

# Futurescapes



## Landscape-scale conservation in practice

- Building the world's largest protected area network
- Hollywood comes to the Inner Forth
- Linking iconic Caledonian forests in the Cairngorms

# Welcome

Welcome to the final newsletter of the Futurescapes LIFE+ communications project. This issue focuses on best practice driven by the project work that has supported the UK's contribution to the Natura 2000 network of protected sites. Over the last three years, this programme of work has led to improvements in practical conservation and new ways of thinking about how we implement it on a landscape scale. This is one of the most important legacies of Futurescapes work, for both the RSPB and our many partners.

## The world's largest protected area network

Working in partnership across the European Union, the Natura 2000 network of protected areas is supporting some of our most vulnerable and threatened species and habitats.

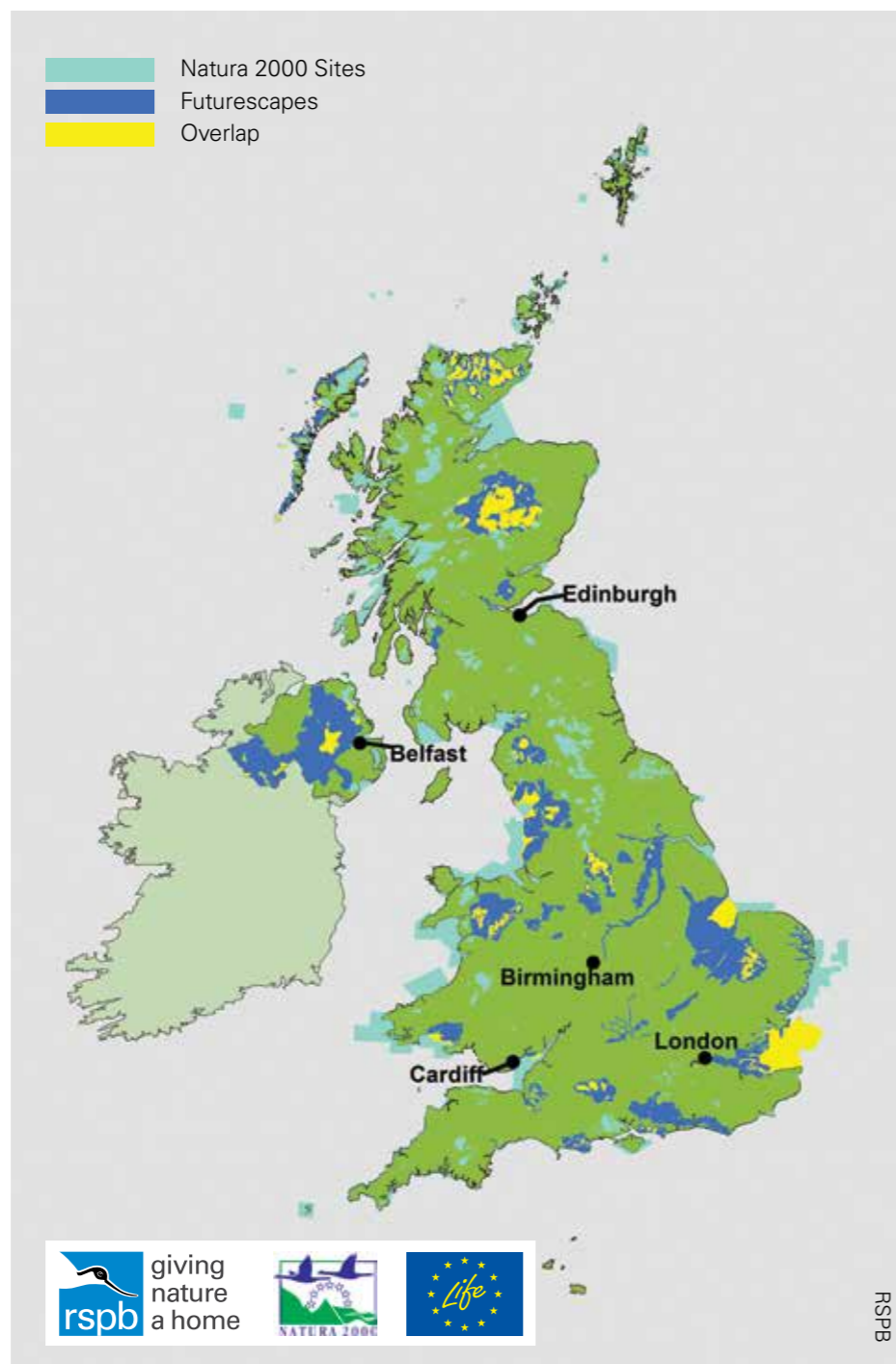
The network is made up of sites designated as Special Protection Areas for Birds through the Birds Directive, or Special Areas of Conservation for Habitats through the Habitats Directive.

