



NATURE MATTERS

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cover photograph:
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GETTING IN TOUCH

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Nature Matters is a periodic e-magazine set up to inform its readership about wildlife and environmental issues.

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FOREWORD

Welcome to this Spring issue of Nature Matters.

It's always difficult to decide which articles to leave out in each issue but I try to bring readers a varied range of information that doesn't usually find its way into your inboxes together.

I like to include some topical articles and this issue's Tailpiece is a fitting and richly deserved tribute to Sir David Attenborough on his 100th birthday.

I hope you enjoy it.

Mike

EDITOR

Our Gardens

What is glyphosate and why is it a problem?

Glyphosate is a broad-spectrum, systemic herbicide used to control weeds. It is the most widely-used herbicide in the world and is used in public spaces in most villages, towns and cities of the UK. It is classified as a Highly Hazardous Pesticide (HHP) due to its potential harmful impact on human health.

In March 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC, part of the UN World Health Organisation) declared glyphosate to be genotoxic (it causes DNA damage), carcinogenic to animals, and a “probable carcinogen” to humans. This ruling was based on a review of one thousand publicly available scientific studies by independent experts. Meanwhile, since 2018, there have been a spate of US court cases linking Monsanto’s Roundup – which contains glyphosate as its key ingredient – to the potential risk of developing non-Hodgkin lymphoma (a type of cancer). It is worth noting that many of these cases were linked to non-agricultural activities such as grounds maintenance and landscape gardening. Landmark legal defeats for Monsanto (now Bayer) have resulted in jury verdicts worth billions.

There is an ever-growing body of evidence linking glyphosate to both environmental and human health harms. In June 2025, the most comprehensive study ever conducted on glyphosate was published. The Global Glyphosate Study concluded that glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides cause multiple types of cancer, even at exposure levels deemed to be “safe” by governments, including the EU.

Our Gardens

'No Mow May' continues to grow

BBC

More gardeners than ever are turning over parts of their lawns to nature, according to campaigners.

The annual 'No Mow May' initiative encourages gardeners to reduce grass cutting and allow wild flowers and grasses to bloom.

According to a recent survey by the Salisbury-based charity Plantlife, 32% of those who took part in 2025 were doing so for the first time, with more expected to join this year.

The campaign, now in its eighth year, is in response to the loss of 97% of grassland meadows in the UK since the 1930's.

Our Gardens

Advice from the RSPB on feeding our garden birds has changed:

- 1) Feed seasonally
- 2) Feed safely

We all want to help birds and make our gardens or outdoor spaces a place where all wildlife can thrive. But some species, such as Greenfinches, are experiencing serious declines because of disease.

The good news is that we can help reduce the spread of disease by making two simple changes to the way we feed our birds.

Research has shown a worrying decline in some of our much-loved garden birds due to a disease called trichomonosis. This is a highly contagious disease and can spread where birds gather in large numbers such as at bird feeders.

Greenfinches, for example, have dropped by over 65% in the last three decades – and you may have seen this decline yourself. Back when the Big Garden Birdwatch started in 1979 Greenfinches were at number seven in the top ten birds seen. This year they were down to number 18.

We can help stop the spread of disease among garden birds by making two simple shifts to how we feed birds. Put simply: Feed seasonally. Feed safely.

