic resources that support people’s lives and livelihoods. They include cultural, spiritual, recreational, aesthetic and educational uses of the natural environment. We depend on land for all these visible ecosystem services that support and enrich our lives, and for many less visible services, too, ranging from climate and flood regulation to nutrient cycling. Our demands are already increasing and are set to continue apace. We need to take account in our decision-making of all the services that land provides us with and devise fair processes for deciding how such services are provided, and for whom. This includes speaking up for nature, which without us, does not have a voice.
Landscape-scale conservation is a big, bold approach to address the issues of habitat loss and fragmentation, the need to help wildlife adapt to climate change, and the imperative to adapt our natural and built environments to a changing climate, but in a truly sustainable way.

The landscape-scale approach aims to restore ecological function across whole landscape units, rather than just protecting limited nature reserves or sites. This means creating more habitats where remnant areas have become too fragmented to support the species that depend on them, particularly important for heathland and woodland. It means restoring the hydrology of wetland complexes at a scale that allows natural and sustainable water regimes to be resumed, rather than having small verdant patches desiccated by surrounding drained land – vital for water meadows, and the insects and breeding waders that rely on them. It means ensuring that a mosaic of habitats is put back, often integrated with other land uses such as farming, forestry or housing, that allows wildlife to move through a landscape and thrive within it.

Landscape-scale conservation is not only about making the countryside better for wildlife – but also about making the countryside better for people. It’s about a countryside where people can celebrate nature, a countryside that sustains the supply of food, fuel, fibre and water that people need now and in the future.

The landscape-scale approach will help tackle these challenges to wildlife and society in four important ways:

PUT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS AT THE HEART OF DECISION-MAKING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

A thriving natural environment enhances people’s quality of life. But in order for people to benefit most from landscape-scale conservation, communities need to have good information about the options for nature conservation – big and small – in their area. They also need the opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect them. Local communities may be at the forefront of delivering conservation action, too, whether they are landowners or land managers, volunteers for conservation, business sponsors or local spokespeople and organisers. That is why partnerships among communities, government, business and civil society organisations are critical to achieving a viable shared vision of landscape-scale conservation, and implementing it.

Natural and semi-natural habitats in the UK provide a vast array of ecosystem services. More research is needed to quantify the extent and value of these functions properly, but their value to the UK is estimated to be hundreds of millions of pounds in the form of reduced flood risk, better water quality, carbon storage and sequestration, health benefits, tourism and recreation revenues, and education provision. Action for biodiversity may help restore other functions to the environment: for instance, restoring native woodland for wildlife habitats can also increase natural carbon stores and
recreational places for people to enjoy. Seldom are decisions about land management without trade-offs. That is why it is important that stakeholders work closely together at the local level to ensure that concerned parties are consulted, and communities are involved in developing sustainable solutions for their area.

**INCREASE THE SIZE OF AREAS THAT ARE MANAGED FOR NATURE CONSERVATION**

There is abundant evidence to show that small, fragmented and isolated pockets of wildlife habitat are likely to fail the species that depend upon them – in nature conservation size really does matter. Larger sites, managed primarily for nature conservation purposes, will be needed, and can build on existing important wildlife sites. Large sites usually offer a greater variety of conditions for a wider range of species. They buffer sensitive features from external pressures such as pollution, and from some of the difficult climatic conditions we will come to expect, such as drought. For example, by making wetland sites larger and innovating ways to store and manage water, we can keep those places in better condition for wading birds, dragonflies and other wetland species as our summers become hotter and drier. Large sites allow for more cost-effective management, making better use of natural processes, and they support species that require mosaics of different habitats or a large range to complete their lifecycles.

**MANAGE THE COUNTRYSIDE TO HELP SPECIES ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

As well as making habitats more resilient to climate change by increasing the size of protected areas, it is possible to make targeted interventions that will help individual species to cope. For example, we can develop ways to manage for stronger winds as weather events become more severe – another predicted effect of climate change. On grasslands, we can adjust grazing and mowing regimes to suit longer growing seasons and still provide the right grass height for breeding waders.

