

Wildlife World

SPRING 2026
ISSUE 29

people's
trust for
endangered
species

UK

Wildcat return

Small mammals

Focus on farmers

Hedge restoration

Beetle Mania

Why stag beetles are the UK's most remarkable insects – and how we're helping them thrive

Overseas

Slow lorises

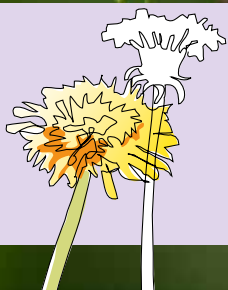
Mountain toads

Rainforest orchids

Cambodian dolphins

Holy voly

We take a special look at the beloved water vole, the river-loving inspiration behind Ratty in *The Wind in the Willows*.



Mexican wave

Our new partner in Central America is trying to establish the movements of whale sharks in Baja California during the year.

Last survivors

A species of rain frog in South Africa is on the brink of extinction – a new project we're funding is aiming to save it.

Bringing the wild back to life

Wildlife World is published by People's Trust for Endangered Species

Our wildlife is disappearing. Almost two thirds of species in the UK have declined in the past 50 years. There's nothing natural or inevitable about this. It can be stopped. And everyone can play a part. That's why People's Trust for Endangered Species exists.

 Find out more
www.ptes.org

Snow leopards

Once a metaphor for mystery and enigma, snow leopards have been shedding their secrets in recent years, thanks in part to the work of our partner scientists at the **Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation**. Using technology such as GPS collars and remote cameras to reveal more about the big cats' daily lives, the foundation has also successfully campaigned to make the Tost Mountains of southern Mongolia a nature reserve and to ban harmful mining projects. This ongoing work is helping to secure the future of these beautiful predators.

Welcome

We're delighted, once again, to bring you stories from around both the UK and the world on the colourful and interesting species your funds are helping us to protect. As the first signs of spring emerge, we're beginning to plan our work for the year here at home, getting ready for the wildlife surveys we run, which many of you take part in.

One of our longest running surveys, the *Great Stag Hunt*, is the main feature of this issue. **David Wembridge** outlines the fascinating facts about our largest land beetle, why we focus on them, and what tens of thousands of records can tell us about an animal that spends most of its life underground, feeding on rotting wood.

Flapper skates and footprints belonging to small mammals both feature in articles about two of our recent Conservation Interns. These budding scientists are passionate about making a difference to our wildlife. We're delighted that PTES funds are helping **Jazz, Elizabeth** and many other future conservationists make their mark in the world.

Last autumn we had the difficult but rewarding job of deciding which grassroots conservationists to support around the globe. As you can imagine, we have many more asks for help than we can fund. We were particularly taken with the **Botanical Garden of Medellin's** ambition to trial new methods of moving threatened orchid species, from forests which are subject to habitat loss to protected areas where they can thrive.

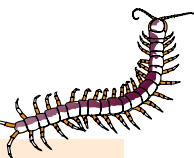
And I'm sure you'll agree that **Tiaan Botha's** focus on Bilbo's rain frog – an exceptionally rare amphibian – in South Africa, seeking to secure protection for the fragile remnants of land the remaining population has been squeezed into, was the right choice.

We hope you enjoy reading these and the many other stories featured in this issue. Thank you.

Nida



Nida Al-Fulaij is the Chief Executive of People's Trust for Endangered Species.



In this edition

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PTES
PEOPLE



Farms are a vital cog in restoring wildlife in Britain, and Lydiard Turkeys in Wiltshire is a prime example.

Chris Rumming farms 70 hectares on the edge of Swindon – beef cattle, rare-breed sheep and free-range, Christmas turkeys – but he says it's improving the habitat for wildlife on his family-owned farm that motivates him the most.

One main focus has been enhancing the biodiversity value of the farm's hedges. Using hand-drawn diagrams in a book, Chris has taught himself how to lay and coppice a hedge, and estimates he can achieve 95 per cent of the benefits that a professional, trained hedge-layer can.

He's been helped by our own hedge expert Megan Gimber. Megan's a big fan of hedge rejuvenation – removing material and letting the light back in, which all aids regrowth,' Chris says. The key, he adds, is to regenerate the bottom two feet of the hedge and increase the thickness of the vegetation, because that's where most wildlife is found.

Chris has also held an all-day event on the farm, dedicated to raising awareness about the value of hedges and how to manage them – inevitably, called Hedgefest. 'We had two venues with speakers running all day,' Chris recalls. 'And there were various demos of hedge-laying, coppicing and wildlife sensitive trimming.'

Aside from the hedges, Chris has made great efforts to improve the value to wildlife of the stream – a small tributary of the River Thames – that runs through his land. The stream is home to water voles, and Chris has created a two-metre bank in one spot for kingfishers. They've nested in it twice now thanks to this intervention.

In addition, leaky dams store water and create habitat for fish such as sticklebacks. For the wildlife at least, it's Christmas every day. ●

Chris has also held an all-day event on the farm, dedicated to raising awareness about the value of hedges



Trust farmers with restoring our fauna's fortunes

We won't make any progress bringing wildlife back to Britain unless we help the people who have the greatest impact on it – farmers and other landowners.

In Britain, land that isn't part of an urban area or already built on is mostly farmland. The Government estimates that 168,000km² (out of a total land area of 243,000km²) is given over to agriculture in Britain – to arable and horticultural crops, to pastures and to rough grazing in the uplands.

Put another way, very nearly 70 per cent of the entire country is given over to farming. But, as the series of reports called State of Nature, published by a coalition of environmental groups (including PTES), have made clear over more than a decade, farming has been the biggest contributor to wildlife declines.

The intensification of agriculture has been the culprit, the reports say – this has included the growing use of pesticides and fertilisers, the conversion of semi-natural habitats to farmland and the removal of hedgerows and other landscape features such as ponds.

It would be easy but unfair to blame farmers for what has happened. They were encouraged, and paid, by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to reap this environmental destruction when what was originally the EEC, and now the EU, prioritised increasing food production over protecting nature.

But even as far back as the 1980s, it was realised that something was amiss, so CAP brought in payments that rewarded farmers for taking action that benefited wildlife. These were paying out hundreds of millions of pounds a year, though they only ever amounted to roughly 10 per cent of the overall subsidy.

