



Painted lady *Vanessa cardui* © Hunter Herbert

CONCLUSION

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Editing this report has been a bittersweet experience. Since the last report of this type in 2011, there is much to celebrate in the fortunes of wildlife of Kent, and in the achievements of the dedicated individuals and organisations whose mission it is to protect it. The overwhelming message from within these pages is clear though; in spite of significant efforts, we haven't done enough. Furthermore, Kent's nature continues to be subject to an increasing barrage of coinciding threats. Significant collective action at scale is required if we are to reverse declines and restore a thriving natural environment for wildlife and people. There is hope, however, if we can learn from and extend the influence of many inspiring local initiatives, highlight best practice, capitalise on opportunities, and build a stronger evidence base. Through pages of the report the actions we need to take are highlighted by experts at the forefront of the challenges ahead. This report aims to galvanize the collective response required around those actions.

Of 3,684 species in Kent that have had their UK threat status assessed, 372 (10%) are classified as threatened with extinction from Great Britain. Over the last 10 years, Heath Fritillary has shown a marked increase, but we are losing the Grayling. We have gained Black-winged Stilt, Cattle Egret and Red Kite as breeding species, but have lost Snipe and Redstart. Not enough land is in conservation management. Our species and habitats are threatened by climate and land use change, pollution, development, fragmentation, unsympathetic management, inadequate policy, under resourcing and lack of data. Our summers are getting hotter and drier, our winters warmer and wetter, and sea levels are rising. Invasive species such as Ash Die Back and Pacific Oyster have taken hold. Our nocturnal wildlife is increasingly disturbed by light pollution, and our pets and recreational activities are significantly impacting the wildlife around us. Our water is polluted with nitrates and phosphorus and our air does not meet recommended standards. The pace and scale of development is visible all around us, and is unfolding in real time. The picture that unfolds throughout the pages of this report is stark to say the least. The pressures on nature in Kent have been examined in detail, the status of nature as a consequence is reported, and the action taken to drive nature's recovery is highlighted. There is no doubt that in many places the picture painted in this report is bleak, however, it also demonstrates that when conservationists, government, business and individuals work in partnership, landscapes can be

restored and threatened species can be saved. To be effective, we must know where we have been, where we are now, and where we want to go. This report builds the evidence base needed to inform, and is intended to act as a driver for continued, enhanced and ambitious conservation action, commensurate with the scale of the pressures faced by nature in Kent. Not discounting the significant and inspiring wins that have been made, we still need to do more.

What needs to happen now?

Kent's nature is vital for a healthy, happy society. It improves our health, wellbeing and education; it reduces pollution and flooding, and supports adaptation to climate change in towns and in the countryside. The variety of benefits provided by nature to wildlife and people are numerous but not always as well understood or recognised as they should be. We still need to achieve greater acknowledgement of their importance among decision-makers, landowners and businesses. In addition to wildlife and cultural values, Kent's nature locks up carbon, further contributing to climate change mitigation. It needs to be recognised as a huge carbon store with great potential to lock up more carbon in future. We need to further develop our understanding and recognition of the importance of soils and fungi too.

We must continue to protect Kent's special places, ensuring that the best examples are resilient and can provide a kick-start to nature's recovery. Every effort needs to be made to ensure no further loss or deterioration of key habitats, and to buffer them. To do this we will need to continue to rigorously implement protections provided through planning and policy and facilitate improved direction and guidance for the county's planners, developers and local politicians, as well as keeping up the pressure on industries that facilitate the spread of invasive and non-native species, pests and diseases, and pollute the environment.

We must continue to deliver more and bigger landscape-scale projects, to join-up fragmented habitats, and secure more land in conservation management. The urgency of the need to scale-up our efforts in the deployment of the conservation tools at our disposal cannot be underestimated, and this report emphasises four key areas for collective action: evidence, collaboration, investment and engagement.