Modelling shows the broad scale and significant extent of species’ expected movements. Projections of species’ potential movement to the north and to higher altitudes are only meaningful if adequate habitat is in place for the species concerned. Only relatively small areas of our present countryside are protected or managed as habitat for wildlife. These are set within a wider landscape that contains many barriers to movement, including towns and cities, roads and railways, and intensively managed farmland and forestry with little by way of suitable habitat. In a productive landscape, a range of simple, practical measures can make the countryside better for wildlife and more amenable to species movement: features such as hedges, ponds, water-filled ditches, woodland and scrub patches, and field margins. Agri-environment schemes can, and already do, support many of these features, but they must be fully funded and available.

**Bitterns: from virtual extinction to 76 booming males**

Bitterns are an excellent example of how targeted management can dramatically change the status of a species. Once on the verge of extinction, Bitterns are now thriving and have more than tripled in numbers. They have expanded their range, now breeding in areas like the Thames estuary that were previously unsuitable. Looking north, Bitterns are also spreading into more northern areas, possibly as a result of climate change. Bitterns’ population growth may be an indicator of improving conservation efforts, and highlights the importance of nurturing and protecting habitats for this beautiful species.
PUT NATURE CONSERVATION AT THE
HEART OF OUR RESPONSE TO NEW
PRESSURES ON THE COUNTRYSIDE

As indicated previously, the measures we take to avoid
dangerous climate change could transform parts of our
countryside. The UK government is legally committed to
ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions
by at least 80% by 2050. There are similarly ambitious
targets for developing renewable energy: 15% of the UK’s
energy is to come from renewables by 2020, and 40% of
Northern Ireland’s energy in the same period. These
aspirations have profound implications for the way our
land is managed, as a mix of renewable energy
technologies will need to come on-stream in the next
two decades to provide low-carbon heat and power.
These range from onshore wind farms to feedstock
crops for solid biomass.

With careful planning, siting and evaluation of wildlife
impacts, all these technologies can be developed to protect
and even to enhance benefits for wildlife. It is essential
that they do so, in order to safeguard biodiversity for
today and tomorrow. The other pressures foreseen for
the UK countryside in the coming decades – increased
agricultural production, housing, infrastructure and other
developments – could, likewise, hold deep implications
for wildlife. At the landscape scale, these developments
must be planned strategically in a way that leaves space
for wildlife and for thriving habitats to support it.

While we can anticipate many of the challenges to our
countryside in the future, the details – naturally – remain
uncertain. The actual impacts of climate change, the
response from wildlife and people to climate impacts,
and other social and economic trends of the future, point
only in the direction of contentious debates over the use
of land, and a countryside where space for wildlife will be
under strain. A landscape-scale approach to conservation
helps create flexibility for people and wildlife to adapt to
all these unknown pressures in the future.

RESTORING
NATURE IN
A COMPLEX
WORLD

The RSPB advocates an approach
that supports the ecological
processes that drive the natural
world supplemented by a targeted
approach for the species that are
in greatest need of our help. Our
ecosystems are too damaged, too
fragmented and too small to rely
solely on species responding to
broad-brush measures. This risk is
compounded by the uncertainties
that are faced in relation to a
changing climate.

We have been at the forefront of
showing what can be achieved
through targeted, well-researched,
species-focused work. It is an
approach that comes from our history
and is central to our passion to ensure
that we can hand on a natural world
to future generations that is in better
condition than it is now.

The improving fortunes of avocets,
ospreys, bitterns, corncrakes,
red kites, white-tailed eagles, cirl
buntings, stone-curlews, large
blue butterflies, aspen hoverflies
and great yellow bumblebees all
demonstrate that species-focused
conservation works.

Too often, the benefits of either
an ecosystem or a species approach
are posed as alternatives. We
believe the solution lies in an
intelligent combination of delivering
vital ecosystem services alongside
effective nature conservation
strategies that deliver for both
species and habitats. To combine
both approaches demands a
landscape-scale approach.
Red kites: from virtual extinction in the UK to more than 1,350 breeding pairs.
THE RSPB’S FUTURE SCAPES PROGRAMME
Futurescapes is the RSPB’s programme of landscape-scale initiatives that will build on our strengths, in partnership with others, to achieve a step change in sustainable countryside management.