Now we've left the EU, in England at any rate, payments are theoretically entirely linked to whether farmers are managing their land for environmental benefits – so-called 'public money for public goods'. It's a good idea though some conservationists say the scheme hasn't been implemented as well as it could have been.

Before we left the EU, many farmers embraced so-called agri-environment schemes, even though the paperwork was often

complex and time consuming. It may not always seem obvious, but people who work the land don't want to destroy it. You only have to read our interview with Chris Rumming, featured in PTES People (opposite), to realise that loving farming and loving wildlife can go hand in hand.

I've interviewed dozens of farmers over the years who have a similar outlook. They point out that it's just common sense that you can't flog the land to achieve ever greater degrees of productivity without it coming back to bite you. Damage to the soil, loss of pollinators and the removal of trees and hedges all make it harder to produce food in the long run.

'Every farm business should be looking at where we can

produce food most effectively every day,' Patrick Barker, who farms in Suffolk, told me a few years ago when I interviewed him about how he is protecting hedgehogs on his land. Giving space to wildlife in those areas that are less productive is the answer, he told me.

But, apart from the business case, what always strikes me about these farmers is their enthusiasm for the wildlife on their land. Who wouldn't be excited to have water voles scurrying along their riverbanks or yellowhammers and corn burnings singing gloriously from the hedgerows?

Today, farmers have more ways of making protecting wildlife work for them. A policy that came into force in 2024 requires developers to offset the

impact of a housing estate or whatever they're building by recreating appropriate habitat either on the site itself or paying for it to be carried out elsewhere. Habitat banks that can offer landowners nature credits are springing up all over the country – more than 60km² (the equivalent of 40 Hyde Parks) have been set aside for nature thanks to this policy in just two years.

It demonstrates that if you give farmers the right policy tools, they'll do the right things. It's enough to give us all hope for the future. ●



Loving farming and loving wildlife can go hand in hand



James Fair is a journalist specialising in wildlife conservation stories and editor of Wildlife World Magazine.

In this issue's Conservation News, find out how volunteers are celebrating 10 years of monitoring water voles and why the return of the wildcat to West Wales is closer than ever.

Ministers must heed nature security assessment

Britain isn't spending enough on helping farmers be more sustainable or protecting enough of our land and sea areas, say UK conservation groups.



Wildlife & Countryside Link (WCL), of which PTES is a member, is warning the Government that it is not taking the threat of nature loss sufficiently seriously. A report published in 2026 assessed the risks the UK faces as a result of ecosystem collapse all around the world. These risks include 'crop failures, intensified natural disasters, disease outbreaks, political instability, conflict and erosion of global economic prosperity'. Crop failures are already happening regularly, so these are not just warnings of what could happen in the future. WCL has recommended a number of policy changes that could help us avoid or mitigate some of these impacts – they include increasing support for farmers through the Environmental Land Management Schemes (or ELMS) and making sure it meets its goal of protecting 30% of both land and sea areas by 2030.

'Vole-unteer' monitors mark special anniversary

There's even room for cautious optimism after 10 years of our unique water vole citizen science programme.



Last year marked the 10th anniversary of our citizen science survey, the National Water Vole Monitoring Programme. Over the past decade, thousands of volunteers have helped us to build a clearer picture of how 'Ratty' is faring by surveying rivers, streams, ditches and canals across Great Britain. In that time, they have submitted records from more than 2,200 sites, allowing us to understand where water voles persist, where they're declining and where conservation action is most urgently needed. Thanks to habitat loss and the spread of non-native mink, water voles declined dramatically in the 20th century, and a decade's worth of data shows populations remain far below historic levels. There are some encouraging signs, however. In East Anglia, where coordinated mink eradication has taken place across entire river catchments, water voles are beginning to recover. Reintroductions in other parts of the country are helping to restore populations to areas from which they disappeared long ago. Over the past year, PTES has been working with experts to review the evidence from these conservation efforts and to support mink projects in other areas.

Study reveals high death rate of released lorises

Rehabilitating captive animals into the wild seems like a good idea, but these tiny primates are proving to be tricky customers.



Anna Nekaris, who runs the Little Fireface Project in Java, has recently published a study looking at the survival rates of Bengal slow lorises which have been released into the wild following a period of captivity. Unfortunately, it's not good news. Nine slow lorises that had been confiscated by the authorities were released into a patch of forest in north-east Bangladesh and were tracked by Anna and her team using radio telemetry over a period of eight months. But of those nine, seven died within weeks or even days of their release, with four of them falling victim to attacks by other lorises.

Lorises are territorial and aggressive and are highly unusual among mammals in possessing a venomous bite. Though disappointing, the high death rate of lorises released from captivity shows that conservationists must plan in much greater detail in the future. Sadly, many are taken from the wild to be kept as pets.

Breeding boon for rare turtles

Every hatchling counts when your wild population is so low – and the northern river terrapin's captive population has just had an excellent breeding season.



With a maximum weight of about 18kg, the northern river terrapin is one of Asia's largest freshwater turtles – and also one of its rarest. Once found from eastern India through Bangladesh to Myanmar and Thailand, they are now entirely restricted to the Sunderbans wetland delta that straddles India and Bangladesh. It's thought the number of wild individuals is in the tens, not 100s. The reasons for their decline are multiple, with unsustainable exploitation for meat and eggs, habitat degradation and incidental deaths linked to fishing practices the biggest factors. But our partner in India, the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), is working hard to build up the captive population. In 2025, more than 200 hatchlings were produced, with an almost equal success rate for artificial and natural incubation methods. In addition, the TSA has reported, there was 'confirmed breeding by captive-born individuals, marking a major milestone in global freshwater turtle conservation'.

South American mountain toad on the road to recovery

Working with indigenous people was key to project's success in creating hope this rare amphibian can survive.



The future of one of South America's rarest amphibians is more secure thanks to a project that PTES has helped to fund. The visually stunning starry night harlequin toad is endemic to the mountains of northern Colombia's Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and was feared extinct for a prolonged period until its rediscovery in 2009. Today, it's only really known to inhabit the area around one village, and is classed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN. But by working with local indigenous people, our partner Fundación Atelopus has established two community nurseries to grow native trees and help restore degraded harlequin toad habitat. A monitoring exercise identified 93 individuals, with none of them found to be carrying the chytrid fungus which is deadly to amphibians. In addition, more than half of local young people were trained in monitoring techniques, 'transforming the local perception of biodiversity into a symbol of territorial pride and cultural identity', the foundation said in its final report. Ongoing work will now concentrate on elevating the importance of the harlequin toad to ensure it becomes a conservation priority for the Colombian authorities.