Evidence

We need to ensure we have fit-for-purpose monitoring, evidence and scientific rigor in all that we do, if we are to measure our progress and maximise our impact. Evidence use must be routine practice in decision-making. Too often monitoring is an afterthought, or sometimes not considered at all. Far too often this report has shown that a lack of evidence has hindered our ability to report on changes over the last ten years. Evidence must be front and centre of strategies to restore Kent's nature and resourced appropriately. This means thorough baseline data collection to enable more accurate identification of gains and losses. We need to ensure important wildlife sites are regularly assessed. Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of management interventions is vital to. Management planning is only useful if progress and effectiveness against clear objectives is monitored and data used for active adaptive management. We need to fill the gaps in data, including basic recording of all conservation action in the county and our collective impact at landscape-scale, the pre-BNG baseline and urban expansion, and we must further develop and resource monitoring that is aligned with Key Performance Indicators for the ambitious targets set in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and for the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent.

Collaboration

Many of the challenges and issues that must be addressed can't be tackled at single organisation or site-scales. We need to increasingly work together by default to deliver real progress, and to share knowledge and information on how best to collaboratively respond to environmental change. We need to continue to work with groups already familiar to us, such as developers, farmers, planners, local and national government. Farmland presents a huge opportunity to increase space for nature, and we must continue to challenge our assumptions and continue to develop the best mechanisms for engaging and collaborating with farmers and land managers to maximise the opportunities presented by the regenerative agriculture movement, the three new environmental land management schemes and other evolving nature-based solutions funding streams. We also need to be innovative in our pursuit of collective action, engaging with new and diverse audiences to realise the impact necessary for nature's recovery.

Investment

We must secure greater investment in nature's recovery. Significant resources will be required to rise to the magnitude of the challenges and opportunities ahead. We need to innovate, diversify income streams and develop new models of sustainable financing. In light of the many public benefits that can be realised, public money, in combination with innovative new and private finance opportunities, are vital for

investment in the future. Conservation professionals, land managers, local authorities, regulators, and others creating and managing space for nature and public benefits, must all have sufficient resources if we are to see an uplift in action commensurate with the challenges. By collaborating more often and more effectively, we can reduce competition for resources among our community and use evidence to direct investment for the greatest potential impact.

The Government's flagship Environment Act 2021 proposes the development of a Nature Recovery Network of land and sea managed for nature, the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the establishment of a mandatory minimum 10% biodiversity net gain from development. We must continue to invest in the work already begun to implement these new approaches, and also advocate for stronger measures, including binding interim targets for nature's recovery and effective enforcement systems. Proposed planning reforms have the potential to significantly impact environmental recovery, and we need to ensure they integrate wildlife, access to nature, and community engagement into every level of the planning system.

Engagement

We need to make our countryside even more accessible, to promote its health and wellbeing benefits, and a long-term, meaningful connection with nature that will inspire all to protect and respect it. We need to do more to promote learning and understanding of nature at all levels and ages, from pre-school to lifelong learners, and for communities and professionals such as land-use planners, developers and educators. We need to continue to engage people with their local green spaces for the purposes of both active conservation and recreation. Whether a decision-maker, local politician, developer, planner, land manager, farmer, park manager, 'friends of' group, conservation organisation, amateur naturalist, volunteer, someone with an interest in our natural world or simply anyone who lives or works in Kent, this report is relevant to all. We need to encourage and empower everyone to help deliver nature's recovery, and foster recognition that all – individuals, landowners and decision-makers – share responsibility to act.

There is no time to lose. The next 10 years are crucial in tackling the climate and nature crises, and 'The State of Nature in Kent 2021' provides clear evidence that there is an urgent need for immediate and increased action across all parts and sectors of the county. It provides a robust basis for the advocacy and funding that will be necessary to achieve our goals. We must work with nature to create, protect, and restore a sustainable future for wildlife to benefit us all. This will require all those whose lives are touched by nature to contribute

to acting on the evidence, including the creation of new partnerships and renewed vigour around those already established. We need innovation for change that will inspire people, drive public investment, attract new sources of funding, create fit-for-purpose policies and target action to where it can be most effective. For nature to recover, not only must the existing drivers of change be tackled, but we must also address future challenges as they emerge and interact. We want this report to act as a catalyst to inspire and guide positive action for nature. We know what we must do, and we must do it faster, bigger and better than ever before.



