

Wilder

KENT

**Special
edition**

**AUTUMN
2026**

Our year for wildlife

Impact Report 2025



**Kent
Wildlife Trust**

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Action and innovation **for nature**



Working towards a **Wilder Kent**

Welcome and thank you
from our Chair of Trustees



Jane Ibbotson
Chair of Trustees

Back in 2019, we set ourselves a bold target with Wilder Kent 2030: to turn the tide on biodiversity decline and put nature into genuine recovery across the county and beyond. Last year's report paused to take stock of where we'd got to. I'm proud to say that momentum has held, and in several areas, picked up pace.

We now manage over 10,000 acres for wildlife in Kent, and in 2025 we welcomed 350 acres of brand-new nature reserve at Ironhurst Valley, one of the most ambitious landscape recovery projects we've ever undertaken. Across our reserves, our Wilder Grazing programme has grown to 750 animals, bringing back natural grazing processes that vanished from Kent's landscape centuries ago. 11% of Kent's land and sea now has climate-resilient, abundant wildlife, against a target of 30% by 2030.

Every part of this work rests on the people who support us. Our volunteers gave more than 44,000 hours this year and completed over 1,000 task days across the county. Nearly 800 citizen scientists took to the field, riverbanks and coastline to gather the evidence that shapes our decisions. Our community keeps growing too — 31,000 members now stand behind us. To every one of you: thank you.

Yet the road hasn't been smooth. The wider conservation sector faces mounting pressure, and government funding and policy support for nature recovery has become harder to rely on, even as the crisis grows. Our view remains unchanged: nature isn't an obstacle to economic progress, it's essential to it. We've also stood firm where nature needed defending — our campaign against National Grid's proposed Sea Link landfall at Sandwich and Pegwell Bay has already led to real, lasting changes, and we now await a final decision with cautious optimism.

Even so, Kent has real ground left to cover before we hit our target of 30% of land and sea restored for nature by 2030, and biodiversity loss across the county hasn't been reversed. Government and private investment can't be allowed to fall away — they need to grow alongside the generosity of our supporters, not leave them to fill the gap.

I am immensely proud of the team at Kent Wildlife Trust, who've met every setback with resilience and poured their expertise into restoring nature regardless of the obstacles. Impact is more than a set of figures, but these numbers tell a clear story: investment in nature works. There's still a long way to go, but I hope this report leaves you certain of one thing: we're doing everything in our power to get there.

C. J. Ibbotson



A Wilder Kent 2030 Vision

Where nature is in recovery and being valued
as a **critical human life support system**.

Overall Impact Measure

30% of Kent's land and sea
displaying increased climate
resilience & containing
abundant wildlife.

Strategic Goals

GOAL 1

WE DEFEND AND RESTORE

Ensure that KWTG is delivering the highest possible impact in the face of habitat loss and climate change.

GOAL 2

WE INSPIRE AND COLLABORATE

Build a groundswell of support for Wilder Kent 2030: scaling-up our engagement to reach a larger, more diverse range of people.

GOAL 3

WE STRENGTHEN AND GROW

Diversify KWTG's income sources and strengthen its systems, whilst operating sustainably.

Measures of Success

1

Double the area of land and sea under nature +ve KWT ownership and influence.

2

25% of Kent's population taking meaningful action for a Wilder Kent.

3.i

A minimum £400K annual surplus being generated and reinvested in achieving our vision by 2025.

3.ii

Minimise operational GHG emissions.

Operating Principles

Action Now

We recognise the urgency of our mission and will take action now based on first principles and calculated risk.

Learning by Doing

We will remain agile to adopt new learning as we go, innovating and continuously improving our action through the convergent application of evidence.

Communicating Impact

We will continuously measure and communicate our impact, demonstrating our learning journey through the impact we achieve.

Scaling Impact

We recognise that we can't do this alone. We will scale our impact by working with others to create a virtuous circle of success.

Our impact

At our recent AGM, we were joined by the talented Jess Hindle from Think Visually who created this incredible live illustration of the achievements made in 2025. It provides a flavour of the varied work KWT carries out, and you can read more details in the case studies further on in the report.

Kent Wildlife Trust Towards a Wilder Kent

Restoring nature connecting landscapes
standing up for wildlife and thanking
the people who make it possible

We've had
SUCCESS
despite
Challenges with
Funding and
POLICY

What can we
do to help
climate
resilience?
This
thinking
informs all
we do!

The RESILIENCE of
STAFF was BRILLIANT
a REAL TEAM EFFORT!

ABEC MARINE & COASTAL WORK

- Habitat management & restoration
- Research & monitoring
- Citizen Science

Coastal Explorer Internship

Tagging &
recording

Shark population

Monitoring
coastal bird
breeding in
Rye Harbour

monitoring
bird species
in intertidal
areas

Kent Dolphin
Project trains
volunteers

Important
mapping of
sea grass

Shoresearch
Identifying
monitoring
Species

WE NEED
POLITICIANS
& ECONOMISTS
ON OUR SIDE!

