

THANK YOU



Impact Report 2023

Love **Essex** • Love **Wildlife**



Essex
Wildlife Trust

**WHETHER YOU GIVE YOUR TIME, YOUR MONEY,
YOUR EXPERTISE, OR YOUR ENERGY TO ENSURING
A WILDER ESSEX, WE CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH.
I HOPE YOU ENJOY READING THIS SNAPSHOT
OF 2023 AND FEEL AS PROUD AS I DO
ABOUT WHAT WE'RE ACHIEVING.**

Rich Yates
Chief Executive Officer, Essex Wildlife Trust



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Essex
Wildlife Trust

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Every one of us makes a difference



Keeley Hazelhurst

Chair
Essex Wildlife Trust

What a year! One million **visitors**, 40,000 children and families, 50,000 **citizen science observations**, ringed plover, little terns, water voles, **Fir Tree Wood**, **The Big Wild Seed Sow**, 1,900 **volunteers**, 50 **local events**, seagrass, oysters, bats, badgers and over 3,000 hectares of **nature reserves**. You make a difference; you make this happen.

And this is just the beginning. We want to do more – more **conservation**, more **restoration**, more **getting involved**, more **taking action**.

As I write, the world has had its hottest month on record. New records for global temperatures are being set regularly. For us in Essex, it means we experience longer, hotter summers on average. But for wildlife it means **changing habitats**, resources become scarcer, and **populations decrease**. Combine this with the societal complexities of a cost-of-living crisis and a government which was unwilling to maintain fundamental protections for nature, and we can start to see the size of the challenge nature faces.

Despite these challenges, we are optimistic. We believe we can make a difference. We see the impact made by our amazing **members, volunteers, staff** and **supporters** every day. We know we can do more, and with your help and support we will.

Recently we have had a period of change at the Trust, and have a **new CEO** – Rich Yates, who demonstrates his enthusiasm for nature, the county, and Essex Wildlife Trust daily. We are delighted that he has taken on the role, and we are looking forward to seeing the impact of his kindness, care and determination. Rich is an inspirational leader, and we wish him every success.

This report will give you just a snapshot of the amazing work being undertaken in Essex every day. It demonstrates the depth and breadth of projects, from

engaging the youngest children through to supporting the purchase of critical land, from **restoring seagrass meadows** to starting work towards becoming a site for **Biodiversity Net Gain**. This work is carried out by our **teams**, and our **partners**, our **friends**, our **volunteers** and our **members**, come rain or shine. It's done for wildlife, in your name.

With your support and by working together, we are unstoppable.

Together, **we make a difference**.

Keeley Hazelhurst

You're helping to restore nature in Essex



Rich Yates

Chief Executive Officer
Essex Wildlife Trust

It's been another great year for Essex Wildlife Trust. After putting in place new structures in 2022, the focus this year was on **realising the benefits of our expertise** as we continued to work towards our two high-level objectives of **30 by 30** (30% of land and sea in Essex actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030) and **1 in 4** (1 in 4 people in Essex taking action for nature and climate by 2030).

In order to use our resources most effectively, we **reviewed our Strategic Plan 2020-25 and produced a revised version that runs to the end of 2030**, therefore aligning the strategy with our longer-term objectives, the wider Wildlife Trust movement, and international targets that define the extent of the progress that has to be made by 2030 in order to halt biodiversity decline and positively impact climate change.

Aside from the small business of **managing 93 nature reserves for wildlife**, we have had a good year for conservation projects, including work to return the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at **Chafford Gorges Nature Discovery Park to favourable condition**, significant work to **protect water voles and manage mink populations**, and targeted work around the **Blackwater and Colne estuaries**.

We have continued to discharge our responsibility as **the voice of wildlife in Essex**, advocating on behalf of nature via the formal planning system to ensure damaging developments in the county are avoided or mitigated, with our focus on several **Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)** as well as some **highly sensitive local sites**.

