



giving
nature
a home

A new future for nature

Our vision for a
Westminster Environment Bill



“Nature is faring worse in the UK than most other countries: on the Biodiversity Intactness Index (an assessment of how damaged nature is across the world), the UK was ranked 189 out of 218 countries.”
State of Nature report, 2016.

We need to act now for nature

Our natural world is in crisis. We are in the Earth’s sixth mass extinction event¹ as our climate changes and species and habitats continue to decline. We are pushing wildlife populations to the brink, with global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles declining, on average, by 60% between 1970 and 2014².

In the UK, the situation is little better with 56% of species monitored across the UK between 1970 and 2013 in decline, and one in 10 at risk of extinction³. Current trajectories mean that we will hand on a poorer and more degraded natural world to future generations, causing continued harm to our health and wellbeing and undermining the potential for a sustainable economy.

We need pollinators and fertile soil to grow our crops, fresh water to drink and clean air to breathe. We need ecosystems to capture and store carbon and help us contain and adapt to climate change. We must act now to address the ecological catastrophe faced by our country and our world.

We need bold new ambition for nature

The UK Government has promised a “world-leading law for a greener future⁴” through the publication of an Environment Bill. As global leaders meet in China next year for a vital Nature Summit, this Bill is an opportunity for the UK Government to present their plan for nature’s recovery. But to lead the world, it must be bold, innovative and ambitious. In the next few pages, we outline what this Bill must do to ensure we can pass on a healthier and more vibrant environment to the next generation. The Bill must ensure that everyone can access and connect to nature in the places they live, work and learn – no matter where in the country they are.

As the environment is a devolved policy issue, all four governments across the UK will need to address these challenges in each of their countries. However, as our environment knows no borders, it is vital that the four nations of the UK work together.

A thriving, healthy natural world, brimming with life is vital to us all. Let’s grab this opportunity with both hands and make it happen.

Together, we can let nature sing.

¹Ceballos et al, 2017. ‘Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signalled by vertebrate population losses and declines.’ Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

²www.panda.org/knowledge_hub/all_publications/living_planet_report_2018/

³rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf

⁴<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-environment-principle-and-governance-bill-2018-environment-bill-policy-paper>



An Environment Bill with...

...a legal obligation on this and future governments to take action for nature's recovery, underpinned by statutory targets.

Currently, much of our nature legislation is focused on protecting a sample of remaining wildlife-rich habitats and safeguarding some of our most threatened species. This is vital, but not enough to turn around the crisis facing the natural world.

By placing an obligation on this and future governments to act for nature's recovery, we can begin to turn things around. Underpinning this obligation must be statutory targets to protect and restore natural habitats and ensure the recovery of our wild plant and animal populations, making sure that everyone has access to nature and green space. These targets should sit alongside others to secure environmental restoration including for water, air and soil, whilst ensuring we can achieve our climate goals.

No one has been held accountable for our failure to address the nature crisis, despite the UK's obligations under international law and its ambitions to be an environmental leader on the global stage. **This must change.**

If we believe that nature matters to our own and future generations, the Environment Bill must set high level goals for nature's recovery in law.

A close-up photograph of a small bird, possibly a warbler, perched on a thin, light-colored branch. The bird has brown upperparts and a white underbelly. Its beak is wide open, showing a bright yellow interior. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting foliage. Several faint, light green paperclip icons are scattered in the upper left area of the image.

An Environment Bill with...