Wales is where the wildcats are – or could be in time . . .

There's still a long way to go, but a possible return of this small, native feline to Wales has been boosted by work PTES has helped to fund.



The return of the wildcat to West Wales could be a step closer thanks to the work of researchers who spent two years talking to local stakeholders such as farmers, the field sports community and cat welfare advocates. A previous study has identified an area of north Carmarthenshire as somewhere that wildcats could be released into, and we helped to fund the Vincent Wildlife Trust to talk to people in the area about how they viewed such a project. Some of those interviewed expressed enthusiasm for the wildcats' return, while others were more sceptical. Concerns that were raised included the impact they could have on other native wildlife and how hybridisation (with feral domestic cats) and the spread of disease could be contained. Overall, the VWT concluded that a wildcat reintroduction could be managed in such a way to avoid impacting either local communities or its wildlife. Establishing a network of local collaborators that is 'balanced and cross-sectoral' would be essential. Wildcats went extinct in Wales some 400 years ago, and are also not currently found in England. A small population still persists in Scotland, and PTES has also supported a project to boost its numbers through releases of captive-bred individuals.

Ratty's return

Water voles were once such a common inhabitant of our freshwater rivers, streams and lakes that they were cast – as Ratty – alongside the toad and badger for a starring part in one of our most-loved stories of all time, *The Wind in the Willows*. But fortunes changed for the species as farming practices impacted riverbanks and water quality, though the biggest blow was the release of non-native American mink from fur farms in the mid-20th century. For the first time in their evolutionary history, they were hunted by a predator from which there was no escape, and their numbers crashed by an estimated 90 per cent. Thankfully, in some parts of the country, there is evidence of recovery, particularly where mink are being removed.

Back from the brink

After years of decline, there is hope that with the right conservation actions, water voles can reclaim a prominent place in their freshwater strongholds.

Sometimes confused with brown rats, water voles are distinguished by having a flatter face and muzzle, smaller ears and a furry tail. In the UK, they live almost exclusively alongside rivers and lakes (this isn't true on mainland Europe and some water voles in Glasgow also have a terrestrial lifestyle), where they feed on more than 220 different species of plant. When not feeding, they live in burrows dug into the bank, where the female will bring up her kits. She can have anywhere between two and five litters of up to eight young every year. The populations in the east end of Glasgow live entirely in the city's parks, roadside verges and gardens and not in or beside bodies of water.

Water watchdogs

PTES has been working on water vole conservation projects for many years. Our National Water Vole Monitoring Programme (NWVMP), which harnesses the energy and expertise of tireless volunteers, has been running since 2015 and gives us vital insights into where water voles are found, and where they are being lost from. Monitors – or 'vole-unteers' – are asked to survey one 500-metre stretch of riverbank once a year, usually a site allocated to them. If you're interested, we can give you all the necessary information on how to do it and what to look out for.

Appliance of science

Besides this citizen science programme, PTES has helped or funded dozens of other conservation projects for water voles. For example, we've published guidance on how best to restore habitat and how waterway maintenance impacts on water vole populations locally. We've also funded scientists to assess whether environmental DNA – effectively, DNA left by wild animals in their habitat – can be used to assess the presence of water voles in particular locations.

Sustainable solutions

More recently, PTES is supporting work that is being managed by the **Waterlife Recovery Trust** to eliminate mink from the UK once and for all. This ambitious project involves trapping and culling mink, and has already completely eradicated the invasive predator from Norfolk and Suffolk. Mink culling is something conservationists do with a heavy heart, but as our Water Vole Officer **Emily Luck** points out: 'We love animals here at PTES, yet the sustainable solution for fully protecting our water voles is to remove mink from our shores. If we did nothing, mink populations would grow exponentially and wipe out every last water vole, alongside countless other animals and birds.' ●



Scrapbook

We love hearing from all PTES people, whether supporters or project leaders. Pictures, reports, emails, web posts and letters give a great sense of your passion for wildlife, so please keep them coming!



Winter wonderland

In January, volunteers joined forces with PTES staff at our nature reserve, Briddlesford Woods, to carry out essential winter woodland maintenance. The enthusiastic team coppiced a 0.2-hectare hazel coupe (a managed woodland area), checked eight barn owl boxes and built a tree cage to protect young trees from grazing cattle. Across the woodland, teams also removed 50 plastic tree guards, cleaned out 200 dormouse boxes, marked 100 stakes, weeded the hazel nursery, replanted young hazels, layered hazel and stacked brash. Our efforts were rewarded — all the barn owl boxes showed signs of use, and we found several dormouse nests. We also spotted wrens, long-tailed tits, bank voles and pygmy shrews. Even in winter, the woods are teeming with wildlife.

Read more about Briddlesford Woods
ptes.org/briddlesford



Slow news

It was fantastic to learn in the annual report for 2025 of our Indonesian partner **Little Fireface Project** how slow lorises are becoming better known in popular culture. Not only did these extraordinary little primates feature in one of Steve Backshall's iconic *Deadly 60* programmes (they might not look deadly, but they're the only primate in the world with a venomous bite), but they are also the subject of Hayley and John Rocco's new book, *Hello, I'm a Loris*, which is part of their *Meet the Wild Things* series.



Hog-talk

We've made great strides in understanding what the conservation needs of hedgehogs are in recent years and also — with the help of our campaign Hedgehog Street in collaboration with the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) — in helping homeowners make their gardens more hog-friendly. At our annual PTES and BHPS meeting held at London Zoo earlier this year, researchers and conservationists from all over the country came together to discuss how we can secure the future of Britain's favourite mammal.

Dear Grace,

It was lovely to see you at the International Hedgehog Conference in Copenhagen.

I thought you might enjoy seeing this Madras hedgehog, spotted recently during surveys in Tamil Nadu, by two of my interns

I'm also working with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department as a consultant on a new study to better understand and protect Madras hedgehogs.

Best regards,

Brawin



Welcome to Amber, PTES PR Consultant Adela's, new daughter. We love your hat!

In-cider

James Crowden, seasoned travel writer, poet, orchard aficionado, and author of *Cider Country*, presented a talk at **Sladers Yard Gallery, Bridport**, which donated the ticket sales to PTES. Thanks James. He has also joined forces with the Orchard Network as a Blossom Day ambassador and works with our Orchard Officer, **Steve Oram**, to raise awareness of traditional orchards, local produce and the real cider industry through creative engagement with the public.