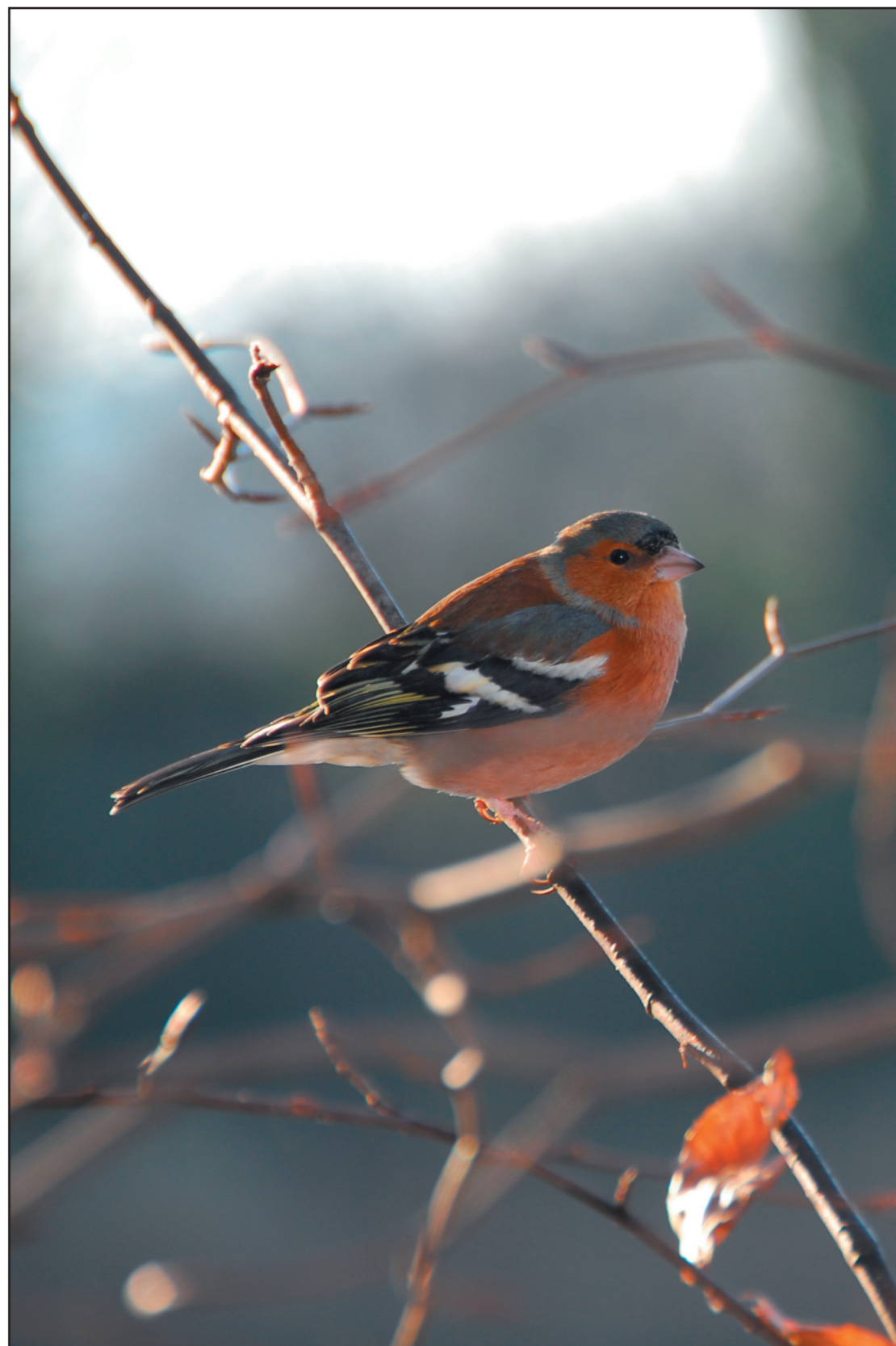
1. Feed seasonally

During summer and autumn, there's a higher risk of disease spreading. But it's also when there are more natural foods available to birds, such as seeds and insects.

1 May to 31 October

Pause filling your bird feeders with seeds or peanuts.

You can continue to offer small amounts of mealworms,



photograph: © Mike Armitage

fatballs or suet.

1 November to 30 April

You can feed your birds a full range of bird foods, including seeds and peanuts.

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The good news is that we can help reduce the spread of disease by making two simple changes to the way we feed our birds.

How to help your garden birds

Watch this short animation to understand how you can best help garden birds.

What's the problem?

Research has shown a worrying decline in some of our much-loved garden birds due to a disease called trichomonosis. This is a highly contagious disease and can spread where birds gather in large numbers such as at bird feeders.