Rebuilding
nature
Strategic Nature
Network

The THREATS are
REAL - the
opportunities to
make an IMPACT
are HUGE

Mitigate infrastructure
issues using
NATURE

Climate Resilient
coasts - North
Kent wetlands

RESTORING NATURAL PROCESSES

- Wilder Bleas - 3 bison calves!
- Two bison bridges reconnect woodland
- Wilder Grazing across 50+ reserves



SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT AND NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS

- Hoothly Farm secured now Ironhurst Valley Reserve
- £1.65 million raised for a 350 acre nature recovery corridor
- Adonis Blue - supports landowners & nature restoration

DEFRAGMENTATION & LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

- 480+ Local wildlife sites
- Darent Valley project builds a connected habitat mosaic
- SNN provides framework to recognise ecological landscapes as critical natural infrastructure

ACTION FOR NATURE & BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

- Rethink Sed Link kept wildlife in the spotlight
- Wilder Kent Awards, Bugs Matter Survey and My Wilder Kent
- Inspired & engaged school children - building confidence + environmental leadership

VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Celebrating the successful reopening of Sevenoaks Visitor Centre
- Events, learning and wellbeing in nature
- Green social prescribing supports health & connection

IRONHURST VALLEY REGENERATION

- Brought together Hoothly Farm & Furnace Farm

350 ACRES - developing the landscape for NATURE RECOVERY



EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT IN NUMBERS

13,500 people participated in KWT's nature-based learning, events, wellbeing and community activities during 2025

58,000 Social media followers



4 billion people reached with the Trust's flagship project news

11% of Kent's land and sea has climate resilient and abundant wildlife, against a target of 30% by 2030

44,000 volunteer hours given to conservation, engagement and citizen science

Bugs Matter 10000 participants reflects people's COMMITMENT

Growing membership means increased income & increased satisfaction

walking with a purpose
Sowing Down
Listening
noticing

Put boards up at local sites to help volunteers and visitors understand what the Trust does

INCREASE in visitor numbers and also in physical & mental wellbeing

SEVENOAKSVC

A gateway for the community to access NATURE through study days guided & wellness walks and flexible spaces

Being a member and a volunteer makes me feel like part of a family for nature

Thank you members, volunteers, donors, partners and supporters - a Wilder Kent is a shared effort

Thank you to our supporters

The work that Kent Wildlife Trust achieved in 2025 was thanks to the support of our members and donors.

Because of your incredible generosity, we have been able to expand the amount of land under positive management for nature, reach and inspire more people and stand up for nature in Kent. Thank you for your ongoing support.



Trustees

Christopher West, Chair
(resigned 13 July 2025)

Jane Ibbotson, Chair
(from 14 July 2025)

Nick Barter, Vice-Chair

Rachel Hoey, Treasurer

Colin Peters
(resigned July 2024)

Elizabeth Lowe

Alison Mings

Thomas Woolgar

Dr Jon Kirkpatrick

Kiran Rayner

Corporate Partners

Southeastern

Merrkur Group UK

Saga

Balfour Winery

Corporate Members

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Earl Street Employment Consultants Ltd

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Zenin Tax Ltd



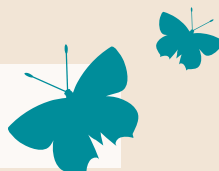
Charitable Trusts, Fund and Grant-making bodies

Affinity Water Ltd
Amazon Web Services
Cobtree Charity Trust
Coca Cola Monitoring and Maintenance Fund
Co-op Foundation
Co-relate Communication CIC
Defra
Elmley National Nature Reserve CIC
Ernest Cook Trust in partnership with #iwill Fund
Explore Kent
Forestry England
Garfield Weston Foundation
Gregg Newman via GJ2S
High Weald National Landscape Partnership
Interreg Europe
Kent and Medway Recovery & Wellbeing College
(Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust)

Kent Association for the Blind
Kent Community Foundation
Kent County Council
Kent Downs National Landscape and North Downs Way National Trail
Laura Capel Trust
Little Cheyne Court Wind Farm Community Fund
Lund Trust
Michael Uren Foundation
National Grid
National Highways
(Environment and Wellbeing Designated Fund, as part of the Network for Nature Programme)
National Lottery Community Fund
(Wilder Wellbeing for Coastal Communities project)
National Lottery Heritage Fund
National Trails UK
(Test & Trial Fund 2025/26 via the Protected Landscapes Partnership and Defra)

Natural England
Nemo Link
Parkinson's UK
Porchlight
Rewilding Britain
Sea-Change
Sevenoaks District Council
Shanly Foundation
Southern Water
Swire Charitable Trust
The Blackthorn Trust
The Bradbourne Rebourne project
(led by Sevenoaks District Council, with funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund)
The Cleary Foundation
The Nineveh Charitable Trust
The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
The William Haddon Charitable Trust
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Veolia Environmental Trust

We also thank those individuals and families who have chosen to donate anonymously and in memory of loved ones.

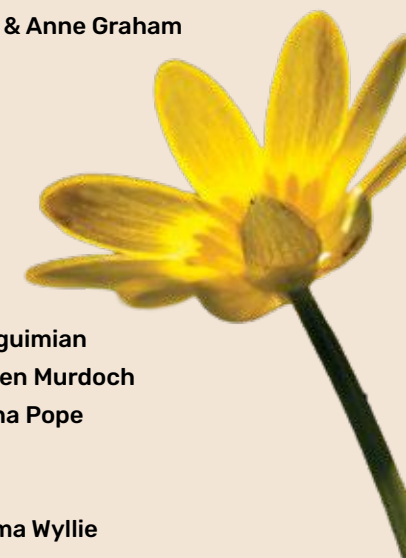


Major Donors

Maggie Bloor
David Carey
Patrick & Katie Hargreaves
Linda & John Langman
Janet Lowe
Nick Miskin
Melissa & Stephen Murdoch
Michael Percival
Anne Robbins
Robin Robison
Stephen Scobie & Anne Graham
Jack Sundt
Beatrice Tate
Keith Turner
Thelma West