It is based on our best current knowledge of what wildlife needs to thrive now and in the near future, and it aims to provide enough versatility to plan for greater species movements and new societal needs, many years ahead.

Futurescapes aims to contribute to a revolution in thinking and delivery of nature conservation, at a scale capable of making a real difference. Our programme will complement, add to and support a growing movement, including in particular the Living Landscapes programme led by the Wildlife Trusts and other initiatives from across the conservation community. These initiatives share a common vision: to see nature thriving in a landscape that provides ecosystem services, supports rural industry and inspires the millions of people who live in it and visit each year. The key is working together to shape the future of a countryside fit for us all.

The RSPB has begun working towards this goal by developing a first tranche of Futurescapes initiatives across the UK. There are approximately 40 sites in our programme and this is set to increase. At these sites, we are acquiring or expanding nature reserves, we are developing species recovery plans for threatened wildlife and we are expanding our conservation management advice both at the farm estate level and also strategically at various spatial levels. All of these projects are in areas of the UK where the RSPB has a good understanding of local situations and where we are part of strong partnerships that can ensure conservation measures are delivered.
The vision for our Futurescapes programme in Northern Ireland is to create a healthy countryside rich in wildlife based on sustainable land management, which inspires the people who live and work there, and those who visit. Futurescapes was launched in Northern Ireland in late 2009 to key stakeholders and potential partner organisations to encourage them to be involved in the Futurescapes programme. To deliver our Futurescapes programme, the RSPB is working closely with governmental partners in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and with farmers, landowners, industry, funding bodies, local community associations and other environmental NGOs.

Our Futurescapes include the Lough Neagh and Lough Erne Basins, and our aim in these areas is to work in partnership to halt biodiversity loss and mitigate against climate change, while delivering public benefits such as improved water quality, sustainable food production and flood management.
Our Futurescape combines the catchment areas of Lough Neagh and Lough Erne Basins and stretches from the Mourne Mountains in the south to the coast with the North Atlantic in the north, and east to west from the edges of our capital city Belfast, to the wetlands of Fermanagh.

The Futurescape area covers nearly 5,000 km², contains the largest freshwater lake in Britain and Ireland, and spans an international boundary, taking in part of the Republic of Ireland. Almost 70,000 wetland birds spend the winter each year within the internationally important wetlands of Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. The Futurescape area contains over 100 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs), 25 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), five Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and eight Ramsar sites.

RSPB Northern Ireland is already working in partnership with several other organisations on large-scale habitat restoration projects and sustainable land management at sites within the Futurescapes areas, including Lough Beg, Sliabh Beagh, the Antrim Hills, Cuilcagh Mountain and Upper and Lower Lough Erne.

LOUGH NEAGH AND LOUGH ERNE BASINS

PINE MARTEN
Reports by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group on progress with the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy show a failure to meet biodiversity targets. Despite many successes, it is clear that our current tools are not sufficient to adequately conserve nature in the future.

The RSPB’s Futurescapes programme sets out an ambitious programme of action led by one organisation, but it will not be enough on its own. To date, landscape-scale conservation has been constrained by a lack of funding and insufficient support among policy-makers. The new European biodiversity target for 2020 is just as ambitious, if not more so, than Northern Ireland’s existing target of halting the loss of species and habitats by 2016.

We need new tools if we are to rise to this challenge: new tools that turn landscape-scale conservation from a possibility to a probability; tools that reflect the huge contribution nature makes to Northern Ireland’s well-being with an appropriate level of specific funding.

The RSPB calls for the following Government commitments to enable wildlife to flourish across Northern Ireland:

- Recognise the importance of the landscape-scale approach to nature conservation and take the intellectual lead in driving forward this approach, to build on and complement work on protected areas and targeted species conservation.
- Ensure appropriate policy and planning frameworks are in place to facilitate a landscape-scale approach.
- Introduce innovative mechanisms for funding a landscape-scale approach, make existing funding mechanisms work harder for wildlife and ensure that public spending does not have negative impacts on the natural resource base.
- Government agencies should undertake pilot projects to test the landscape-scale approach. The Northern Ireland Assembly must, in partnership with others, learn the lessons from practice to inform future policy-making.
RSPB Northern Ireland has decades of experience of helping to put the natural world at the centre of decision-making; we have often done this in co-operation with communities and in broadly-framed partnerships. RSPB Northern Ireland draws its strength and inspiration from the passion people have for the natural world.