Read James' works
jamescrowden.co.uk



Madras hedgehogs are rarely recorded, so sightings like this are always exciting



Dr Brawin Kumar and Grace Johnson, our Hedgehog Officer



Day for dormice

Despite our best efforts, hazel dormice remain under pressure, mostly due to the lack of management of their key habitats and the growing threat of climate change. Consequently stakeholders from key sectors, including forestry, infrastructure and transport came together for a three-day workshop run by PTES and the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group to develop a new national strategy for this much-loved native of our woodlands and hedgerows. We'll report on the strategy in a subsequent issue of *Wildlife World*.



My role at PTES

Jennie Guard
Mapping Officer



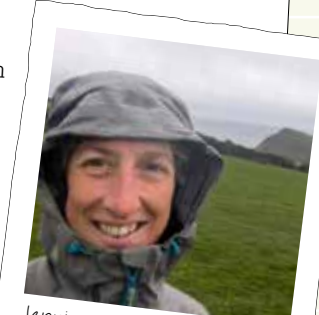
I'm a mapping officer, and along with two colleagues at PTES, we are updating the traditional orchard inventory for Natural England. Traditional orchards are a priority habitat in England, and we are going through the inventory to see if the orchards contained in it are still there or whether any new ones have been created. We do this by looking at aerial photography. If the orchard isn't there any more, then it could have been developed without consent, in which case we can alert Natural England which can chase it up.

Between the three of us, we divided all the counties between us — I started with Devon, because that's where I live, and then moved on to nearby ones such as Cornwall and Dorset.

I do mapping three days a week, and the rest of my time I spend on my internship project. I'm looking at what the impact of climate change is likely to be on a local landscape recovery project here in Devon.

For example, with warmer, drier summers, a wet woodland is at greater risk of drying out, while in the winter, with increasing wind speeds, trees might be uprooted. We're assessing the impact on the habitats, but will also highlight one or two species that are especially at risk and what management actions we can recommend to mitigate these.

I work from home full time, and I start and finish when it suits me. Although most of my work is desk-based, I'm able to take my dog out for a walk in beautiful landscapes where I live when I need to stretch my legs.



Jennie on a site visit of the landscape recovery project



This chubby dormouse was found during a box check in Somerset last year. At 29g, it was in good shape to make it through the winter.



Insects the length of your forefinger
buzzing around on summer evenings
and fighting like gladiators – welcome
to the world of the stag beetle.

Flights *of* fancy

In 1934, the French entomologist August Magnan famously concluded in a paper entitled *La Locomotion Chez les Animaux* that bee flight was aerodynamically impossible. Imagine, then if he had turned his scientific brain towards stag beetles, insects far larger than even the biggest bumblebee and clad in a stiff and unwieldy exoskeleton.

These giants – the UK's largest land beetle – are as long as your forefinger and almost twice as wide, and protruding at the front, on the males, are the huge antler-like mandibles (from which they get their name) and which they use to compete for mates with other males.

It therefore seems a trifle surreal that their flimsy, delicate wings can lift these armour-plated beasts into the air, but somehow they do – indeed, it's essential – though their flight cannot reasonably be

described as elegant, their bodies hanging vertically in the air like some kind of high-tech drone from a science fiction film.

In fact, both males and females (which are considerably smaller in length and bulk) fly surprisingly far – the females 700 metres in a single flight, and males, 1,720 metres, according to one study carried out in Germany. One male was recorded travelling more than 2km, though this involved several, separate efforts.

David Wembridge, Conservation Research and Strategy Officer for PTES, has recently published a paper in the science journal *Insect Conservation and Diversity* looking at what our citizen science programme (see box, overleaf) has revealed about the conservation status of the species in the UK, and he describes their flight as 'rather clumsy and somehow precarious'.

How to tell a stag beetle from a lesser stag beetle



ABOVE: A female stag beetle

Stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*

With its enlarged mandibles, the male stag beetle is unmistakable. Up to 7.5cm long.

The female is smaller, between 3-5cm and only has small jaws.

The abdomens of both males and females are a chestnut-brown, as are the males' mandibles.



ABOVE: A male lesser stag beetle

Lesser stag beetle *Dorcus parallelipipedus*

The male lesser stag beetle has visible jaws, but nothing like its larger cousin's. Male and females are the same size, with a range of 1.5 - 3cm.

Lesser stag beetles are matt black. In theory, you could confuse a female stag beetle with a male lesser stag beetle, but if it's uniformly black, it's the latter.

“Males, of course, will frequently have to vie with others to earn the right to mate, using those outsized mandibles to grapple with each other”

'And you get this thrumming sound as well,' he continues enthusiastically. 'Males are known to pursue females in flight, taking hold of them in mid-air and then the two of them will fall.' Seeing these gargantuan creature maneuvering on fairy wings is an incredible sight.

Males will frequently have to compete with others to earn the right to mate, using those outsized mandibles to grapple with each other. Once they have mated, females lay their eggs in soil close to areas of dead wood such as rotting tree stumps or the roots of dead or dying trees (often, in fact, in the very spots they emerged from as adults), digging down into the earth 10cm or more. Old rotting fence posts – even ones that have been treated – are also an option.

Once the larvae have hatched, they then spend the next three to five years feasting on the dead wood as they grow, reaching a maximum size of 11cm, roughly equivalent to the length of a standard computer mouse. They are an ethereal, creamy-white colour with orange-brown heads and legs.

While found throughout Europe, stag beetles have a limited range in the UK, mainly focused on the south and south-

east, with a few sightings as far west as Cornwall and as far north as North Wales and even into Yorkshire.

It's not only climate that limits their distribution in Britain, however. 'They prefer sandy soils that are easy to dig into, and don't like clay which can cause the soil to be waterlogged,' says David. 'They like a sort of Goldilocks soil where everything is just right.'

Once they emerge as adults, usually in May and June, stag beetles can be found in many different areas – on the edges of woodlands, hedgerows and

country parks, but also quite often in urban areas where there are gardens that provide good habitat for their larvae.

'That's because,' says David, 'there's just as likely to be good sources of dead wood in private gardens as elsewhere in the landscape.' As adults, they have very few requirements, other than finding another stag beetle of the opposite sex. Though they might feed on fruit or tree sap if available, it's not a requirement most of the time.