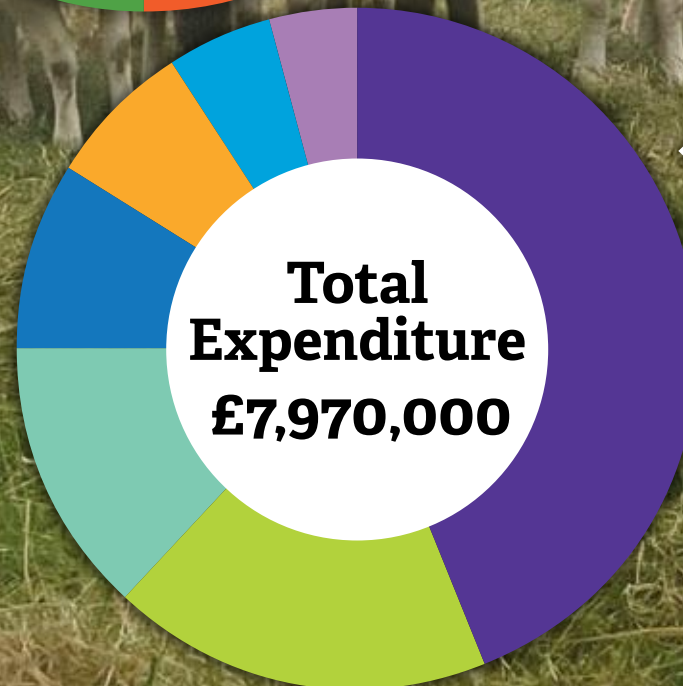
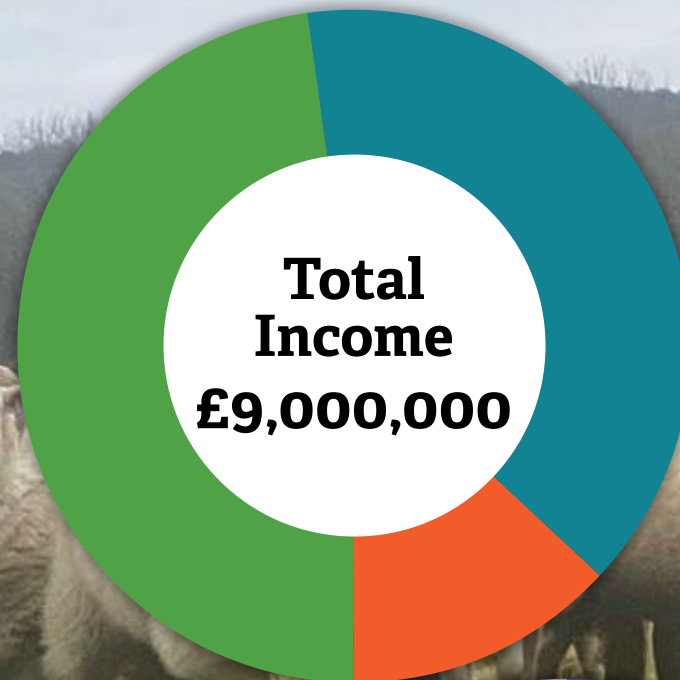
Patrons

Catherine Hovaguimian
Melissa & Stephen Murdoch
Charles & Joanna Pope
Charles Tassell
Dr Chris West
Malcolm & Jemma Wyllie



Our finances

Kent Wildlife Trust continues to maintain a healthy financial position, despite external challenges. The Trust receives income from a variety of sources and in 2025 saw an increase in donations and legacy income whilst maintaining membership income.





**For every £1 donated
to Kent Wildlife Trust...**

68p protects and restores
wildlife and habitats, influences
environmental policy and
connects people with nature.

23p helps us inspire more
people to support wildlife,
growing the funding needed
for future conservation.

9p ensures the charity runs
effectively and is able to deliver
lasting conservation impact.

How you support us		£000's	
Donations and legacies	48%	£4,277	
Charitable activities	39%	£3,509	
Other trading activities	13%	£1,154	
Other income		£17	
Investments		£43	
Total		£9,000	

Where your money goes		£000's	
Projects	44%	£3,526	
Raising funds	18%	£1,438	
Conservation, policy and consultancy	13%	£1,025	
Administration	9%	£698	
Reserves management	7%	£564	
Marketing and membership	5%	£584	
Education, volunteering and visitor engagement	4%	£300	
Total		£7,970	

Your Wilder Kent, forever

A gift in your Will is one of the most powerful ways to protect the Kent you love – long after your lifetime. From the return of bison to the Blean to the rewilding now underway at Ironhurst Valley, much of the work in this report has been made possible by supporters who chose to leave nature a legacy.

Gifts in Wills fund over 20% of our work each year – helping us manage thousands of acres of land, restore lost habitats, and give the next generation of Kent's wildlife a fighting chance.

However you choose to remember us, your gift becomes part of a Wilder Kent 2030 and beyond. And if you haven't yet written your Will, we can help – Kent Wildlife Trust offers a free Will writing service, so protecting your loved ones and the wildlife you love has never been easier.



Want to leave a legacy?

Find out more at kwtg.uk/legacy-impact or speak to Terri, our Legacy Officer, in confidence on 01622 662012.



2025

Progress report

Over the past year, Kent Wildlife Trust has continued to work towards our Wilder Kent 2030 strategy, guided by three core goals: we defend and restore, we inspire and collaborate and we strengthen and grow. From landscape-scale habitat recovery to community-led action and the partnerships that make our work possible, we've watched new reserves take shape, species return to old ground and communities across Kent step up for nature in ways we couldn't have predicted.

It's simply not possible to capture everything we've achieved in a single report, so what follows is a selection of highlights: the projects, partnerships and people that best reflect the breadth and ambition of our work this year. Behind each case study sits a much bigger story, of staff, volunteers, landowners and supporters, all working towards a Wilder Kent.

Ironhurst Valley – One year on

Thanks to the generosity of our members and supporters, in 2025 Kent Wildlife Trust purchased Hoathly Farm, former arable land near Lamberhurst. Alongside Furnace Farm, which was acquired in 2024, it now forms a new 350-acre nature reserve, newly named Ironhurst Valley. It's one of our most ambitious wilding and landscape recovery projects to date, creating a near-continuous wildlife corridor across the Kent-Sussex border. After decades of intensive agriculture, we will restore wood pasture, species-rich meadows and ancient hedgerows, wetlands and river habitats.