“I live close to one of Northern Ireland’s best wetlands – Lough Beg – and volunteer my time assisting with monitoring the site as part of the Futurescapes programme. I have also introduced children from the local primary school to the wildlife of this remarkable place. I think it is vital that local people get the chance to make a difference for their environment.”

Elizabeth Greeg, volunteer

Our Futurescapes programme challenges us to build on our experience and apply, consistently, the lessons we have learned from our most successful and enduring projects. In recognising and embracing the challenge of true, empowering engagement, we believe that the natural environment will benefit and we will embark on a journey together that will have the power to change lives.

“The Lough Beg Wetlands Futurescapes project aims to restore habitats for wildlife such as lapwings, curlews, redshanks and snipe. We encourage farmers to use agri-environment schemes which are designed to work alongside commercial agriculture - to provide the land management that these birds and other species need.”

Graham Seymour, Director Natural Heritage, Northern Ireland Environment Agency

The landscapes that we have identified within our Futurescapes programme have been shaped by their histories and are at the heart of their communities. Our shared vision will only be achievable if we work together in co-operation and mutual respect.

Please contact us to discuss how we can work together to make our countryside rich in wildlife and better for people, now and in the future.
RSPB REGIONAL OFFICES

MIDLANDS REGIONAL OFFICE
46 The Green, South Bar, Banbury,
Oxfordshire OX16 9AB
Tel: 01295 253330

BIRMINGHAM OFFICE
Room 70, 4th Floor, Guildhall Buildings,
Stephenson Street, Birmingham B2 4BT
Tel: 0121 616 6850

EASTERN ENGLAND REGIONAL OFFICE
Stalham House, 65 Thorpe Road,
Norwich NR1 1UD
Tel: 01603 661662

LONDON AREA OFFICE
Second Floor, 65 Petty France,
London SW1H 9EU
Tel: 020 7808 1240

NORTHERN ENGLAND REGIONAL OFFICES
Westleigh Mews, Wakefield Road,
Denby Dale, Huddersfield HD8 8QD
Tel: 01484 861148

LANCASTER OFFICE
RSPB Northern England Region, 7.3.1 Cameron House,
White Cross Estate, Lancaster LA1 4XQ
Tel: 01524 581000

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL OFFICE
2nd Floor, Frederick House, 42 Frederick Place,
Brighton, East Sussex BN1 4EA
Tel: 01273 775333

SOUTH WEST ENGLAND REGIONAL OFFICE
Keble House, Southemhay Gardens,
Exeter, Devon EX1 1NT
Tel: 01392 432691

EAST SCOTLAND REGIONAL OFFICE
10 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB10 1YP
Tel: 01224 624824

NORTH SCOTLAND REGIONAL OFFICE
Etive House, Beechwood Park,
Inverness IV2 3BW
Tel: 01463 715000

SOUTH AND WEST SCOTLAND REGIONAL OFFICE
10 Park Quadrant, Glasgow G3 6BS
Tel: 0141 331 0993

NORTH WALES OFFICE
Unit 14, Llys Castan, Parc Menai,
Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4FD
Tel: 01248 672850
The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.


IMAGES: Lower Lough Erne by Andy Hay, children by Jesper Mattias, lapwing by Steve Knell, Lough Foyle by Andy Hay, Irish stoat by David Kjaer, Dartford warbler by Mike Read, barn owl by Nigel Blake, Lake Vyrnwy by Eleanor Bentall, bittern by Ernie Janes, red kite by Danny Green, painted lady butterfly by Steve Knell, Lough Beg by David Wootton, pine marten by Mark Hamblin, Stormont by Andy Hay, Kebble by Andy Hay and Portmore Lough by Andy Hay (all rspb-images.com); yellowhammer by iStockphoto.com.

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