Greenfinches, for example, have dropped by over 65% in the last three decades – and you may have seen this decline yourself. Back when the Big Garden Birdwatch started in 1979 Greenfinches were at number seven in the top ten birds seen. This year they were down to number 18.

We've been working with experts to find a solution, and we believe that, together, we can make a difference by feeding birds seasonally and safely.

How you can help

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Song Thrush feeding on worms

Song Thrush

2. Feed safely

Busy bird feeders can become hotspots for disease. To help keep birds healthy, it's vital to keep things clean – which is why we've strengthened our existing hygiene guidance. We recommend you:

Clean your bird feeders and water baths at least once a week. Good hygiene is essential. Be sure to also clean away any old food or droppings from beneath feeders.

Place your bird feeders in a different spot every week. This will help to prevent any build-up of potentially contaminated debris underneath. If you have more than one feeder, put them in different areas to reduce the number of birds in one place and the mixing of different species.

Avoid putting feeders under places where birds roost, such as under trees. This will help to avoid contamination through droppings.

Don't use bird feeders with flat surfaces, such as bird tables, window feeders and feeders with trays. Research has confirmed that there's a higher risk of disease spreading on flat surfaces, where contaminated food can collect.

Feed in moderation. Make sure all the food you put out is eaten within one to two days. Adjust the amount you offer based on demand to avoid overfeeding. Keep food as dry as possible. Damp food allows disease to survive and spread. Choose feeders that prevent rain getting in and limit condensation.

Change water in bird baths daily. Only offer water if you're able to change it every day and make sure it's tap water. A pond is the best way to provide birds and other wildlife with water.

Help birds find their own food. One of the best ways to support garden birds in the long-term is to help them find their own food. So fill your outdoor space with bird-friendly plants – such as sunflowers, teasels and ivy. These help provide natural food sources for birds.

Cover Story

Wales welcomes long-awaited Seabird Conservation Strategy

The Welsh Seabird Conservation Strategy is a crucial policy aimed at protecting seabird populations in Wales. Focusing on habitat protection, addressing threats and encouraging collaboration between stakeholders, the strategy aims to ensure the long-time survival of the most important and threatened seabirds.

Seabirds are the most threatened bird group in the world, and a shocking 62% of UK seabird species are in decline.

Wales hosts globally important seabird colonies:

Over half of the global population of breeding Manx Shearwater nest in underground burrows on Welsh islands.

RSPB Grassholm Island, in Pembrokeshire, remains one of the largest Gannet colonies in the world, despite the devastating impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

Wales is also home to the largest Arctic Tern colony in the UK, located on the lower lying Skerries, an islet off the coast of Anglesey.

However, Wales' seabirds are exposed to ever-increasing threats including climate change impacts, poorly sited offshore developments, loss of habitat and non-native predators. To increase their resilience in the face of ever-increasing threats, urgent action is needed.



photograph: © Mike Armitage

That's why RSPB Cymru has been campaigning for a Seabird Conservation Strategy for Wales since 2018.

In summary, our key requirements were:

- Safe places to breed and feed
- Plentiful food
- Reduced adult mortality

The strategy recommendations are based upon the results of hundreds of assessments, looking at the vulnerability of seabirds to pressures in Wales.

This is a live document – with regular review periods planned, so that new evidence can be taken into account.

For some pressures, there is limited evidence on the impact of seabirds in Wales. However, the strategy highlights important research needs.

The strategy does not take into account future threats to seabirds. As such the regular review periods will be essential.

Following a prioritisation exercise, the recommendations do not cover all threats facing seabirds. However, we hope over time, more recommendations will be added as action is taken upon this first set of priorities.

Currently there is no dedicated funding for the strategy. We will continue to call for this, to ensure that the actions can be delivered.

Although the strategy is a step in the right direction, urgent action is still needed to address the overall status of Wales' marine environment, including:

The creation of Marine Protected Areas, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and Marine Conservation Zones, to address gaps in the protections for seabirds and other marine wildlife and habitats, as well as contributing to '30 by 30' (the target to protect 30% of land and 30% of sea for nature by 2030).