Ironhurst Valley occupies a strategically important position in a wider network of likeminded landowners focused on natural restoration, including Scotney Castle to the east, Wickhurst Farm and Wadhurst Park to the south-west, and the Weald to Waves corridor roughly 12km away. Their shared ambition is to create a more connected, thriving and wilder landscape, in which careful early management encourages natural processes to drive recovery. For our part, we will begin by learning about the land and working closely with local communities and partners. Over time, marginal farmland will be transformed into a diverse mosaic of meadows, woodlands and wetlands, reconnecting habitats, enhancing biodiversity, strengthening climate resilience and delivering lasting benefits for wildlife, people and the future of the High Weald.



We began this journey in autumn 2025, when the Furnace Farm side was partly fenced and reseeded with a wildflower meadow mix that has started to establish. The existing pasture had been heavily sheep-grazed, then left ungrazed for several seasons, developing a thick sward with very little wildflower component. We now have six longhorn cattle happily grazing on it, breaking through the thatch to make space for wildflowers to come in naturally over time.

Meanwhile at Hoathly Farm, we're waiting for the last cultivation cycle to finish before we can start creating the conditions for natural regeneration. Here, our plan for the initial five-year phase is to establish a baseline of early succession habitats, put

up fencing and lightly graze the land. Over time the surrounding woodlands will provide a seed source for trees and shrubs that will start to invade the open space of the former fields and create a mosaic of scrub and grassland habitats. This will absorb carbon from the atmosphere and create valuable habitats for wildlife. For example, we expect to see benefits for nightingale, turtle dove and a wide range of butterflies and other invertebrates.

On sites like these, where intensive agriculture has been carried out for many years, a lot of wildlife is pushed into isolated pockets. Slow worms and long-horned bees are examples of species that are clinging on mostly because of the efforts of surrounding

homeowners and smallholders. Thanks to them, we have a nearby source population that can eventually move into Ironhurst Valley, increasing species resilience and helping the landscape wild itself.

This kind of collaboration is vital, and we are proud to be part of a growing community of farmers, land managers and private householders. We owe a huge thank you to them and the donors and supporters who originally helped us buy the land.

We have no overriding agenda for a specific species or assemblage of species, but rather a goal to create a semi-natural wild space. Therefore we are investing in a wide range of monitoring efforts to understand how the journey is progressing. Activity will include passive acoustic monitoring of birds and bats, malaise traps for flying insects, vegetation and butterfly transects, drone surveys, and water and eDNA sampling.

Above all, Ironhurst Valley shows that we don't have to choose between agriculture and nature reserves. Two former farms are starting their wilding journey surrounded by gardens and working farms of all shapes and sizes, where landowners are helping wildlife while generating an income through arable and livestock farming, or financial mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Wilder Carbon. The future looks promising for nature and people in this special corner of Kent.

Soil Health Baseline

Soil Health Baseline surveys in Year 0 have shown us what is living beneath our feet as we begin turning former arable land back into thriving habitat. Eight soil samples were collected across the reserve and sent for environmental DNA (eDNA) testing – a technique that detects species from tiny traces of genetic material left in the soil.

The results showed that the soil at Ironhurst is biologically rich and already functioning, but still early in its journey from arable land to restored habitat.

Repeating this survey in future years will let us track whether mutualistic fungi increase, pathogen levels stay low and invertebrate diversity grows – the key signs that Ironhurst Valley is progressing toward a fully recovered, species-rich landscape.

Learn more

You can read more about these surveys in our blog post. [kwtg.uk/ironhurst-soil](https://www.kwtg.uk/ironhurst-soil)



350
acres protected
for nature

£1,650,000
raised by
supporters

1,000s
of species already
identified through
soil eDNA surveys





| Wilder Grazing

8,922

acres of land being grazed in Kent

900

grazing animals grazing 52 sites

49%

increase in Kentish milkwort as a result of conservation grazing in 2025

Kent Wildlife Trust runs one of the largest and most sophisticated conservation grazing operations in the UK. Nearly 900 animals, including longhorn cattle, Konik ponies, Hebridean sheep, goats, pigs, and European bison graze 52 sites in Kent, both on Kent Wildlife Trust reserves and land owned by others.

By using a mixture of old breeds of grazing, browsing and rootling animals across a wide range of habitats, we can mimic natural processes and promote nature-led recovery. The grazing species on our reserves are effectively proxies that act in similar ways to the large grazers that used to live wild in Kent but are now locally extinct, such as aurochs, elks and the ancient species of bison that once roamed Britain. When used as a conservation tool alongside wild herbivores such as deer and wild boar, our grazing animals have an almost symbiotic relationship with their surroundings. For example, when relatively few cattle graze coarse vegetation (low-density grazing), they make room for a wider variety of plants to grow, which in turn gives the cattle a greater choice of food. This keeps them healthier as well as making the habitat more stable and resilient to the effects of climate change.

In 2025 we began a partnership at Leybourne Chase in West Malling with Leybourne Grange Management CIC. After careful consultation, we replaced the cows that previously occupied this 10-acre meadow site with sheep to prevent over-grazing. We're now seeing how the turf has healed and wildflowers are starting to recover.

We're also engaging with the local community to explain how wilder grazing works and the benefits it can deliver. As well as holding events with local council and youth groups, we've recruited and trained an expanded team of livestock checkers, who go out every day to make sure the animals are healthy and happy.



Kentish milkwort

Kentish milkwort is one of Britain's rarest wildflowers and grows naturally on chalk grasslands in Kent. Once found at 16 sites across the county, its numbers fell dramatically because of scrub growth, reduced grazing and changes in land use. By 2010, only three sites remained, placing the plant on the brink of extinction. In response, Kent Wildlife Trust, the Species Recovery Trust, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and volunteers launched a conservation project. Seeds were collected from the healthiest population and grown at Kew before being replanted at suitable sites, including Queendown Warren. The project has been a remarkable success, with numbers of self-seeded plants rising from 17 in 2021/22 to 177 in 2025! Careful habitat management, including grazing and natural soil disturbance, has helped the flower recover. The hope is that the restored population will provide seeds for future reintroductions, helping to secure the long-term survival of this unique Kent wildflower.