Since Natura 2000's formation over 30 years ago, the number of designated sites has been growing, and the network now covers over 20% of the total land area of the EU. This makes it the largest network of protected areas in the world.

Here in the UK, we have designated over 900 Natura 2000 sites. These protected areas are an important tool to help us reverse the continuing fall in biodiversity and deal with the increased need to mitigate against the effects of climate change.

Supporting and enhancing our protected area network in the UK has been at the heart of the RSPB's Futurescapes programme. Over the last three years we have been able to get involved with many activities in or around the Natura 2000 sites, thanks to funding from the EU LIFE+ Communications Programme.

This work has included providing management advice to local landowners, leading direct practical conservation initiatives and working with local communities to raise awareness through outreach and education programmes.



# Working in partnership with RSPB colleagues

To deliver successful landscape-scale conservation we must work effectively both within our own organisations and with external partners. At the RSPB, innovative governance and management at a regional level has been key to our success.

For the RSPB to take an effective approach to landscape-scale conservation, it is important to ensure that there are clear roles and responsibilities, decision making processes and governance structures that ensure cross-functional working.

In the eastern region, Area Managers act as the Futurescape leads and are accountable for the progress in their Futurescape. Each Futurescape has a core team including local reserve staff, together with regional conservation, fundraising and

communications officers. They are all responsible for progressing the project's objectives. Land agents, volunteering officers, membership officers and others are also routinely consulted as and when their input and expertise is needed.

Governance structures have been carefully arranged to meet the particular objectives that are relevant to each Futurescape. For example, in the Broads Futurescape, the core team oversees progress and sets direction, while the project's

objectives have been allocated to different steering groups. This structure ensures that each area of work is "owned" and progressed and that colleagues from the regional office and headquarters are involved at the right times.

Underpinning this is the need to get the best from colleagues and the Midlands team have led the way in hosting energising meetings. Their secret: good facilitation skills, which create a supportive environment for teams to develop their best ideas.

## Futurescapes help grow support for nature

RSPB membership development officers (MDOs) have been using Futurescape stories across the country to help recruit members and connect people to their local landscape, as well as raise awareness of landscape-scale conservation.

For example, in the northern region, MDOs use Futurescape stories to help recruit members who live closer to a Futurescape than they do to an RSPB reserve. By highlighting these areas we can encourage people to explore new places and see the fantastic work we do in partnership with others across the landscape.

To ensure that membership recruiters have the latest stories and information to inspire potential members, Futurescapes officers regularly attend membership team meetings. We've received great feedback on how useful landscape-scale conservation stories can be for recruiters, so if this is something you're not yet doing, why not look into it?



A Membership Development Officer in action in the Broads Futurescape.

# Connecting habitats and delivering practical nature conservation

Providing practical conservation at a landscape scale is challenging and has often relied on the development of new tools and innovative ways of working.

## Linking Scotland's iconic Caledonian forest

The Caledonian forest is one of Scotland's most iconic landscapes. However, just one per cent of the original forest remains. Sixty per cent of this can be found in the Cairngorms, where Caledonian forest is a priority habitat, containing a number of Natura 2000 Special Areas of Conservation.

The Caledonian forest, renowned for the iconic Scots pine, is a rich and varied habitat and home to many tree species including oak, birch, rowan and aspen. One of the most under-represented habitats is aspen woodland, which is home to vulnerable aspen-dependent species such as the aspen hoverfly and dark-bordered beauty moth. One Cairngorms Futurescape project has focused on improving aspen stands throughout the Badenoch and Strathspey area.

Building on an existing project that was mapping aspen stands and carrying out management of the woodlands at RSPB Insh Marshes nature reserve, the Futurescapes project offered the extra resources needed to seek out landowners in the connectivity "gaps" identified. So far, three new stands of aspen have been created through this project, with four more planned over the coming winter and spring.

The Aspen Habitat Connectivity Project is jointly delivered by the Highland Aspen Group, Coille Alba, Malloch Society, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the RSPB.



Four new aspen stands have been planted in the Cairngorms Futurescape.