Key recommendations

1. Agree a plan to address the gaps in evidence and analysis highlighted by this report, and commit funding to support their creation.
2. Continue to invest in the work already begun to implement the Government's flagship Environment Act 2021 and advocate for stronger measures and the integration of wildlife and people in planning policy.
3. Collectively prioritise actions and co-design the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent with all stakeholders at the table.
4. Develop Key Performance Indicators to assess the state of nature and progress towards Kent Biodiversity Strategy objectives, and embed conservation evidence practice in the upcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Kent.
5. Encourage and empower everyone in Kent to help deliver nature's recovery, and foster recognition that all – individuals, landowners and decision-makers – share responsibility to act.
6. Inclusively and equally inspire and engage all people and communities with the natural world for the purposes of conservation and wellbeing.
7. Increase collaboration between organisations, individuals and influencers to deliver nature's recovery.
8. Secure and enhance the investment needed, ensuring sustainable financing models are adopted wherever possible.
9. Maximise impacts by targeting investment, working with nature and using evidence to inform and deliver nature recovery programmes for maximum effect.
10. Innovate and scale-up action to ensure we rise to the challenges and opportunities ahead, and deliver at a pace commensurate with the threats and risks we face.



European Bison in Kent
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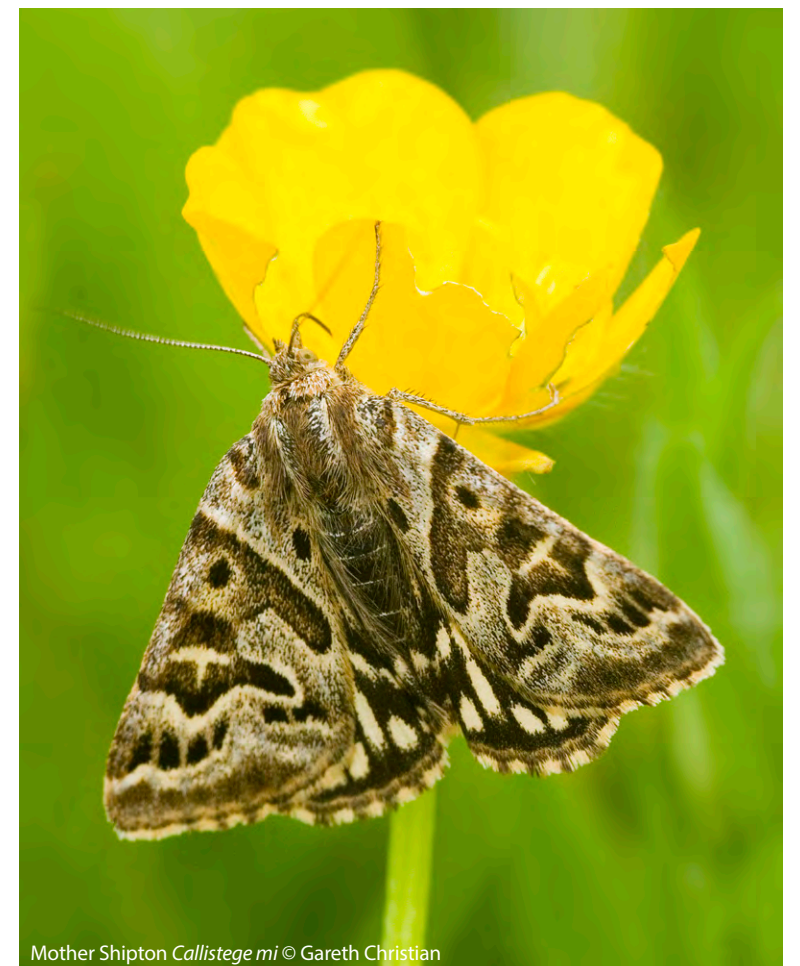
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Mother Shipton *Callistege mi* © Gareth Christian