Rethink Sea Link

As part of its Great Grid Upgrade, National Grid is looking to install a new offshore electricity cable linking Suffolk and Kent. Despite a range of options, National Grid applied for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to make landfall at Kent Wildlife Trust's Sandwich and Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve – a site with multiple protections and international designations.

In 2023, the Trust launched a campaign calling on National Grid to “Rethink Sea Link” and choose an alternative route that has fewer environmental impacts. Led by Senior Planning and Policy Officer Emma Waller, this has grown into one of our biggest ever campaign and advocacy efforts, during which we have worked closely with other conservation organisations, MPs and local campaign groups, such as Save Minster Marshes.

We have reviewed hundreds of technical reports, plans and supporting documents, and scrutinised complex environmental, engineering and policy statements. In total, Kent Wildlife Trust has responded to 26 separate consultation deadlines and produced more than 190 pages of written submissions. We have also actively participated in eight days of hearings and were the only environmental NGO to attend every single hearing, giving nature a voice at every stage.



In addition, the Examining Authority has routinely engaged with us directly, seeking our expert opinion and advice on key ecological matters. The Trust has stood out within the Examination process as a credible and authoritative voice, and the Examining Authority has relied on our evidence and professional judgement throughout.

It has been a huge, sustained team effort, drawing on expertise from across the Trust, including local knowledge, technical expertise and public engagement. During the process we encouraged more than 6,000 people to register as Interested Parties, the most ever for a DCO application.

The DCO process is now in its final stages. The Examining Authority will write its Recommendation Report for the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, who will review the evidence and make a final decision. We are expecting this by November 2026.

Most significantly, at the last Issue Specific hearing, the Examining Authority stated that it is currently "minded to recommend refusal" of Sea Link's DCO application. This is based on a concern that National Grid has not provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the mitigation hierarchy has been properly followed, a fundamental requirement of the planning process and a point we have consistently raised since the earliest stages of the project. It is encouraging that the Examining Authority's current view reflects our long-standing concerns.

Whatever the outcome, we should be proud of what has been achieved. Kent Wildlife Trust has played a central and influential role in shaping the way the project has been examined, securing meaningful and lasting changes to the DCO. We have driven improvements to the marine mammal baseline, including the use of the Kent

Dolphin Project data; increased ecological survey efforts; influenced the redesign of the cable route to avoid Goodwin Sands Marine Conservation Zone; and secured a role in approving access routes and cable installation methodologies. Most critically, through sustained and determined effort, we have heavily influenced a clear requirement prohibiting open-cut trenching across the saltmarsh, preventing a repeat of the damage caused by Nemo Link, a similar National Grid project that made landfall at Sandwich and Pegwell Bay in 2018. This is a significant win for nature, and a direct result of our persistence.

We can proudly say our efforts have genuinely raised the bar and helped strengthen outcomes for nature.



RETHINK SEA LINK

6,000
registered
Interested Parties
- a DCO record

**Potential refusal
of National Grid's
DCO Application**





2025-26 was the Awards' most successful year yet

90 winning groups

25,000+ people took positive action for nature

400,000+ people are estimated to have benefited as a result

Almost **200** acres of land was directly improved or restored for nature

Wilder Kent Awards

Protecting, nurturing and restoring nature is everyone's responsibility and we're delighted to recognise those who rise to the challenge. The Wilder Kent Awards celebrate the schools, businesses, nurseries, colleges, universities, villages, towns, cities and community groups that have transformed their surroundings, revitalised local spaces and more. They are all helping to create a county that is richer in wildlife and more resilient to climate change.

Some of our 2025-26 winners explain the impact on their organisation:

"Taking part in the Wilder Kent Awards has been a genuinely positive and motivating experience for Spadework. The process has helped us reflect on our environmental practice, recognise the progress we have made, and identify where we can continue to strengthen our approach year on year."

Kris Healey, Spadework

"Everyone involved with the community garden really values the Wilder Kent Awards. Volunteers have so enjoyed attending the awards event and meeting other groups. The awards inspired us to set up our Biodiversity Working Party in 2024 and this has gone from strength to strength."

Vanessa Ross Russell, Lynsted Community Kitchen Garden

"[This] was a really positive experience for us. It gave our school a chance to focus on creating a more wildlife-friendly environment and encouraged everyone to think about sustainability in a practical way. The children loved being involved in projects like planting wildflowers and building habitats, and it really boosted their sense of responsibility for nature. It also brought our staff and pupils together with a shared goal, which was fantastic for teamwork and community spirit. Overall, it was inspiring and has motivated us to keep making improvements for wildlife in the future."

Colleen Fosbraey, Grovepark Primary School



The support of Kent Wildlife Trust and the incentive of the Awards has led to many different groups and organisations taking the plunge. While schools and community groups were the pioneers, this steadily expanded to nurseries, colleges and universities. Then came villages, towns, cities, parish councils and businesses. The community category for the 2026-2027 Awards will encompass people who come together for any reason, such as youth groups and places of worship. The scope grows each year and new award categories make sure everyone feels included.

For the Kent Wildlife Trust team, it's particularly rewarding to see groups dip their toe in the water, discover the benefits and start dreaming bigger, then go on to achieve remarkable things. For example, Bridge and Patricxbourne CEP School entered the Awards in 2022 and won a commendation. This year they received a gold, with the judges recognising the school's exceptional commitment to protecting wildlife and embedding nature-based learning into its curriculum.