It's thought females stay close to the site where they originally emerged, while males might disperse a little more, but still only a kilometre or two.

One thing important to note is that stag beetles are harmless. Even the enormous jaws the males possess can at best only deliver a gentle squeeze, and as long as you're careful, there's no risk in handling them. PTES often hears from people who have relocated a stag beetle they have come across on a busy pavement or road, but be careful!

David's research paper, 'Long-term population changes for the UK stag beetle', on which he collaborated with two other PTES staff members **Laura Bower** and **Silviu Petrovan**, looked at more than 80,000 records collected from our annual

citizen science survey, *The Great Stag Hunt*, comparing occupancy records from 1998-2002 with those from 2018-2022.

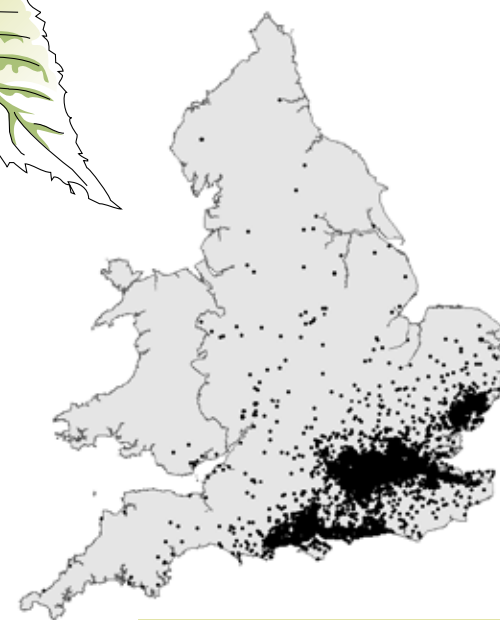
In essence, what the data show is that the overall distribution hasn't changed much, either since 1998 or indeed compared with historical records going back over a century, though there may have been small declines in the western part of its range.

The Great Stag Hunt asks surveyors to record when they see a stag beetle, and this has given some indication of how their range has changed in the past 25 years.

PTES will continue with its citizen science survey, and anyone can take part, though only those in the southern part of the country are likely to see any.

So, how best to see one? Warm summer evenings from the end of May through June and July are best, though they will continue to be active later into the summer, too. 'Then it's just a question of being patient,' David remarks.

So spare a thought for stag beetles this summer and see if you can spot one. Think about the changes you can make to your garden – and even if you don't live in a part of the world where they are likely to be found, this will still benefit other species. ●



ABOVE: A map of England and Wales clearly shows how stag beetles are largely found in the south-east of the UK, with limited sightings in the West Country, the Midlands and the North.

Top tips for helping stag beetles in your garden

Leave stumps in situ when you cut down any trees or woody shrubs. Dead wood is essential for growing larvae.



Build a log pyramid – bury logs (best from a broadleaved tree rather than a conifer) up to 50cm deep, with the tops exposed.



Cover water butts – stag beetles and other insects can drown in water. If you find one in water, take it out and put it somewhere dry.

Provide exit points from ponds and put in stones which insects can crawl onto.

Leave wild spaces where insects and other wildlife can take refuge or feed.



GET INVOLVED

The Great Stag Hunt

Help us keep track of how stag beetles are faring in Britain by letting us know when you see any.

Scan this QR code to take you to our website, where you can record your sightings.



Migration watch



The movements of whale sharks on Mexico's Pacific coast are cloaked in mystery – our new partner hopes to pull the veil off how they spend their lives.

Whale sharks are the largest fish on Earth, and yet scientists still don't fully understand their movements. These migratory giants follow blooms of zooplankton from place to place, but many questions remain.

In Mexico, our new partner **Whale Shark Mexico (WSM)** has studied them for more than 20 years. Now, thanks to PTES funding, the team will be able to build a clearer picture of the sharks that live along the country's Pacific coast.

As WSM director **Alberto García-Baciero** (below) explains, here's what they do know: juvenile sharks are found off the coast of Bahía de la Paz, at the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula, between October and May, with peak numbers in December and January. At Bahía de los Ángeles in contrast, some 800km to the north on the peninsula, whale sharks are present between June and December.

Then there's a population of mature females which is found at the southern end

of the Gulf of California in May and June and then in the Revillagigedo Archipelago hundreds of kilometres off the coast of Mexico in November and December.

'But we have no idea if they come for breeding, mating, or feeding purposes – it is still a mystery!' Alberto says.

In order to get a clearer picture of where whale sharks are migrating to and from and when, WSM will purchase several satellite tags to attach to individuals. These will provide data on where the animals are spending a significant amount of their time and it will allow the scientists to assess whether they're vulnerable to threats such as boat collisions from shipping or fishing vessels or from bycatch.

'With that information, we aim to identify higher priority conservation areas for whale sharks,' Alberto says. ●



Fact File

- NAME**
Whale shark *Rhincodon typus*
- APPEARANCE**
Distinctive (and unique to each individual) pattern of white spots and pale horizontal and vertical stripes over a blue- or grey-ish background. Large dorsal fin and tail. Huge, broad, flattened head.
- LENGTH**
Grows to a maximum of 20 metres.
- DISTRIBUTION**
Can occur in all tropical and warm temperate seas. Is found throughout the Atlantic Ocean as far north as New York. In the Pacific, from Japan to Australia.
- DIET**
A wide variety of plankton, but also larger prey such as small crustaceans, fishes and even tuna and squid. Phytoplankton can also form part of their diet.
- BEHAVIOUR**
They filter-feed, often at or near the surface, and frequently in large groups. They segregate into male and female groups, and also into juvenile and adult ones.
- POPULATION**
Studies published nearly 20 years ago using mitochondrial DNA put the effective population at 119,000–238,000 female sharks. The population is thought to be declining and fragmented.
- IUCN RED LIST STATUS**
Endangered.



Net gain for Cambodia's dolphins



Involving local fishing villages in protecting rare coastal dolphins is the goal of our new partner.

A novel project that PTES is supporting in Cambodia will teach fishing communities in southern coastal Cambodia to attach used plastic bottles to their nets as a way of reducing bycatch of endangered Irrawaddy dolphins and other cetaceans.

Our Cambodian partner, **Khmer Ocean Life (KOL)**, has carried out research demonstrating that the accidental capture of non-target species, such as dolphins, is having a negative impact on their populations.