Essex has a unique **350-mile coastline of scenic creeks and marshes** that are internationally important for wildlife and act as a huge carbon store. We have significantly **bolstered our Marine and Coastal Recovery Team** and our

portfolio of work so that they match the importance of the Essex coast and better serve the marine environment.

It's also been a great year for engagement, with **93% of the 1m visitors to our Nature Discovery Centres rating their experience 5/5** and more than half reporting that they planned to take more action for wildlife as a result of their visit, while over 95% of the **40,000 children and families that the Wilder Learning Team worked with** through our education programmes noticed a positive impact on their nature connection, and over 90% pledged to take action for nature.

Furthermore, we ran a raft of citizen science campaigns that, when combined, resulted in **over 50k new citizen science wildlife observations in a single year**, the majority of which came via the Essex BioBlitz, the annual campaign that we run in partnership with the University of Essex, which is the largest citizen science project in Essex.

We couldn't have done this without you. Whether you give your time, your money, your expertise or your energy to ensuring a Wilder Essex, we can't thank you enough. I hope you enjoy reading this snapshot of 2023 and feel as proud as I do about what we're achieving.

It's been a great year, but we know next year can be even better.

Restoring wildlife



The ambitious target to achieve 30% of land and sea being actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030 (**30 by 30**) remains our focus. Managing **93 reserves** is already contributing significantly both in the protection of biodiversity and as exemplars for others, so a highlight of 2023 was strengthening the **Nature Reserves Team** and **Conservation Evidence Team** with new appointments. This is providing further expertise in conservation land management to increase the wildlife value of our land, as well as analytical and mapping skills which is helping to increase the Trust's influence on the county's developing Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Leading wildlife gain across the county

Partnership is core to our work, and in 2023 we continued to play a fundamental role in advocating for Essex's wildlife and influencing various landscape-scale, multi-partner conservation initiatives. This included providing conservation advice to multiple specialist groups that contributed to the County's **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** and feeding into the development of a coastal habitat restoration plan for the **Transforming the Thames project which encompasses the whole coastline**. The Trust also continued to host and chair the long-running **Blackwater Partnership**, which is growing in strength, assembling more vital data on the health of the environment in this part of the Essex coast.

An important partnership with the **RSPB, Essex County Council, Essex & Suffolk Water** and the **National Trust** was set up this year, putting together an ambitious **Blackwater and Colne Landscape Recovery Scheme (LRS)**. The work involved developing a toolkit for the recovery of the two estuaries and their surrounding farmed landscapes. The project was supported by over **30 private landowners** and was aimed at enhancing the conservation of over **2,700 hectares** of land. Although the application was unsuccessful, the feedback from the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) suggested that a revised bid would be viewed favourably. Irrespective of this initial outcome, strong links have been built with a range of farmers and landowners, who are keen to protect the environment of this special area of Essex. This bodes well for the future.

We continued to deliver our exciting marine and coastal recovery projects by nurturing a range of strong partnerships. This included working with Natural England and Project Seagrass to **restore intertidal seagrass**; with the RSPB to **protect beach-nesting birds** and **create new coastal habitat** for species such as **ringed plover** and **oystercatcher**; with the University of Essex to **monitor our saltmarshes**, and the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative (ENORI) to **raise awareness of native oysters**.

The **seagrass** work saw the transplanting of seagrass at **St Lawrence Bay in the Blackwater Estuary** – one of the first attempts in eastern England to expand existing seagrass meadows and stimulate their recovery. Along special sand and shingle beaches, nesting success included 24 ringed plover fledglings, 44 little tern chicks and six oystercatchers, although tides and predation at our **Colne Point nature reserve** limited **ringed plovers** to one successful nest.

Next year, therefore, protective cages are planned to help this threatened beach-nesting bird.