Wild Kent AWARDS



© ALLA STRATIENKO



Learn more

See the full list of winners, and find out how to enter next year, visit kwtg.uk/wka-impact

Citizen Science

Citizen scientists in Kent and beyond are providing invaluable insights into the state of our wildlife. In 2025 hundreds of enthusiastic volunteers invested their time to help with a range of surveys, from monitoring the health of our rivers, to recording dolphin sightings and counting butterflies. Kent Wildlife Trust runs some of these initiatives, including Kent Dolphin Landwatch, Riversearch and Shoresearch, while others, such as the BeeWalk Scheme and Riverfly Monitoring Initiative, are carried out at least partly on our nature reserves, but coordinated by other organisations. Here are some examples:

Bugs Matter

We've worked in partnership with Buglife on this insect splat survey since 2021, and 2025 was our biggest year so far. A record 10,693 journeys were recorded and we launched outside of the UK for the first time, in the Republic of Ireland.

Bugs Matter is a simple, effective way of monitoring the population of flying insects. Participants count the number of insect splats on their vehicle number plate at the end of a journey and record this on a mobile app. At the end of each season, we can calculate the splat rate and compare it to previous years to build up a picture of how insect populations are faring.

Worryingly, the 2025 results show an average annual decline in insect splats in Kent of 23% since 2021. We now need even more citizen scientists to build up a better picture of what this means at a local, national and international level.



Riversearch

Running since 2021, Riversearch involves volunteers walking stretches of Kent's rivers and streams, testing the water, and recording what they find. The project began on the River Stour as part of the H2O: Source2Sea partnership and expanded in 2023 to cover the Darent Valley and Upper Beult as well. Rivers are home to a huge range of wildlife, and by tracking water quality over time, we can understand how healthy they are and where they need the most help.

At each site, volunteers record three key water quality indicators: nitrate and phosphate levels (nutrients that, in excess, can starve rivers of oxygen and fuel algal blooms) and turbidity (how cloudy the water is). All three point to how much pollution – from farms, roads and towns – is reaching the water.

1,457 samples were analysed from 169 sampling locations across the Stour, Beult and Darent rivers.

What the data shows

Nitrate (from fertilisers, manure & sewage)

Highest in the Stour, and rising there and in the Beult over the five-year study. Levels were also higher near towns and farmland than near woodland, showing runoff from land use is a key driver.

Phosphate (a marker of sewage & household waste)

Highest in the Beult, but encouragingly declining there and in the Darent over time. Levels were higher at sites with bare, unvegetated river banks, suggesting plant cover helps filter runoff before it reaches the water.

Turbidity (how cloudy the water is) Highest in the Beult; no clear trend up or down over the study period in any catchment. Cloudier water tended to follow heavy rain and high water levels.

Why it matters Many of Kent's rivers remain in poor ecological health: in 2019, 79% of Kent's monitored rivers and lakes failed to meet the standard for good phosphorus status. Reducing nutrient pollution requires farmers, landowners, local authorities and environmental groups working together – from better land management to restoring wetlands and river-bank vegetation that naturally filter runoff.

The data from Riversearch informs this work to target specific issues within these three rivers.

Shoresearch

Shoresearch is The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts' (RSWT) national citizen science survey of the intertidal shore, a critical habitat that supports a diverse range of marine species. To effectively conserve and manage it we need robust baseline data on intertidal species and their habitat. In 2003, Kent Wildlife Trust trained an enthusiastic group of volunteers to identify and record this – and Shoresearch was born. It is now practised across Britain as a TWT initiative.

In 2025, nine rocky shore sites across Kent, from Cheyney Rock, Sheerness, to Lower Leas, Folkestone, were surveyed. Over the year, a total of 146 volunteers spent more than 300 hours recording at least 145 species. In 2026 we are expanding into quantitative biodiversity quadrat surveys, which will help generate more robust data to inform and support decision-making.

Kent Dolphin Project

This is a collaborative effort between the Sussex Dolphin Project and Adonis Blue Environmental Consultants, part of the Kent Wildlife Trust Group. Its goal is to better understand and protect whales, dolphins and porpoises (known collectively as cetaceans) in the county's waters. By combining research, community engagement and conservation, the initiative aims to safeguard these charismatic animals and their habitats for future generations.

The soft launch of the project in 2025 saw trained volunteers carry out systematic land-based surveys to establish a baseline understanding of cetacean activity. They conducted observations from key coastal vantage points and recorded sightings and behavioural data. This has begun to build a clearer, evidence-based picture of the presence, distribution and behaviour of marine mammals along the Kent coastline.

To complement these field observations, our Coastal Explorer intern compiled and analysed historical cetacean records. By synthesising past and present data, we are learning more about long-term patterns and distribution.

Last year we hosted three training sessions for more than 30 volunteers across the Kent coast. A further 14 opportunistic sightings were also recorded, including humpback whales, bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises.

We are so grateful to our team of citizen scientists for collecting this vital data on cetaceans, including some of the UK's most threatened species.



800+
active citizen
scientists

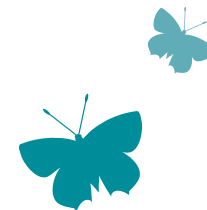
8 citizen science
initiatives

11,000
Bugs Matter survey
responses, 21%
more than in 2024

1,457
water samples
analysed as part
of the Riversearch
project



MyWildersKent App



MyWildersKent is Kent Wildlife Trust's free smartphone app that encourages people across the county to discover, record and celebrate the wildlife on their doorstep. After two years' development it launched to members in 2025, before going on general release in spring 2026.

The app was inspired by the mother of a member of staff who wanted to take action for nature but, daunted by limited mobility and a lack of helpful online resources, didn't know where to start. It helps users discover wildlife on their doorstep, start making a difference and see their impact as part of a much larger conservation effort. It also enables them to connect with a growing community of like-minded nature-lovers. By the end of 2025 more than 330 people had used it to take part in collective activities, pledging or completing 382 actions for nature.