An uplift in funding for monitoring and management of marine protected sites, informed by the condition assessments of Welsh Marine Protected Areas and this week's published Welsh Seabird Conservation Strategy.

Marine planning to reduce the threats seabirds face.

Delivering conservation action for seabirds whilst they are at sea is challenging – it's much more effective to prioritise prevention of damage.

Therefore, carefully planning how and where human activities (such as offshore energy developments) take place is vital.

Investment in marine surveys to improve the understanding of seabirds and their prey species, and to inform spatial marine planning and conservation. This investment is long overdue, with gaps in knowledge a frequent barrier to informed decision-making about marine issues.

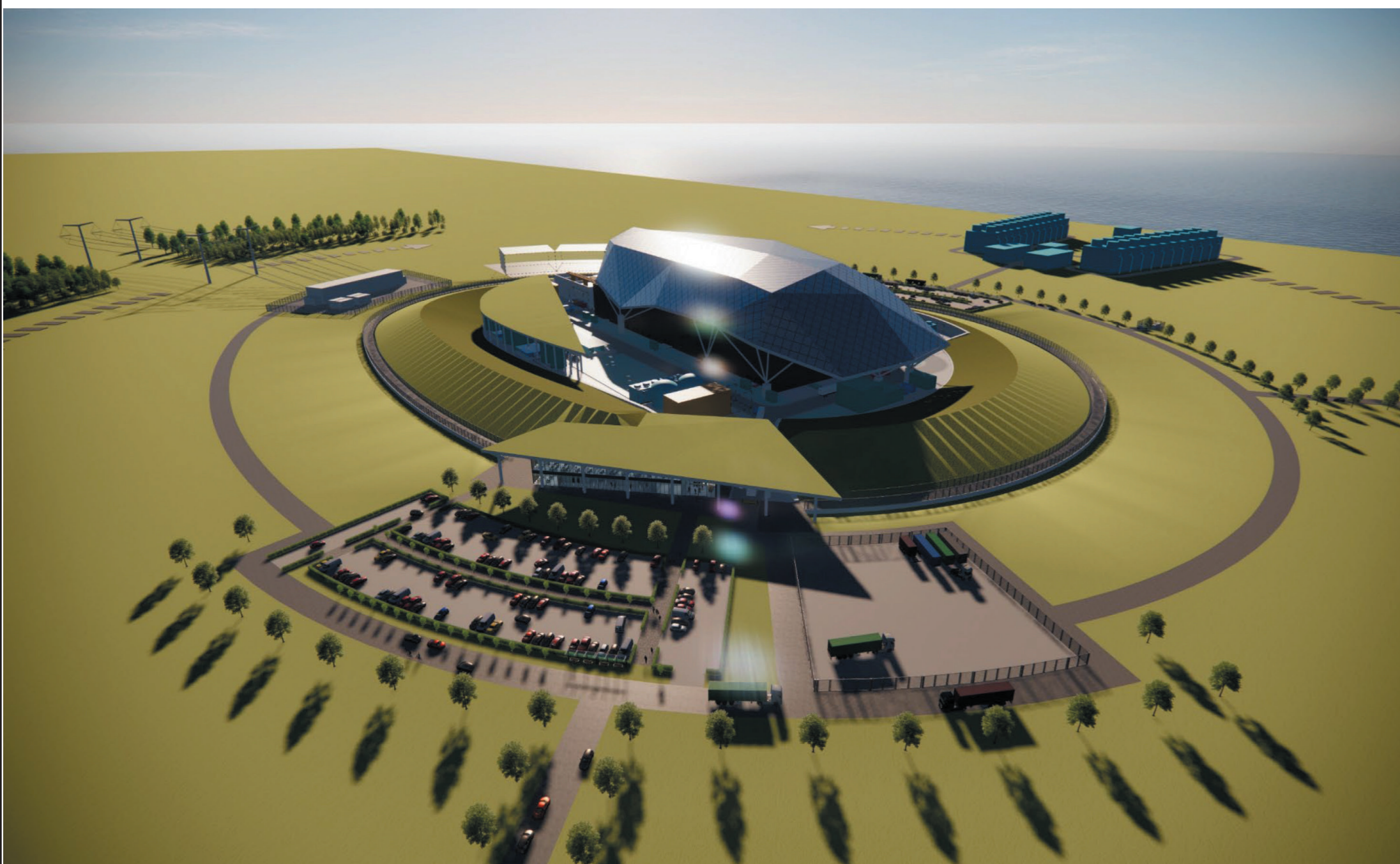
A long-term solution to ensuring the biosecurity of seabird islands, keeping seabird colonies free from invasive mammalian predators. This will allow more chicks to survive to adulthood and help counter declining populations

