



Photo credit: Pete Holmes

Wildlife and
Countryside

LINK



2015 Annual Review

Our vision

Wildlife and Countryside Link is a unique coalition of 45 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Since 1980, we have been achieving our charitable objective of 'promoting the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside for the benefit of the public', through facilitating collaboration between voluntary organisations in the UK.

Our vision is to secure and shape a healthy, enhanced and accessible natural world.

Our ambition for Link is clear - to work with members to be a powerful, credible and effective voice for the natural environment, delivering influence and impact, while enhancing our delivery of clear added value to our members' work.

Our natural systems are under increasing pressures and it has never been more important for all those who care about them to work effectively together. Following the result of the EU Referendum, we must ensure - now more than ever - that the environment is at the heart of policy and decision making during negotiations about our future. We truly believe we can achieve far more collectively, and Link's impact demonstrates the value of working in partnership.

Dr Hazel Norman, Chair, Wildlife and Countryside Link





OUR STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES

In 2015, Link began to implement its ambitious five-year strategy, which recognises the need to adapt and evolve in response to a changing political and financial environment.

Link is working to four strategic objectives:

 <p>Increase and focus Link's influence and impact</p>	 <p>Strengthen our network of relationships and communications</p>	 <p>Increase members' capacity and consolidate our membership</p>	 <p>Grow our capability and establish our financial resilience</p>
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In delivering our strategic objectives, Link's value to members is two-fold: delivering the leadership to support our members to have impact and influence at the highest level, while simultaneously providing a professional, highly skilled collaborative service to guide and support policy at the highest level.

Throughout 2015, we began to build and strengthen what is already good at Link, increasing our capacity and competence, and therefore enhancing our engagement, influence and impact with Government, while delivering even more added value for members. We are also working to diversify our sources of income. Our approach is to ensure that Link is financially sustainable in the long term, while maintaining our members at the heart of what we do and how we do it.



OUR IMPACT

In 2015 Link continued to present collective messages to those who have the capacity to bring about change - both in Government, and elsewhere. We supported and facilitated collaborative working across Link's member organisations on a wide range of issues.

Our groups: [Agriculture](#); [Animal Welfare](#); [Invasive Non-Native Species](#); [Habitats and Birds](#); [Land Use Planning](#); [Legal Strategy](#); [Marine](#); [Blueprint for Water](#); [Whales](#); [Wildlife Trade](#); and [the 25 Year Plan for Nature](#).



Link held meetings with Ministers, MPs, civil servants, Commissioners, embassies and Ambassadors on a number of key issues throughout the year. We also met with numerous key bodies such as: water companies, Natural England, the Environment Agency, the UK's Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission, the National Wildlife Crime Unit and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Throughout this work, Link has strengthened the voice of the sector, increasing the impact for our members by gaining support from a wide range of organisations and engaging further with key stakeholders.

Similarly, Link's Director worked to advocate key messages through raising the profile of Link and its members, and creating opportunities for them, by attending external meetings and workshops with Ministers, Government officials and funders. Link's Director also continued to liaise with chief executives and policy directors of Link member organisations, providing an opportunity to share information and discuss Link's new strategy.

TWO OF OUR KEY CAMPAIGNS

Farming Fit for the Future and Water Matters

Link launched two key reports in September 2015: [Water Matters](#) and [Farming Fit for the Future](#). These publications set out an exciting vision for a future in which the natural environment underpins healthy farmland, rivers, lakes and wetlands in England. The reports call on the Government, businesses and wider society to do more to achieve this and stress the willingness of Link and its members to work in partnership.

The Parliamentary launch of the two publications, and a series of compelling case studies, brought together more than one hundred different stakeholders including farmers, water companies, MPs and voluntary organisations. The event and the publications generated a great deal of positive interest, enabling Link and its members to continue dialogue with Government and other interested parties to take forward our recommendations and shape a better environment.



Photo credits: Nic Trott, Terry Rook, Northeast Wildlife



100 NGOs Unite to Defend Nature

Our collaborative work with our sister Links across the UK ([Environment Links UK](#)) was also successful in advocating for the protection of Europe's natural environment. In May 2015, 100 voluntary organisations across the UK, coordinated by Link with and on behalf of our sister Links, published a position statement warning that the European Commission's [REFIT 'Fitness Check'](#) of the Birds and Habitats Directives could be the single biggest threat to UK and European nature and biodiversity in a generation.

Throughout the campaign, Link members called on MEPs and MPs to defend the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, which provide vital protection for habitats and species. A public consultation from the European Commission was undertaken during the summer of 2015, which saw the unprecedented participation of 520,325 people, making it the largest ever response to an EU public consultation.

With the support of the Environment Links UK network, over 100,000 signatories were from people across the UK, demonstrating their high regard for the contribution made by the Directives and their application in safeguarding nature.

Following the work from Link and its members, at a key meeting on 16 December 2015 the UK Environment Minister Rory Stewart spoke up in support of the Directives, stating that;

'The UK like many other Member States... does not wish to renegotiate the Directives'

Following the EU Referendum, there has never been a more pressing time for Link to help coordinate the work of our members to ensure that Government and other key decision makers hear a clear unified voice articulating the need for the best possible measures to protect our shared environment.



COMMUNICATIONS

Improving our Communications

A key element of Link’s strategy is to improve communications across all of our work. In this way, we can maximise our collective impact and influence on Government policy, while also delivering tangible benefits for both our members and stakeholders across the environment sector as a whole. Since April 2015, Link’s Communications Manager has worked with member organisations to increase our shared impact and influence. This has included setting up teams of communications colleagues from across member organisations to ensure the smooth and effective management of communications activity throughout our campaigns. This approach resulted in excellent media coverage as we launched our reports on agriculture and water.

Link has also created a new, visually appealing and accessible [website](#), with a strong campaigning voice. Launched in December 2015, it has enabled members, and other organisations, to engage further with others to promote their ideas, through blogs which have become very popular. One of the first blogs published raised concerns over the [future of the National Wildlife Crime Unit](#). The blog initiated significant media attention, with Link and a number of member organisations quoted in the national media. Soon after this, the Government announced that the Unit would receive four years further funding.



Photo credits: Northeast Wildlife, Graham Canny



WHAT'S NEXT?

Link's Strategy 2015-19 sets an ambitious but deliverable vision and direction for the organisation. Developed in response to members' views, the strategy is already delivering tangible benefits for our members, in large part recognising the need to adapt to an ever-changing environment. In so doing, Link is continuing to provide a powerful and credible collective voice for the natural environment, delivering value for members and securing our future financial resilience.

Looking ahead, we will work with members as the country prepares to exit the EU, emphasising the need to maintain and improve protection for the environment. There is the prospect of far reaching change in many policy areas of close interest to Link, in particular agriculture, marine conservation, and wildlife protection.

While there may be challenges, Link is well placed to address them. Working in coalition with our member organisations, we are able to draw on their huge expertise in delivering high quality information and analysis to Government and its agencies.

We also recognise that we need to do even better and we look forward to creating space with members and others, to shape innovative and strategic thinking, in order to build even stronger collaborations to benefit people and the natural environment over the coming years.



Photo credits: John Bridges, Paul Naylor and Rod d'Ayala.



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**For further information, view Link's full
2015 Annual Report**

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