The app acts as a digital bridge to the natural world, adapting to each person's circumstances. It's designed to be easy for everyone to use – appealing to a younger, tech-savvy audience who prefer to engage online, while also offering meaningful access to nature for those who find it harder to reach a garden, attend an event or afford a course. It can help one person create a wildlife-friendly window box in a town-centre flat, and another manage a half-acre meadow in the countryside. Above all, it

lets people see how their individual actions connect to the bigger picture of biodiversity. Each small step becomes part of a clearer path to exploring and enjoying nature.

The app has been entirely created by the digital development team in a Trust-wide collaboration, which means we can learn directly how members and other users interact with it today – and what they want from it tomorrow. It currently features around 175 separate resources to support all sorts of actions, from reducing your water usage and counting butterflies to feeding garden birds responsibly.

A system of badges, levels and rewards helps users track their journey and stay motivated, while the action map offers an updated snapshot of what communities across Kent are achieving.

The app is already evolving. Over the coming year, the Wilders Kent Awards – the Trust's scheme recognising the achievements of schools, community groups, businesses and local areas – will be integrated directly into the platform. Nature training courses and new ways to connect with fellow users are also in development.

By bringing a vast range of our work together in a single app that you carry around in your pocket, we hope to foster a stronger sense of ownership for the natural world, rather than nature being something you visit now and again. By reminding people of the actions they've taken (or could take), we can connect them with the wider conservation movement across Kent. We hope they will feel involved, rather than just spectators. That's why we called it MyWildersKent – and why we're delighted it is already changing people's relationship with nature.



Actions taken on app by users to protect and restore nature



Actions taken on app by users to protect and restore nature





| Volunteering

Our conservation activity depends on teamwork – and a vital part of this is our amazing group of volunteers. We count on more than 1,000 active volunteers and received 650 new applications in 2025. Each one of them donates their time, skills and effort in different ways, including practical conservation tasks (such as restoring habitat and removing invasive species), education and outreach, office support and helping in our visitor centres.

For example, the Darent Valley Landscape Recovery Project relies on the surveying and monitoring skills of a dedicated band of volunteers. This major, multi-partner project aims to create and restore a mosaic of 1,800 hectares of connected habitats across the landscape, focused on the globally rare chalk stream of the River Darent.

To secure essential funding from Defra, the project requires a vast amount of detailed and accurate baseline information that enables us to track the impact of restoration work. This is where our volunteers come in. Every month since 2023 they have been collecting incredibly useful data on everything from vegetation and pollinators to birds and river invertebrates. As the project moves on and we start to see changes in the landscape, they will record how it's affected.





In 2025 our volunteers spent 752 hours surveying up and down the Darent Valley, including:

27 bird surveys in 6 locations

60 bumblebee surveys in 10 locations

46 butterfly surveys in 9 locations

37 reptile surveys in 6 locations

59 riverfly surveys in 9 locations

16 water vole surveys in 16 locations...

... and they counted 4,491 birds, 1,244 bumblebees and 3,499 butterflies.

Their support plays a critical role in helping us understand habitats and species, target conservation activity and monitor outcomes. It also reflects the blended finance model that underpins this landscape-scale recovery project, ensuring funding is not solely reliant on government sources.



Most volunteers are personally invested in the project through their connections to the area. Many have been involved from the start and when they talk about it their passion shines through. Glen Smith grew up in the Darent Valley: "Volunteering is a way to do something positive for a place I love," he says, "but I get a lot out of it as well. I'm a keen amateur photographer and interested in conservation – and this enables me to learn so much. I'm proud to be a citizen scientist and the group is such a lovely, positive environment."

Sarah Ingle is an experienced volunteer surveyor who regularly monitors birds and butterflies in the Darent Valley. "I'm aware of the fact that we're doing something important on a landscape scale, working alongside farmers and other landowners. It gives you a real sense of purpose – and you can actually see what's changed."

Sarah has also had some memorable encounters with nature in the valley. "I knew brown hairstreak butterflies had turned up at Fackenden Down and last year I managed to map exactly where they were. One day, I spotted a female in a blackthorn bush, just as I was finishing my butterfly transect walk. She was inching backwards down the bush, laying her eggs and then flying up to the top to warm herself in the sun. Then she'd go back and do it again."

The volunteers are trained by experts from Kent Wildlife Trust and other conservation organisations such as the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and the People's Trust for Endangered Species, as well as learning from each other through meetings and a supportive WhatsApp group. They are also engaged with the local community and represent the Trust at open farm days and other events.

As Glen says, "It's a fascinating project that I'm really proud to be part of. I went to one briefing and was blown away not only by the sheer scale of it, but also by people's willingness to get involved. You expect it from a Wildlife Trust, but to see farmers and landowners so on board is a lovely thing."

Learn more

For more information on volunteering with Kent Wildlife Trust, visit kwtg.uk/volunteer-impact



Over **1,000** active volunteers

44,000 hours of volunteering in 2025

245 surveys in the Darent Valley



| Nature Restoration Fund

28%

of target reached
by July 2026

1,700 donors

Over
£850,000
raised



In 2025, the Trust launched its biggest and most ambitious fundraising effort to date. The KWT Nature Restoration Fund aims to raise £3million by 2030 to restore wild places and reverse species decline. By July 2026 we reached an impressive £840,000 - 28% of our target. Our sincere thanks go to everyone who has contributed so far.

As well as appealing for general donations, the Fund is running a series of fundraising sprints. The first of these ran in December 2025 as part of the Big Give's Christmas Challenge. Wilder Blean: Wilder Woodlands focussed on the Wilder Blean project and the need for woodland restoration. Donations were doubled thanks to match funding where match donors pledged half of the £75,000 we needed to raise in this time frame. Generous supporters helped to unlock these funds by donating with double the impact and, in fact, surpassed our target, helping us to raise an incredible total of £101,573.