Introducing Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) for large fishing boats to ensure the impacts of fishing activities on seabirds, their food sources and other sealife are better monitored and understood.

Let's hope this is a positive move towards a future where our seabirds are not only protected but able to thrive.

Nuclear Power

UK's first small nuclear power station planned for North Wales



The plant at Wylfa, on the Welsh island's northern coast, will have the UK's first three small modular reactors (SMR), although the site could potentially hold up to eight.

Work is due to start next year with the aim of generating power by the mid 2030s.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said Britain was once a world leader in nuclear power but "years of neglect and inertia has meant places like Anglesey have been let down and left behind. Today, that changes."

The project, which could power about three million homes, will be built by publicly owned Great British Energy-Nuclear and is backed by a £2.5bn investment from the UK government.

Visiting a further education college in north Wales on Thursday, Sir Keir said the development would bring jobs for "decades to come" and that work would begin "virtually straight away".

Wales' First Minister Eluned Morgan, who said she had been "pressing the case at every opportunity for Wylfa's incredible benefits".

SMRs work similarly to large reactors, using a nuclear reaction to generate heat that produces electricity - but are a fraction of the size, with about a third of the generating output.

Ed Miliband, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, called the announcement "exciting" and said Britain is in the race for new reactors.

Renewables



Wind Power latest

The overall pipeline for Welsh wind projects (operational, under construction, consented, in planning or under development) is currently 12.2GW. This is up from 10.7GW in late 2024.

The onshore wind portfolio potential has increased by 29% in the last year, from 4,592MW in November 2024 to 5,907MW in October 2025.

The largest portfolios for onshore wind remains in Mid and Southeast Wales.

Offshore wind makes up 52% of the Welsh total portfolio, with the largest pipeline of projects in the Celtic Sea. In the Celtic Sea Project Development Areas (PDA) 1 and 2 are both considered in this report as National Grid ESO's design plan launched in August 2024 proposes connecting 3GW of capacity into South Wales.

photograph:
© MIKE ARMITAGE

Renewables

Cornish Geo-thermal Energy

What gives Cornwall its high geothermal potential?

Almost all of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly, and parts of Devon are intruded by a large granite body called the Cornubian Batholith.

This granite outcrops at the surface in multiple locations in Cornwall, however, it is a large, 3-D body with peaks and troughs, so where you cannot see the granite at the surface, it may be meters or even kilometers beneath your feet.

The batholith contains a variety of minerals, some of which are enriched in critical raw materials (CRM) such as Lithium.

Cornish granite also has high concentrations of heat-producing radionuclides such as Potassium (K), Uranium (U), and Thorium (Th). These radionuclides are decaying slowly over a long period of time, halving in number over billions of years. As they decay, they release energy in the form of heat, it is this heat that gives Cornwall its geothermal potential.

UK Curlew Species Action Plan



photograph: © AIDAN SEMMENS (PIXABAY)

The Curlew – wonderfully charismatic, desperately threatened and in need of urgent action if they are to remain part of our landscape. That’s why the launch of the UK Curlew Species Action Plan in the House of Lords is so important.