Using a method first trialled in southern Brazil to protect franciscanas or La Plata dolphins, the KOL team has begun working with 100 local fishers to raise awareness of the impact of bycatch on marine mammals.

Workshops will be given to show how and where to strategically attach plastic bottles to their nets. The bottles act as acoustic reflectors – the trial carried out in Brazil shows that dolphins were still present around nets with bottles attached to them but were less likely to interact with them.

The team, led by **Chhayhy Heng** (below), will both train fishers to attach the bottles to their nets and collect data on the impact this has on bycatch rates.



The project will then enter a long-term auditing and monitoring phase, with data collected monthly from participating fishers,' Chhayhy says. Part of the PTES funding will help compensate fishers for the time they spend on this innovative work.

As well as beginning this new project, and carrying out research and monitoring, KOL also focuses extensively on education and outreach work, and in 2025 worked with 1,300 students on marine conservation issues. Last year, it also launched an ecotourism initiative called Kampot Dolphin Encounters in collaboration with local communities.

Other species that benefit from its work include Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, Indo-Pacific finless porpoises and dugongs, a member of the Sirenia order and so related to the three species of manatee or sea cow. ●



An Irrawaddy dolphin surfaces close to fishing boats in southern Cambodia, where local people are attaching bottles to fishing nets to reduce bycatch.

Fact File

- NAME**
Irrawaddy dolphin *Orcaella brevirostris*
- APPEARANCE**
Characteristic rounded face with no beak; small dorsal fin; species sometimes compared to a beluga because of its blunt head but it is grey, not white.
- LENGTH**
2.7m (males), 2.3m (females).
- DISTRIBUTION**
Coastal marine and freshwater habitats in South-east Asia, including the Bay of Bengal and Indonesia.
- DIET**
Varied – includes fish, squid and octopus
- BEHAVIOUR**
Usually lives in small groups (six or fewer); slow swimmers and dive when frightened; occasionally spy-hop (where they hold their head above the water to visually inspect the environment above the water line); tail slap, but rarely leap.
- POPULATION**
Not known but thought to be threatened throughout their range.
- IUCN RED LIST STATUS**
Endangered.

Wanted: a new home

One of the new projects that's started in 2026 involves our partner in Colombia who's investigating how best to move orchids under threat from habitat loss to locations where they'll be able to thrive.

With 28,000 species globally (and found on every continent except Antarctica), orchids are one of the most diverse families of flowering plants in the world. They fascinate both scientists and horticulturalists because of their often exuberant and beautiful flowers.

In Colombia, our new partner Ana María Benavides of the Botanical Garden of Medellín, has been studying orchids for 25 years, initially in the Amazon Basin and then in the tropical Andes.

With PTES funding, Ana María has begun a project which will assess whether it's possible to relocate epiphytic orchids (species that grow on trees rather than in the soil) from at-risk areas into suitable, alternative secondary forests.

A particularly important aspect of this work is the opportunity to test whether trees established through restoration and reforestation programmes, which are now widely promoted for carbon sequestration

and climate mitigation, can also function as effective host trees for rescued orchids,' she says.

As well as translocating orchids, Ana María will carry out long-term monitoring of their survival, growth and reproduction and assess which microhabitat conditions best support their ongoing persistence.

The Colombian Andes are renowned for their biodiversity, and this is as true for orchids as it is for other groups of plants and animals.

New orchid species are discovered on a regular basis, and more than 4,000 have been identified in the whole of the country. ●



All about orchids

- ▶ The name 'orchid' comes from the Greek word *orchis*, which means testicle – because of the shape of the tubers of some species.
- ▶ Orchids are famous for the often elaborate mechanisms through which they attract (and often deceive) insects to come and pollinate them using colours, scents and pheromones.
- ▶ Some orchids have no chlorophyll and survive through parasitism.
- ▶ Vanilla flavouring comes from the dried seed pods of orchids in the genus *Vanilla*.

Saving the Hobbit frog

This amphibian is so rare it's only found across an area the size of a small village, but our new partner is working hard to ensure its ongoing survival.

A frog that survives in just 20km² of the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal and whose tadpoles hatch and metamorphose in underground chambers is the focus of one of our latest partnerships.

PhD student Tiaan Botha, of North-West University, will be studying Bilbo's rain frogs in the area around the small town of Mthonjanen. His goal is to better identify the threats they face and devise mitigation plans with landowners who

'As a result, it has had to retreat to small, five-metre grassy verges between the highways and the plantations and make do there,' says Tiaan.

Working with the landowners to legally secure 'key, sensitive habitats' for the frogs will be critical. 'This will prove to be a wobbly tightrope that will have to balance acceptable conservation outcomes with business operations by proving that the expanding corporate world can care about the natural world they affect,' he adds.

Amphibians – which include frogs, salamanders and caecilians – are the most threatened vertebrate group in the world, with 41% of all species facing extinction, but their conservation is poorly-funded. Tiaan says PTES support 'is exactly what we need to make this project a success.' ●



Rain frogs

- ▶ Rain frogs are part of the *Breviceps* genus, which refers to their short heads (Brevis = short, ceps = head).
- ▶ They are mostly active in or just after wet weather and they are almost exclusively found in southern Africa.
- ▶ All rain frogs lay eggs into underground chambers. The tadpoles whip up a foam with their tails to capture oxygen and undergo metamorphosis underground.

include large corporations, local farmers and the government. Bilbo's rain frog is found in grassland in eastern South Africa, but much of its habitat has been converted into commercial forestry of pine, black wattle and gum trees.

Breeding like wildcats

A pioneering project to save the Scottish wildcat from extinction has proved to be even more successful than anticipated.

The future of Scottish wildcats is far rosier in 2026 than it has been for many decades, thanks to a project that PTES has helped to fund.

Saving Wildcats, which is led by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland in partnership with other groups, has reintroduced 46 wildcats into an area of the Cairngorms National Park since 2023.

A study published at the end of last year found that the overall survival rate of the first tranche of reintroductions – 19 in 2023 – was 95 per cent for the first 10 months, much higher than had been predicted.

Not only that, the released wildcats proved to be successful breeders, too. Between April and August 2024, camera trap footage has revealed that at least 24 kittens were born to seven females. Two of the females went on to have a second litter. In total, it's thought at least 40 kittens have been born since the project began.