Our **Wilder Rivers & Protected Species Manager** spent the latter half of the year pulling together two separate legal agreements with National Highways, which will provide funding from 2024 for five years to help the control of the invasive mink on the one hand and the recovery of water vole populations on the other. Water vole is a species that was heading towards extinction in the county in the early 2000s and is still 'on the brink', with the control of mink being vital if the water vole is to survive as a species of our rivers and ponds. This new project should help consolidate the position of East Anglia as mink-free and as a refuge for nationally important populations of water vole.

Progress was made on **the plans for Abbots Hall** including decisions on the ecology of the site. We **produced a management statement** and work was begun on the **Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan** which is an obligatory document to allow Abbots Hall to be registered as a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) site with Colchester City Council. BNG is a potentially very important funding mechanism linked to Local Plans. However, it is only one funding mechanism and additional options were also explored which will allow new habitats to be developed at Abbots Hall.

In addition to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), we routinely **screened between 15–20 planning applications per week**, responding to 4-5 with one objection on average per week. Due to the likely extensive impact of **offshore wind development**, which currently make up much of the NSIPs work, our **Conservation Planning Coordinator** continued to **collaborate with Suffolk Wildlife Trust and other North Sea Wildlife Trusts** to ensure a consistent approach. We engaged on the **Five Estuaries** and **North Falls** developments regarding onshore biodiversity, ecology and ornithology.

Other important planning responses were made to **Colchester City Council** about the **Middlewick Ranges Local Wildlife Site**, making it clear that this local site is, in fact, of national importance. In addition, we continued to engage on the port development at **Bathside Bay** with **Tendring District Council** and, in particular, examining the proposed **Little Oakley** compensatory realignment.

Enhancing the conservation value of our land

The management of **93 nature reserves**, covering almost 1% of Essex's landscape, remains the Trust's vital contribution to safeguarding many species and habitats that would otherwise be lost. An example of the importance of our reserves is that one third of their area is made up of wildlife-rich grasslands – a habitat that, outside of the nature reserve protection, has seen a catastrophic 97% decline over the last 70 years.

Volunteers are fundamental to delivering and supporting impactful management work on our reserves. Additional volunteer assistance was provided this year to help check livestock on new grazing sites and to assist with wildlife monitoring initiatives, for which we are extremely grateful.

In addition to this vital habitat management by staff and volunteers, **partnership working** is also important to the continued health of our reserves. Several special projects with partners came to fruition during 2023. These included the completion in April of the **Green Recovery Challenge Fund** work at **Tollesbury Wick** and **Howlands Marsh**, a joint 18-month project and partnership with the RSPB that has seen the enhancement of a range of grazing marshes for wading birds including redshank and lapwing.

Building on this project further work was carried out to create over 4km of new wet ditches for wading birds and geese by using a specialised rotary ditcher at **Fobbing Marshes nature reserve**. Similar work completed in 2022 at Blue House Farm was funded by a BIFFA Award and this involved the addition of predator exclusion fencing, which has resulted in enormous benefits for breeding waders: with a 50% increase in breeding lapwing and a 30% increase in redshank.

In **partnership** with the RSPB, a successful application was submitted to Natural England's **Species Recovery Programme** (SRP) to undertake restoration works at **Howlands nature reserve** and to install solar pumps at **Tollesbury Wick**. The £210k project will deliver **huge benefits to wildlife** and will be completed by the end of 2024.

At **Chafford Gorges Nature Discovery Park**, the **More Marvellous Meadows project** began, opening up and restoring the extraordinary, orchid-rich chalk grassland landscape. This project is the start of a 10-year funded project to restore these SSSI grasslands and scrub edge habitats to **favourable condition**, as monitored by **Natural England**.