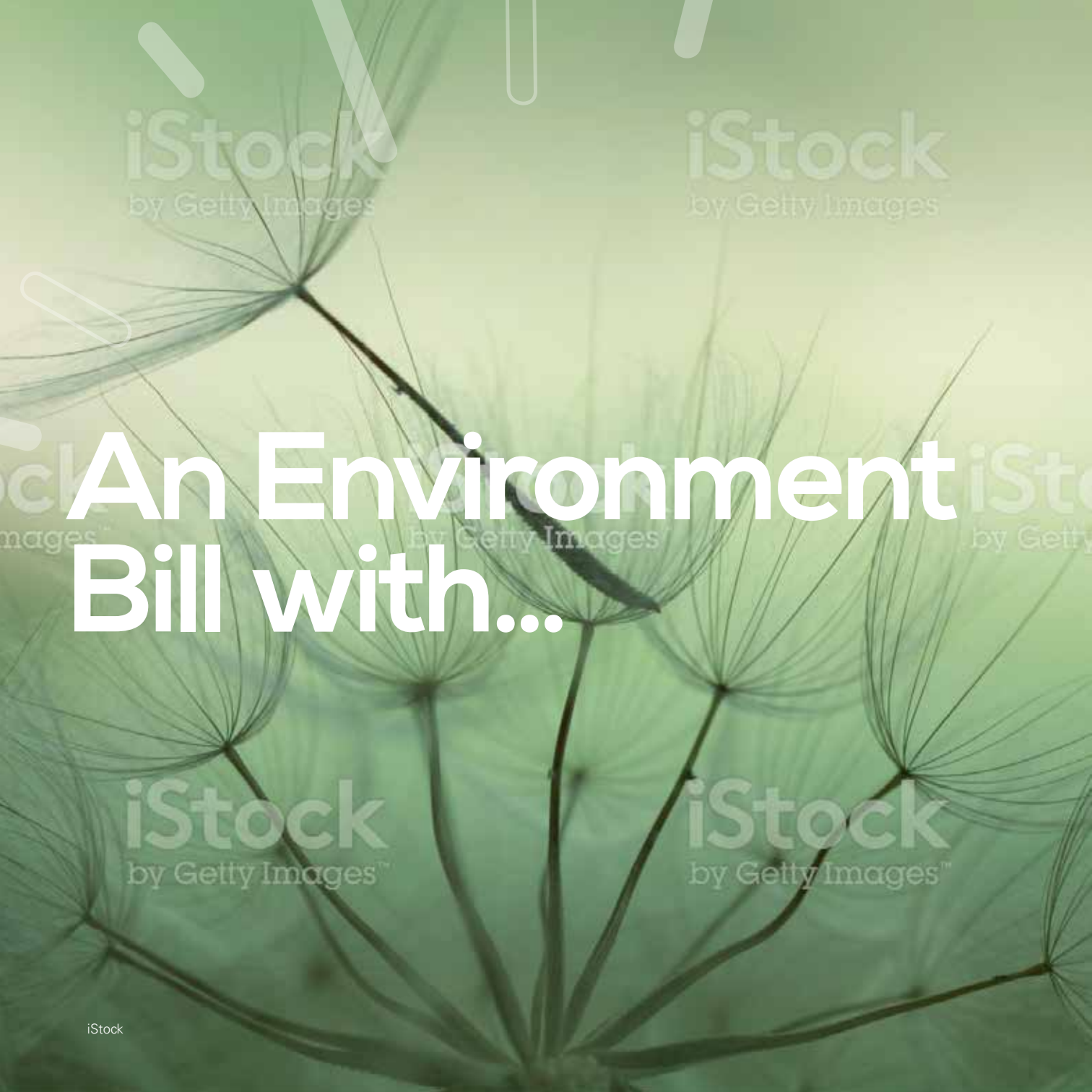
...a robust, independent watchdog to uphold the law and stand up for our environment.

Our environmental laws are only as effective as the bodies that enforce them. Currently, our membership of the EU provides the ultimate enforcement and accountability for much of our environment legislation, through the European Commission and the European Court of Justice.

Without replacing the role these bodies play in enforcing environmental law when we leave the EU, we risk diminishing the effectiveness of that law.

To ensure accountability for the recovery of nature and the environment, the Bill must set up a new watchdog that:

- Is fully independent, reporting to Parliament, with a secure, multi-annual budget.
- Has powers to monitor and advise on the interpretation and implementation of environmental law.
- Has powers to investigate possible breaches of the law including through an accessible and free citizens' complaints process.
- Upholds compliance with environmental law by, if necessary, appropriate and effective recourse and remedies, that not only truly act as a deterrent but ensures environmental damage can be rectified.