## New tool for mapping habitat connectivity

The Dearne Valley Nature Improvement Area Connectivity Tool is a mapping tool to assess the effects of land cover change on priority habitat connectivity in the Dearne Valley Green Heart Nature Improvement Area.

It uses a "least-cost distance" approach to identifying and mapping groups of habitat patches that species can move between. The tool allows users to map potential land cover changes so that the effects of these scenarios on habitat connectivity can be measured and compared.

The quantitative, spatial information provided by this tool provides an evidence base for targeted decision making across the Nature Improvement Area (NIA).

The tool can also be used in an effort to protect and enhance habitat connectivity, helping users to select between potential future scenarios related to: habitat restoration and creation; biodiversity offsetting; housing and infrastructure development; species conservation; and green infrastructure planning.

The Dearne Valley NIA Connectivity Tool is a partnership project between Dearne Valley NIA and Forest Research.

# Achieving more through successful partnerships

Working together is central to the ethos of Futurescapes – bigger and better things can be achieved when great minds and organisations are brought together. Our commitment to working with others is delivering real results for conservation.

## Developing joint management plans in Natura 2000 sites

In both the Suffolk Coast and Greater Thames Futurescapes, we identified sites within the Natura 2000 network that should be delivering more for wildlife.

Although covering different habitats, the issues were similar: management wasn't as good as it could have been and neither site was under our direct control. Rather than trying to buy the land outright, which would have been very expensive, we decided to engage with landowners to develop joint management plans.

At Tunstall and Rendelsham Woods, in the Suffolk Coast Futurescape, we were able to help the Forestry Commission to meet their targets by entering into a Farm Business Tenancy agreement. As a result of restoring precious heathland on the Suffolk Coast, the decline in woodlarks appears to have halted, with the number of territories up by 29%. Nightjar numbers were also up 15% on 2013.

At Higham Marshes, in our Greater Thames Futurescape, we helped draw up a new management agreement with the landowner and grazier – the deal was sweetened as we were able to use NIA funding to deliver capital works to improve the condition of 150 hectares of the site. Within a year, 10 pairs of redshanks and 16 pairs of lapwings bred on the site, with a whopping productivity ratio of 1.68 chicks per pair (exceeding our 0.7 target), providing a link for breeding wading birds across the Greater Thames.

On both sites, we have achieved win-win outcomes – landowners are not only receiving a sustainable income from the land, but effective partnership working is supporting management of a healthy Natura 2000 network. Joint land management partnerships of this kind take place across the Futurescapes programme and are the building blocks of thriving ecological networks.



Redshanks are thriving at Higham Marshes, thanks to new management.



We're connecting heathland at Arne.

## Working together for nature

The Wild Purbeck Partnership consists of 12 partners (including the RSPB) all working together to meet a range of objectives, including engaging local communities, managing land in a positive way and growing a green economy.

Wild Purbeck, in Dorset, covers one of the most important areas of lowland heathland in England. Working with the National Trust and Natural England, the RSPB will be connecting grazing units within Arne and Hartland, managing almost 2,000 hectares as a single unit (only 25% is owned by the RSPB). This change is supported by local communities who have been actively involved in the management of the land.

Our Futurescapes approach is all about bringing partners together around a single vision, to grow momentum and overcome traditional obstacles to successful conservation delivery.

# Unlocking the economic potential of nature conservation

From bio-energy and tourism to improving water quality, working at a landscape scale ensures that people as well as wildlife benefit. When it comes to looking for examples of best practice related to conservation land management and improved economic viability of farm and rural businesses, Futurescapes have interesting case studies to offer.

## Working with water companies to improve water quality

The RSPB has been working hand in hand with the water industry to help prove that it is worth paying farmers to manage their land at a catchment scale to improve raw water quality.

Leading the field is the north-west of England's private water company, United Utilities (UU), through the development of the Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (ScaMP). Working in partnership with the RSPB, advice has been provided to farmers and contractors to secure land management improvements that not only increase raw water quality, but improve habitat quality and connectivity across key Natura 2000 sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

The scheme proved so successful that it has been rolled out across the north-west, covering large parts of three northern Futurescapes. The best practice hasn't stopped there, with UU sharing advice with Northern Ireland Water, who are working with the RSPB to develop their own catchment management plan across the Lough Neagh Futurescape.

By investing in better land management, the water companies can improve farm infrastructure and farm incomes, and save themselves significant infrastructure improvement costs to water treatment plants.



Sensitive land management can help improve water quality.