Our Ecological Monitoring Programme has made excellent progress conducting surveys on **over 40 reserves**, including monitoring breeding and overwintering birds, butterflies and conducting habitat condition surveys for grasslands, woodland

and invertebrates. The evidence collected **will inform important conservation management decisions** on our reserves. With the appointment of a **Conservation Ecologist** this year, we have been able to focus and develop our monitoring programme further. The recruitment of our **GIS and Data Manager** has had a positive impact, supporting the monitoring and survey work and enabling this area of skilled work to be taken forward at the Trust, providing expertise for project bids, citizen science campaigns and supporting reserve works.

We have also taken forward our biological recording of species and are in the process of setting up **Nature Counts**, a new interactive system allowing our volunteers and members of the public to record, manage, and communicate **wildlife sightings directly to our website**.



Take action



There have been lots of notable achievements across our portfolio of engagement work this year, **from formative experiences at our Nature Discovery Centres and memorable education activities, to inspiring communications and mobilising campaigns.** We approach all of our work with people as a form of 'indirect conservation', with the intended outcome always being the protection of wildlife, whether that's through nurturing a closer relationship with nature, developing a better understanding of wildlife, sowing the seed of a lifelong passion, or by taking direct action – these all deliver against our strategic objectives and link directly to our ambition for 1 in 4 people in Essex to take action for nature and climate by 2030.



New Lucy Loveheart retail range

Creating places of wonder

We welcomed more than **a million visitors to our Nature Discovery Centres** in 2023. It was our second year of full trading since Covid restrictions, and despite the cost-of-living pressures on public spending, we were delighted to see an increase in visitors and retail sales compared to last year. In fact, February half term was our busiest trading week in three years. Our **Fir Tree Wood Appeal** at the end of the year captured the hearts and minds of visitors, who generously supported via round up donations across all Nature Discovery Centres, donating 68% more compared to the previous December.

Re-decoration of Fingringhoe Wick and Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Centres continued, and internal signage and interpretation was trialled at Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre. We secured funding to enhance the site at Thameside which saw the installation of new floating bird hides and an enhanced picnic area and car park.

A **collaboration with artist Lucy Loveheart** was developed which will see our retail range expand with an exclusive range of products, due to launch early 2024.

It was encouraging to see our new visitor survey showing an increase of 6% in our overall score in the last quarter of the year, 93% of respondents scoring our **customer service 5/5 stars**, 84% of respondents agreeing their **visit deepened their connection with nature**, and 55% of respondents saying their **visit inspired them to take action for wildlife**.



Bringing people and wildlife closer together

Working alongside the **wonderful community** in Little Baddow, we launched our Fir Tree Wood appeal in November to secure the future of this woodland, with more than 100 donors in the first month.

Despite the cost-of-living crisis, we retained our **membership base of 40,000** and our Corporate Membership Scheme welcomed **11 new Investors in Wildlife**, giving us a strong voice for nature among businesses in Essex. We've engaged more than 200 businesses through hosting the Big Green Expo and annual Golf Day, and hosted 150 corporate employees on volunteer days.

Gifts in Wills are an opportunity for our supporters to **nurture nature forever**. We launched our free Wills service to make this easier and continued our committed and personalised relationship with those who pledge this incredible gift. Generous individuals also supported us with significant donations this year, which enabled us to boost the impact of our work.

Our Wilder Learning Team has engaged with an amazing **37,500 individuals**, and are rated as excellent (92%) by attendees. This high-quality connection and relationship has resulted in 90% pledging to take action for nature, equating to a minimum of 33,750 individual actions. Our Nature Nursery also received an