An Environment Bill with...

...world-leading environmental principles enshrined in law.

Currently, our environmental legislation is underpinned by important overarching environmental principles found in the EU Treaties. They include principles such as the polluter pays and the precautionary principle.

They are an essential component of our environmental law and policy, helping to give it shape and direction including in helping direct decision makers, including the courts, to determine how the law should be interpreted.

The Environment Bill must secure these important principles on the face of the Bill, with a strong duty on all public bodies to apply these principles.



An Environment Bill with...

...a nature recovery network, to provide bigger, better, more joined up natural habitats for wildlife to flourish.

These habitats will provide the homes nature needs, whilst also locking up and storing carbon, purifying our air and water, and helping protect people and property from floods, as well as connecting communities with nature and green spaces.

Mapping and delivering a nature recovery network will enable better targeted investment of public and private funds and allow local people to have a say in shaping the places where they live; creating new green spaces around housing developments for example, or planting new woodlands for future generations to enjoy.

The Environment Bill should enable the delivery of a nature recovery network, helping to reconnect communities with their green spaces by:

- Requiring the development of statutory guidance on the creation and implementation of nature recovery maps and plans.
- Ensuring nominated public authorities bring together relevant stakeholders including local communities to create and maintain the maps as well as to prepare and deliver plans to achieve the network.
- Ensuring land use policies and decisions, including around planning and development, help deliver the nature recovery maps and plans.



An Environment Bill with...

...commitments to reduce our global environmental footprint and restore nature overseas.

It is vital that the actions we take in the UK do not result in environmental damage overseas. Our natural world is in crisis globally and the impacts of our actions extend beyond our shores, particularly when we consider our consumption of products such as food, timber and clothing.

Taking steps to reduce our global environmental footprint should help enhance sustainability and resilience across the public and private sectors, as well as helping the UK Government move towards its goal of ending deforestation in commodity supply chains.

The Environment Bill must include high level objectives to reduce our global environmental footprint and ensure that opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity are taken where possible.

Furthermore, the Bill should include a Due Diligence duty, requiring all private actors to monitor and report on the environmental impact of their operations and supply chains, as well as considering steps that they could take to reduce these impacts.

A close-up photograph of a child's hands, wearing a bright green long-sleeved shirt, holding several brown acorns. The background is a blurred natural setting. The text 'An Environment Bill that is...' is overlaid in large white font on the left side of the image.

An Environment Bill that is...

...fit for purpose.

Our environment is facing huge challenges and it is time to act. We are not ready to live in a silent world, where the clatter of insects and the music of bird song vanish from larger and larger areas; and where our children grow up never having seen a hedgehog, a tree sparrow or a bluebell.

We can turn it around. Where farmers, fishers, foresters, gardeners, town planners, house builders, birdwatchers and botanists have worked together, nature has bounced back. Look at the amazing stories of the bittern and the red kite, which have come back from the brink thanks to our determined efforts.

We want wildlife back in our lives, in our fields, our streets, our gardens and parks. With strong and visionary leadership from our politicians to create an ambitious new law, we can finally secure the policies we need to make a difference.



LET NATURE SING

Find out more

For more information about how you can help give nature a voice and secure a more vibrant and sustainable future, contact:

Sarah Whitebread

Head of External Affairs

Email: sarah.whitebread@rspb.org.uk

Tel: 01767 693185

Ali Plummer

Senior Policy Officer

Email: ali.plummer@rspb.org.uk

Tel: 01767 693214

Find out more about how we are letting nature sing at
rspb.org.uk/letnaturesingMP

Front cover image: Stanislav Kondratiev. Back cover image:
the RSPB (rspb-images.com). The RSPB is a registered charity in
England and Wales 207076, in Scotland SC03765 332-0601-18-19