The money raised will support nature-based conservation at West Blean woods, and fund essential tasks – like coppicing and thinning of non-native conifers. This will help to make our woodlands more diverse, so that a greater number and variety of species can find a home within them.

The Blean Bison Project, the pioneering wilding collaboration between Kent Wildlife Trust and Wildwood Trust as part of the Wilder Blean project, introduced bison to the UK for the first time in thousands of years. Similar projects across Europe have proved that these large herbivores, known as 'ecosystem engineers', can restore the natural biodiversity of a landscape. Their natural behaviour, such as grazing, dust bathing, eating bark and felling trees, enables other species to thrive.

Since their arrival in 2022, the bison herd has flourished, growing from three to nine. What's more, biodiversity is already showing signs of recovery. Previously dark, densely covered areas of woodland, dominated by single species of the same age, are now more open, threaded with rides and dotted with dust bathing spots. More light is reaching the forest floor, which will provide a range of benefits for other plants and animals

in this habitat. Our bison rangers have recorded rare fungi, butterflies and other key woodland species, while our volunteers and conservation evidence team conduct extensive fieldwork and gather data to monitor the bison's impact on soil health, vegetation and species diversity. Although it's still too early to identify any significant trends, baseline data has shown several Red List birds and 67 species of threatened invertebrates on site.

2025 brought both new life and loss to the Wilder Blean project. In October, a female calf was born, marking the third generation of wild European bison since the herd's 2022 release and bringing the total to five calves born in the woods. Sadly, November saw the passing of the herd's original matriarch, whose legacy lives on through the thriving population she helped establish.

Of course, having bison at the Blean is just one part of our vision for Kent. We see an entire county alive with birdsong, buzzing with pollinators and filled with wild species that benefit both people and wildlife. We have the knowledge, experience and strategy to make this vision a reality and reverse species decline, but we cannot do it alone. Without public support, nature will continue to vanish; with it, we can bring back lost species, restore habitats and create a future where people and wildlife thrive together. We hope the KWT Nature Restoration Fund will help us achieve our goal.





Support

Learn more about the KWT Nature Restoration Fund at kwtg.uk/nature-fund



| Adonis Blue Environmental Consultants



Adonis Blue Environmental Consultants (ABEC), a wholly owned subsidiary of Kent Wildlife Trust, is spearheading the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) approach in Kent and beyond. It recently presented its findings from the first year of monitoring on the Upper Beult Resilience wetland restoration and natural flood management pilot near Shadoxhurst, funded by Southern Water.

The River Beult is a main tributary of the River Medway. Southern Water extracts water from the Medway to supply drinking water. To meet stringent drinking water quality standards, pesticides and other pollutants need to be reduced and removed. Southern Water is working with partners including ABEC, Kent Wildlife Trust and the Upper Beult Farmer Cluster to encourage sustainable pesticide use to reduce the amount of pollutants entering the River Medway.

ABEC is responsible for monitoring throughout the project to establish whether the changes in land management have an impact on water quality and biodiversity. To obtain baseline (pre-works) and Year 1 biodiversity information, ABEC devised a pioneering biodiversity monitoring strategy with two key strands: parallel monitoring of multiple taxa and monitoring of the priority species common nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*).



The multiple taxa monitoring took place at six locations in 2025 and included:

Malaise traps for collecting terrestrial invertebrates (June 114 species, August 85 species)

Aquatic sampling to collect freshwater invertebrate eDNA (May 100 species/68 families)

Acoustic monitoring of birds (June 41 species, August 42 species)

Acoustic monitoring of bats (May 9 species, August 7 species)

What are taxa?

A taxon (singular) is a recognised biological category, for example a species, genus, family, order, class or phylum. Therefore, a taxon might refer to a single species like the blackbird, to thrushes in general, or even to all birds.

The species data were analysed to determine species richness, relative abundance, diversity and conservation status. Despite a good range of species being recorded for all groups, one or more species tended to dominate each species assemblage.

With further analysis ABEC will evaluate how this pattern could change over time as the restored habitats develop. They aim to collaborate on this with South East Rivers Trust, who have been collecting environmental data for the six monitoring locations.



Analyses will also move beyond species diversity to look at functional diversity – the different traits and roles species play in supporting ecosystem function, such as decomposition, pollination and environmental tolerance. Using habitat preference and conservation status data, ABEC will identify biodiversity indicator species for each taxonomic group from 2026 onwards, focusing on those whose populations are most likely to respond to an increase in wetland habitat.

Meanwhile, the nightingale surveys recorded a range of behaviours, including differentiation between singing, calling and sightings only, as well as territorial interactions. A total of 31 nightingale territories were identified across the study area, including a stable population of singing males. It seems likely that rewetting, combined with rotational woodland management, will help sustain this strong population and provide juveniles for other suitable habitat nearby.



By continuing to monitor the nightingale population, ABEC hopes to better understand the population dynamics and response to habitat restoration. Alongside migration studies this should provide robust evidence of nightingales' response to the changing woodland conditions and other potential initiatives intended to benefit the species.

The Shadoxhurst project is an example of ABEC's approach to 360-Biodiversity Monitoring. It shows how landowners can gain a comprehensive insight into biodiversity on their sites through the long-term monitoring of a broad diversity of taxa throughout the year.

By repeating the same sampling techniques each season, a clearer picture emerges of the opportunities that new habitat management approaches provide – offering a consistent way to measure biodiversity change over time. The 360-Biodiversity Monitoring approach brings together species and habitat monitoring for BNG, showing how ABEC can carry out bespoke biodiversity investigations across a broad range of taxa. This, in turn, reveals how biodiversity shifts over time in response to habitat management and restoration. Findings from each survey season are compiled into a comprehensive report, detailing the species recorded and how the species assemblage relates to both existing and proposed habitats.



**Monitoring on average
334 species per month to gain a detailed picture of biodiversity**

31 nightingale territories identified





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