BTO science has been central to its development, underlined by Professor Ian Newton, and they remain committed to doing all they can to turn the plan into action.

Saving Wales’ Curlew: Renewables partnership gives conservation efforts a vital boost

Over 700 km² of survey data shared to strengthen Wales’ Curlew Recovery Plan.

Renewable energy developers across Wales have stepped in to provide Natural Resources Wales (NRW) with an unprecedented dataset, covering more than 700 km² of land, to help conservation efforts for Wales’ most threatened bird species.

The data, gathered through surveys at 53 proposed wind and solar projects, will now inform NRW’s nationwide wader survey scheduled for 2026 – with a particular focus on the curlew. Curlew numbers are falling by around 6% each year, leaving as few as 400 breeding pairs. Without urgent action, they could disappear from Wales by 2033.

By pooling and sharing their resources, developers have given NRW access to broad survey coverage and high-quality data that would have been impossible for them to replicate within existing budgets or fieldworker capacity. The dataset provides vital insight into where breeding populations of waders – including 76 curlew territories, as well as lapwing, snipe, golden plover, and redshank – remain, and where they may have disappeared. This clearer picture will enable NRW to target its survey work far more effectively and prioritise conservation efforts.

Jessica Hooper, Director of RenewableUK Cymru, said:

“This kind of collaboration is hugely important given the short time we have left to act.

“By sharing rigorous ecological data already collected for project planning, developers have enabled NRW to cover more ground, more quickly, and at no extra cost to the taxpayer. It shows how the private and public sectors can work together to help conserve species at risk.”

Bethan Beech, Specialist Advisor for Terrestrial Species Recovery at Natural Resources Wales (NRW), said:

“This collaborative approach supports our commitment to nature recovery and evidence-based decision-making, as outlined in NRW’s corporate plan. The data provided by RenewableUK Cymru is being used by NRW during the planning phase of the 2026 Wales Wader Survey.

“Having access to this information enables NRW and its partners to concentrate survey efforts in areas that have not been monitored for curlew or other wader species in recent years.”

The dataset was collated and standardised by BSG Ecology and has now been passed to NRW’s Land and Nature Group. It will form a critical part of the evidence base underpinning the Curlew Recovery Plan for Wales, first published in 2021.

Participating developers included RWE Renewables, Galileo Empower UK Ltd, Vattenfall Ltd, Trydan Gwyrdd Cymru, Wind 2, Coriolis Energy Ltd, Bute Energy and EDF Energy, with support from Dulas Ltd, SLR, Atmos Consulting and BSG Ecology.

Press Releases



Iconic golden eagles to make comeback in England

Environment Secretary approves additional £1m of government funding to explore the reintroduction of golden eagles, restoring hopes they will return to England

One of Britain's most iconic birds, the golden eagle, is poised to make a return to England after more than 150 years after the Government paved the way for a recovery programme that could include reintroduction.

Once widespread across England and mentioned more than 40 times by Shakespeare, golden eagles were virtually wiped out by persecution during the Victorian era. Only a handful of pairs have been seen in England since and the last eagle died in the Lake District in 2016.

But a study published by Forestry England today confirms that England has the capacity to sustain golden eagle populations once more, with eight potential 'recovery zones', mostly in the north of England, identified as being the most suitable areas.

The Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds has welcomed the study's findings and approved £1m of additional funding to explore a reintroduction programme with the potential for juveniles, six to eight weeks old, to be released as early as next year.

Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds said:

"This government is committed to protecting and restoring our most threatened native wildlife – and that includes bringing back iconic species like the golden eagle.

"Backed by £1m of government funding – we will work alongside partners and communities to make the golden eagle a feature of English landscapes once again."

In Southern Scotland, golden eagle populations have recovered to record numbers thanks to the restoration efforts of the groundbreaking South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project. Satellite tracking indicates that some of these translocated birds have already begun to fly across the border and explore northern England. The funding announced today will help accelerate this re-establishment and, where appropriate, further reinforce it with targeted reintroductions. Replicating their successful collaborative approach in the south of Scotland, charity Restoring Upland Nature (RUN) will lead the pioneering project in partnership with a group of core partners, including Forestry England.