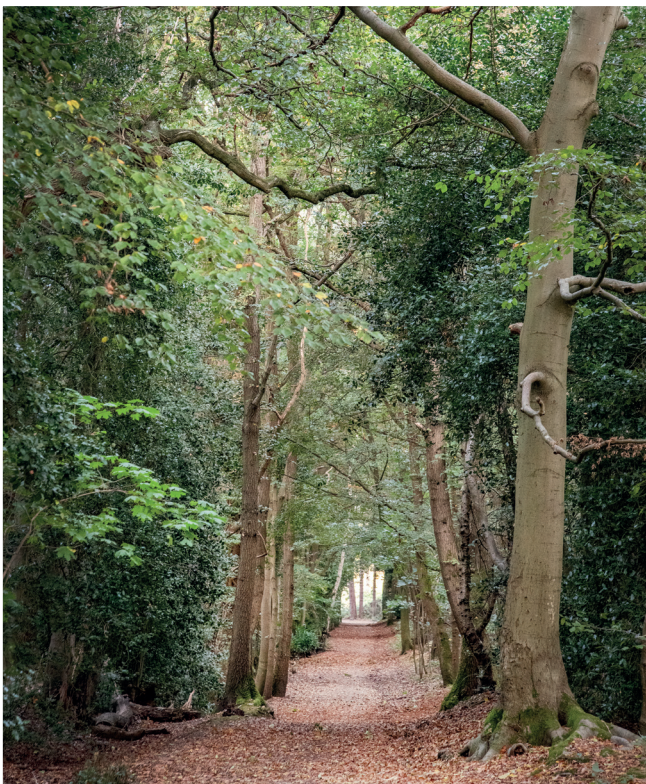
outstanding accreditation from Ofsted, demonstrating excellence across all aspects of curriculum, management, safeguarding, and development.

Our Wilder Communities team supported **22 parish and town councils**, 60 Urban Wildlife and River Champions, 40 individual groups via Nextdoor Nature and hosted 230 individuals on webinars and workshops, empowering members of the local community.

The Trust's Communications team continued to reach large audiences, with 8 million individuals reading about our stories along with high-profile TV and Radio features, including BBC Morning Live, Sky News Climate Show and BBC Radio 4. We reached **77k social media followers**, with a 218% growth on TikTok, helping the Trust reach younger audiences.

We led on 15 campaigns, including lobbying on the Government's overturn on Neonicotinoids and generating a public response to the Lower Thames Crossing plans. We gained **50k citizen science observations** through the second year of the Essex BioBlitz and the launch of Butterfly Seekers, with 1.2k participants. The Big Wild Seed Sow gave 6.6k families free wildflower seeds to sow, 4k took part in 30 Days Wild and our Coastal Creations art competition for National Marine Week had 257 entries.

Collaboration has been at the heart of 2023, helping us reach new audiences and forming stronger relationships with key organisations. Our campaigns have worked with Colchester Zoo, Butterfly Conservation, Froglife, c2c Rail, the University of Essex, Braintree Shopping Village and High Chelmer. The Wildlife Explorer podcast also hosted high-profile figures including **Steve Backshall and Megan McCubbin**, helping the Trust inspire new nature lovers.





Our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do

Volunteer thank you event at Belfairs Nature Discovery Centre

We are hugely grateful for the valuable contribution made by our **1,900 volunteers** who continue to support our conservation work parties, our Nature Discovery Centres, our Wilder Learning activities, gardening on Trust sites, and support functions, with 46% of our volunteers volunteering at least once a week. Volunteer satisfaction survey results from 2023 show that **98% of volunteers enjoy volunteering for the Trust**, with 90% feeling valued and 97% who intend to continue volunteering in 2024. **A massive thank you to all our volunteers** who give their time to support the Trust.

There has been much to celebrate with volunteer contributions in 2023. The **Ray Marsh Award**, our annual volunteer recognition award for outstanding contribution, was **awarded to Kathy Hunter**, volunteer warden at Two Tree Island. Kathy has been working on **Two Tree Island for over 30 years**, visiting the site more than weekly to not only take part in regular weekly and monthly work parties but to take part in additional actions such as butterfly transects, bird surveys, litter picks, walkovers, reptile surveys and much more. Her passion and care for the site is truly inspiring.

We enjoyed celebrating at the well-attended in-person **volunteer thank you event at Belfairs Nature Discovery Centre** in June and the **volunteer warden events held at Danbury Ridge and Pound Wood**, in September and October respectively, which received positive feedback.