In terms of their diet, monitoring with GPS collars and camera traps has suggested the cats are primarily using areas where they will be preying field voles and rabbits. Scavenging of roe deer and brown hares has been identified, and nine of the wildcats have opted to occupy game-shooting estates, creating potential conflict with gamekeepers.

Some of the behaviour of the reintroduced cats has proved surprising. All of them were released within the area of the national park known as Cairngorms Connect, a partnership of four landowners whose principal aim is ecosystem restoration.

But – out of the first tranche of 19 – 17 of the cats chose to establish their territories in the River Spey corridor to the west.

'The establishment of resident home ranges primarily on the western edges, or outside, of Cairngorms Connect, where habitat is more diverse and productive with relatively higher prey population densities (including rabbits and pheasants), suggests that the interior of Cairngorms Connect may provide sub-optimal habitat for wildcats,' a report published in the IUCN's Cat News states.

'Predation/disturbance of domestic poultry and gamebirds, and other impacts on gamebird shooting, has caused conflict within local and land management communities,' it goes on to say.

Another concern is that genetic testing confirmed interbreeding with wildcat-domestic cat hybrids in one litter. Mixing with feral domestic cats has been one of the principal causes of the species' decline. ●





Scotland's population of wildcats roam across the Cairngorms, parts of Aberdeenshire and Ardnamurchan





They're largely active at dawn and dusk

Fact File

- NAME**
Scottish wildcat *Felis silvestris*
- APPEARANCE**
Stocky and muscular, brown, mottled fur and a thick ringed tail with a black tip.
- DISTRIBUTION**
In the UK, they're only found in the Scottish Highlands.
- DIET**
Voles and other small rodents, rabbits, some small birds and carrion.
- BEHAVIOUR**
Almost entirely solitary, except during the breeding season.
- POPULATION**
In Scotland, the population was judged to be so low it was functionally extinct. In Europe, the species appears to be doing well in north-west Europe and declining elsewhere.
- IUCN RED LIST STATUS**
Least Concern

Intern inquiries

We sponsor a number of young ecologists to carry out vital research into a wide variety of British species. Here we look at two of them.

The footprint detective

Our intern is using AI to see if it's possible to distinguish small mammals from one another using just their footprints.

Small mammals are a vital part of any terrestrial ecosystem, but can be hard to monitor. Traditionally, the main way of getting an idea of their presence and abundance has been trapping, but this is time consuming and somewhat invasive.

As a result, footprint tunnels – in which a small mammal leaves its footprints after walking through a non-toxic ink – are becoming increasingly popular.

But can you identify species from their footprints alone? That's the question our intern **Jazz Woollard** is attempting to answer in a project she is carrying out in conjunction with the Wildwood Trust in Kent.

Jazz is collecting examples of small mammals' footprints, then feeding this

information into an AI programme called Footprint Identification Technology (FIT) developed by WildTrack. FIT then looks for distinctive patterns in the footprints.

'So far, we've collected prints from 22 field, 27 bank and 6 water voles, 11 wood, 32 harvest and one house mouse and one pygmy and one water shrew,' says Jazz.

'Small mammals make up 40 per cent of all the animals within a habitat,' she continues. 'Their population dynamics can help us understand the health of an ecosystem.'

This project could transform how we monitor small mammals in the UK and make it accessible to a much wider audience, opening the door to new citizen science projects. ●



High skates

Our intern is investigating how to make one of Scotland's top marine predators better known and understood.

Flapper skates are one of the world's largest skates and part of the elasmobranch family that includes sharks and rays. They can grow to 2.5m long and 2m wide and weigh more than 100kg.

They eat everything from fish and prawns to squid and even small sharks, and as such they play an important role in regulating prey populations and therefore in maintaining the health of marine ecosystems.

Elizabeth Weldon is investigating broader attitudes towards the species by interviewing the public – and particularly young people – about how they view them. 'We chose this demographic because studies have shown they are less scared of elasmobranch species and are an important

group for fostering pro-conservation attitudes,' Elizabeth says.

At the same time, Elizabeth is also studying underwater footage of flapper skates to identify individuals from their unique dorsal spot patterns with the aim of creating profiles for each one and making them more visible to the public.

'If the flapper skate can be identified as a flagship species for Scotland, its protection could in turn protect other vulnerable species that live alongside it, as well as protecting its habitat,' she says.

Until 2010 considered to be the same species as the common or blue skate, the flapper skate inhabits the Eastern Atlantic Ocean where it feeds on the seabed usually at depths of more than 100m. ●



The age of restoration

PTES has already developed a tool, which has received the backing of Defra, to enable landowners to survey their hedges, now we're helping them bring them back to life.

Helping farmers manage their hedges for the long-term is the focus of the latest project of our **Key Habitats Officer, Megan Gimber**.

Advising landowners they need to lay or coppice their hedges, or change their approach to trimming, has the biggest impact when they also have the capacity to carry out what's been recommended.

So this year, Megan will start working with farmers within the South Downs National Park on how they can draw up 10-year management plans.

Hedge surveying is the first, crucial step to get an understanding of their current condition (using PTES' very own Healthy Hedgerows App), but then all the assessments need to be gathered, and urgency of actions prioritised.

In short, managing one hedge is easy, but managing a farm-full is a complex but essential jigsaw puzzle.

Hedges can decline for a number of reasons, but often it's due to lack of timely rejuvenation (laying or coppicing), a non-negotiable step in any good hedge management. Without management, a hedge will slowly turn into a line of trees and will lose its low flowering scrub that's so

important for wildlife. Ultimately, without intervention, it will thin out and be lost.

'If you've got beech or oak or other beefy tree species in your hedge, they will grow into tall trees, and over time, anything such as hawthorn and blackthorn, the scrubby, flowering and fruiting ones, will disappear,' says Megan.

But equally, trimming management without timely rejuvenation also sees the thinning of hedge bases, the deaths of stems and the development of gaps, again leading to the disappearance of the hedge.

The base of the hedge is critical to its function, because this is where birds such as wrens and dunnocks feed and nest, where hedgehogs hibernate and where many insects overwinter.

Without laying a hedge once every 15-40 years to create new growth, the base becomes less dense and doesn't serve this function. Only through restoring lifecycle management systems can we ensure the future and quality of our nation's hedges. But retrofitting our hedges to this system isn't easy, and this is what our new project will seek to address.

Megan will also help communicate these complex management changes to

contractors. Most of the people who carry out the work – hedge cutting, laying and coppicing – are external operators.