## A new approach to bio-energy

We're working with partners in both the Cairngorms and Humberhead Levels Futurescape to trial innovative ways of turning rushes, reeds and other woody cuttings into bio-energy.

Cutting and disposing of rushes is a major task at many RSPB reserves and many farmers who are restoring wetlands within the Natura 2000 network are faced with the same challenge. We aim to develop the technology to convert cut rushes and other wetland vegetation into useful products such as woodchip and reed briquettes. Briquettes can be used on fires and woodburners, and woodchip is used in boilers. Providing materials to develop these products is securing new income streams for farmers and reserves.

## Farms for nature

The RSPB's farm advisors are working across the landscape to help farmers manage their land for nature conservation, connecting habitats across the Bowland Fells Natura 2000 site. Farmers have seized the opportunity to gain additional income by offering nature-rich visitor experiences and products.

Cobble Hey Farm is managed for wildlife as well as livestock and is an award-winning visitor attraction. Converted farm buildings house a café, shop and education centre, and wildlife-rich gardens, a nature trail and a hide allow visitors to connect with nature around the farm.

# Engaging children and communities

Landscapes are hugely varied, but there is one aspect that almost all have in common, and that is people. So if conservation is going to work, people must be involved – especially children, who will be tasked with looking after these landscapes in future. The three projects highlighted here show how it is possible to enthuse and inspire children about nature, and give them pride in where they live and a desire to protect it in the future.

## Bringing Hollywood to the Inner Forth

The Inner Forth Futurescape team took the view that the best way to get children excited about nature was to make them into Hollywood stars!

The Inner Forth film project involved students from two schools exploring the Futurescape, filming everything they found and creating an animation about the wildlife of the landscape. Of course, with this being a Hollywood experience, the project couldn't end without a fancy premier so a popcorn cart and red carpet were hired, pupils were asked to dress up and VIPs from our partners were invited, creating a fantastic evening to celebrate the pupils' achievements. The full films can be found at [vimeo.com/100884731](https://vimeo.com/100884731)



Schoolchildren exploring the Inner Forth Futurescape.



Children preparing to release elvers.

## Skydancer wins Lottery award

Hen harriers are becoming increasingly rare in England, and only four pairs bred in 2014, despite the fact that there is enough suitable habitat for more than 300. Our Bowland Futurescapes project is trying to change this.

We're working with schools as part of our Skydancer project to help primary and secondary school pupils learn about and understand this beautiful species through interactive workshops. The workshops for primary schoolchildren focus on introducing the hen harrier and its moorland habitat, while the secondary school pupils delve into the issue of moorland management and the conflicts that can occur.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and United Utilities, this project has been so successful that it recently won the 2014 National Lottery Award for Best Education Project – a simply fantastic achievement for the team.

## Getting up close to eels

If you were casting for a big Hollywood blockbuster, eels might not be your first choice for the lead role. But, as schools in the Dearne Valley found out, these amazing creatures have real star potential.

As part of the Eels in Schools project, five schools from around the Dearne Valley looked after a tank of young eels (known as elvers) for ten weeks, allowing them to get up close to these fantastic creatures and learn all about their astonishing life cycle. The pupils then released the elvers into the wetlands around the Dearne Valley where they will spend at least the next 15 years before migrating back across the Atlantic Ocean to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.

The number of European eels in the UK has declined sharply and this project allowed the schoolchildren to play an active part in their recovery.

# The future of landscape-scale conservation

Creating new ways of working together to deliver more in our landscapes.

We are now poised for the next phase of delivery, where we aim to fully implement the Lawton principles of creating bigger, better sites that are connected for nature and people, to restore and enhance our future landscapes.

As part of the Bristol European Green Capital 2015 programme, we are working together with The Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust to bring together one of the largest gatherings of landscape-scale conservation professionals.

Taking place over two days, The Future of Landscape-Scale Conservation in Europe workshop, part of the Bristol 2015 Nature and Wellbeing summit, aims to identify clear ways of working together to deliver more in our landscapes.

## Thank you!

Our LIFE+ Futurescapes Programme could not have happened without the dedication and enthusiasm of many of our staff, volunteers and partners. We would like to extend a massive thank you to all of those people who have been involved.

**Right: A few of the LIFE+ Futurescapes team members in York.**



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Natura 2000 – Europe's nature for you. We are working together across the EU to safeguard Europe's rich and diverse natural heritage for the benefit of all



The RSPB is part of BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world



giving  
nature  
a home



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