Aside from being Britain's second largest bird of prey with an impressive 2-metre wingspan, the golden eagle is a keystone species that can play a vital role in nature recovery more widely. As an apex predator at the top of the food chain, golden eagles help to keep the whole ecosystem in balance.

Forestry England's research suggests that Scottish birds could be seen across northern England within 10 years, but it will take longer for breeding golden eagles to become established in England.

With support from Forestry England, Restoring Upland Nature will now develop a programme of engagement with farming, game management, recreation, nature conservation, tourism and education interests in the region.

The move to explore reintroducing golden eagles is the latest milestone as the government's works to achieve the statutory targets set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 and to reduce species extinction risk by 2042 against 2022 levels.

It follows the government's landmark decision last year to allow the legal reintroduction of another keystone species, beavers, into the wild in England for the first time in hundreds of years, and a record £60m of funding announced last week to protect threatened native species.

Additional information:

The programme will be delivered in partnership with the pioneering charity project that helped to restore the golden eagle population in the south of Scotland.

This follows Defra revealing a new campaign, "Wild Again: Restoring England's Wildlife", which will encompass the government's existing and future work to protect and recover native species through projects including the flagship Species Recovery Programme.

Press Releases

Law Banning Fires in the Cairngorms

A new byelaw banning the use of fires and barbecues in the Cairngorms is set to come into force to curb the growing risk of wildfires.

The Cairngorms National Park is the first place in the UK to introduce a seasonal fire ban backed by an integrated wildfire management.

Scottish ministers approved the measure following an extensive consultation process, which showed that the “overwhelming majority” of residents and visitors were in favour of a fire management byelaw.

The ban will come into force from April 1 until September 30 each year. Those found breaking the byelaw face a fine of up to £500.

Last year saw Scotland’s largest wildfire on record near the northern boundary of the Cairngorms National Park.

In June and July, blazes raged across more than 11,800 hectares of moorland in Carrbridge and Dava, causing “catastrophic damage” to local wildlife.

The risk of wildfires is increasing in Scotland, with climate modelling indicating longer drought periods in the future.

In the Cairngorms, the stakes are particularly high, with the National Park home to around 18,000 residents, as well as 25% of the UK’s rare and endangered species and around half of Scotland’s ancient pinewoods. It also welcomes around two million visitors annually.

The ban comes a week after the first wildfire warning of 2026 was issued for the north and north-east of the country.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service issued 14 wildfire warnings last year, with the final one in October, which it said was well beyond the typical timeframe for heightened wildfire risk in Scotland.

Sandy Bremner, convener of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, said: “The Cairngorms National Park is loved and cherished by so many of us, and we all want to protect and safeguard this incredible place. This byelaw will help us to do just that.

“Now that it has been approved by Scottish ministers, we’re committed to taking forward a range of practical measures to reduce wildfire risk in the National Park – from signage and communications to training and enforcement.

Tailpiece

A Tribute to Sir David at 100

A special event to mark Sir David Attenborough's 100th birthday is taking place at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Presenter Kirsty Young hosted a celebration of the broadcaster's life and his unique natural history career, which many may be surprised to learn, spans seven decades.

The audience relived many of the iconic moments - one involving a very close encounter with a family of gorillas in Rwanda.

We also saw a film of orcas and seals from 2022's Frozen Planet II. The film shows a seal using an iceberg

as a refuge, attempting to protect itself from the killer whales who were hunting it.

The BBC Concert Orchestra played live through this sequence in the Royal Albert Hall.

They provided a dramatic score as the audience watched the clever tactics the orcas used wash the seal off the iceberg into the sea.

"Only about 100 killer whales in the world hunt using this technique," Sir David explains in his narration "It's an ingenious solution to the problem of finding prey here in the most frozen habitat on Earth."

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