'If we are asking flail operators to come in and do something wildly different and more complex, how do we communicate that adequately so the plans can come to fruition?' Megan says.

Megan sees a growing appetite from farmers who want to restore their hedges. The current crisis came about following the end of the Second World War when the priorities in the UK (and Europe) changed to require farming to produce more food, more cheaply. The number of farm labourers dropped dramatically, and there was no capacity for carrying out essential tasks such as hedgelaying that had previously taken place.

Farmers get criticised for what's happened but it's not black and white, says Megan. 'They're at the forefront of dealing with impacts from climate change and biodiversity loss, they know what's happening, and there is a huge contingent who want to do things differently to address and reverse these threats.' ●

Find out more
www.hedgerowsurvey.ptes.org



ABOVE: Neglected hedges slowly become tree lines, losing their valuable hedgerow benefits.
FAR-LEFT: PTES Key Habitats Officer Megan working with farmers to restore traditional hedge management.
LEFT: Hedge-laying rejuvenates old hedges, encouraging dense new growth at ground level – exactly what many birds, mammals and insects need.

Thanks to you

Thank you to all our fundraisers who have been raising funds for PTES. This is a great way to help endangered species and spread the word about what PTES does, so thank you all of you!

Bull's eye!

A huge donation from one grant-giving body will help us target our conservation work for some of Britain's rarest mammals.

PTES received a generous £20,000 from the Oak Foundation this winter. We're extremely grateful for its gift, which will help support our critical work on threatened mammals in the UK, particularly hedgehogs, hazel dormice and water voles. These widespread but declining species are in urgent need of targeted conservation actions. ●



Good companies

You can buy bags, pouches and scrunchies from these outfits, and a percentage of the sale price comes back to us – what are you waiting for?

Thanks to all the small businesses who support us by donating a percentage of profits from their ranges and designs. We have businesses raising donations from products such as hedgehog friendly fencing (fencing panels with holes that give hedgehogs space to roam, birkdalesales.com), handmade bags (bagsforbiodiversity.co.uk), handmade gifts (tahliapaige.co.uk) and dormouse necklaces (blackbirdjewellery.com). Donations like these really do help, and we're so grateful, so if you have a small business and you could support us in any way, please get in touch. ●



Hedgehog Skincare Essentials Gift Set from tahliapaige.co.uk

Draw in donations

If you love art and wildlife, then these unique classes are for you – and you help to raise money for PTES and other charities at the same time.

Wild Life Drawing has been supporting PTES through its wildlife drawing sessions since 2022. Each class focuses on a particular species, with an expert on hand, such as one of our own conservation officers, to share interesting facts and stories throughout the sessions. For every ticket sold, PTES receives 50% of the proceeds.

So far, hundreds of people have enlisted to draw hazel dormice, hedgehogs, hares, red squirrels, stag beetles, water voles and snow leopards. Jennie and her team have raised almost £100,000 for a variety of animal and wildlife charities.

We're very proud to work with them regularly, and see the wonderful drawings supporters produce. Thank you if you have taken part. ●

Join an upcoming class
wildlifedrawing.co.uk

Bridging the gap

Your funding is helping to protect the rare golden langur and other primates in the Indian state of Assam.

Thanks to everyone who generously supported our golden langur appeal last autumn, raising nearly £23,000. Your donations will help us support our newest Conservation Partner, Dr Jihosuo Biswas, and his team who are trialling innovative solutions to save golden langurs from road collisions and deforestation.

With PTES's support, Jihosuo and his team have installed 18 artificial canopy bridges to reconnect fragmented forest. Over the past year, these bridges were used by golden langurs 133 times, reducing road collisions at a known hotspot by 74%. Of the four designs tested (ladder, pipe, bamboo, and rope), langurs showed a clear preference for pipe bridges.

The Assam Government has now endorsed these designs, installing similar structures across the state to protect primates and other wildlife. And in Bhutan, Jihosuo's training has already led to

two new bridges being built, with langurs using them within days. ●

To read more on this incredible project and how wildlife bridges are helping these primates, you can read our blog here: ●



Snow business

Our partner in Mongolia continues to reveal the incredible secrets of snow leopards' lives thanks to your generous donations.

Thank you to everyone who donated to our snow leopard appeal at the beginning of the year. Together, you raised more than £30,500. The team at the Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation in Mongolia is doing an incredible job monitoring these elusive cats, and last summer they made history with two extraordinary visits to snow leopard dens, documenting five healthy cubs.

These events are exceptionally rare – over nearly two decades, the team has only ever visited a total of seven dens with cubs. They offer a valuable glimpse into their early lives, revealing rare data on litter sizes and cub survival rates. The data gathered from these exceptional moments are essential for making informed conservation choices to protect this endangered species.

Much of the monitoring is carried out through either remote cameras or the use of GPS collars, and your generous support helps us to continue to fund this long-term and critical work. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. ●



And thank you to all our supporters who have donated to our fundraising appeals. Your continued and generous support makes it possible for us to carry out conservation and fund vital research and campaigns.

Christmas present

Pictures of wildlife have helped to raise funding for – and awareness about – PTES.



PTES supporter and artist Jenny Hannam raised £50 and spread awareness for PTES and the wildlife we protect through exhibiting at the Christmas exhibition in Cheltenham's Lansdown Art Studios. With each piece of art, Jenny included information encouraging people to think about the plight of our native wildlife. Jenny very kindly donated 10% of the proceeds from all the paintings and cards she sold to PTES. See her incredible work on her Instagram page [@jennyhannamart](https://www.instagram.com/jennyhannamart) ●

Design for wildlife

The (wildlife) revolution is just a t-shirt away – see what you could snap up in our new clothing range.

Thank you to all those who supported the launch of our brand new clothing and accessories range. The store is run in partnership with Teemill, which donates a percentage of the sales price to PTES. All our items are printed on demand and from renewable energy and made from certified organic cotton, with plastic-free packaging. All the designs are created by us and inspired by the wildlife we protect. We were so pleased to see so many of our supporters buying these products, so keep your eye out, we'll be regularly releasing new designs. ●



View our range online



people's
trust for
endangered
species

Our wildlife is disappearing



Leave a legacy and help us
bring the **wild** back to **life**

Leaving People's Trust for Endangered Species a gift in your will, or in memory of a loved one, can make the difference between the loss and survival of a species.

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