Approximately **76% of volunteers gave their time to support our conservation** efforts, across 72 sites. The impact of our volunteers' efforts can be seen in the

condition of the habitats they protect and the presence and abundance of species which have been sadly lost from much of the surrounding countryside.

As an example, our volunteers give around **19,600 hours annually to protecting and enhancing the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** under our management. It is fair to say that species that are at serious risk of becoming extinct in the UK such as the turtle dove, shrill carder bee and nightingale only thrive on Essex Wildlife Trust reserves because of the support of our fantastic volunteers.



Caption Two Tree Island nature reserve

Local Groups inspiring our communities

Local Group walk at Waltham Abbey

We are enormously grateful for the work of our **fantastic Local Groups** who engage with their local communities to **inspire people to take action for wildlife** and help deepen their nature connection.

Helping to **restore wildlife** in their local areas, Local Groups have been **encouraging people to volunteer** at nature reserve work parties, carry out ecological surveys and inspect local wildlife sites.

They have also been inspiring local people to take action for nature through **fascinating talks** and **wonderful walks** and **raising money** through quizzes and plant sales. In 2023, eight Local Groups **hosted over 50 events** which **engaged more than 1,000 people**.

Local Groups work closely with our Nature Discovery Centres and have enabled projects to happen like the **sensory garden** at **Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre** and unlock funding for **renovations** at **Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Centre**.

From **counting glow worms** and **planting wildflowers** to **picking up litter** and **inspiring people about bats**, we are grateful for all the time, energy and passion that Local Groups and their members put in to **support their local wildlife**.



WILDLIFE WINS IN 2023

With 93 nature reserves, a 350-mile-long coastline and rivers running through almost every part of our county, it's been another busy year for conservation. Although there is still much to do in the future, it's time to reflect on what we've achieved for wildlife in 2023.

3,030 HECTARES

OF NATURE RESERVES MANAGED BY OUR TEAM AND VOLUNTEERS



10,155

BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLIES SPOTTED BY CITIZEN SCIENTISTS



37,511

WILDFLOWER OBSERVATIONS CONTRIBUTED TO CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH



40 HECTARES

OF SQUISHY AND SQUELCHY WETLAND RESTORED AT BLUE HOUSE FARM



3,500

PLASTIC TREE GUARDS COLLECTED AND RECYCLED



62

NIGHTINGALES RECORDED ACROSS 11 RESERVES

7,000

WILDFLOWER PATCHES PLANTED IN GARDENS



84

TOADS, TOADLETS, AND TOAD CROSSINGS RECORDED THROUGH OUR TOAD WATCH



400

BARRIERS IDENTIFIED ACROSS ESSEX'S RIVERS AS PART OF THE ESSEX FISH MIGRATION ROADMAP



240

SEAGRASS CORES TRANSPLANTED
TO BOLSTER AN IMPORTANT
SEAGRASS MEADOW

42

 PAIRS OF LITTLE TERNS
RECORDED BREEDING
ON OUR SHORES

60



UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX
STUDENTS SURVEYED
SALTMARSH RESTORATION IN ACTION

24

 RADIO AND TV INTERVIEWS
CONDUCTED BY OUR
CONSERVATION EXPERTS

We couldn't do it without you

We are enormously grateful to our members, Local Groups, legators, corporate members, and funders. It's your support that will help achieve a **#WilderEssex**.

Legators

The wonderful foresight and kindness of our legators enables us to increase our impact on wildlife in Essex in the coming years. In 2023, Gifts in Wills amounted to a very generous £1,209,173.

All Gifts in Wills and Deed of Variations, no matter what size, make a significant difference to what we can achieve, and we are truly grateful to every single person. A huge thank you to our wonderful legators in 2023.

[Mrs Joyce Ager](#)

Mr Trevor John Allen

[Dr Martin Eric Anthoney](#)

Mr Arnold Stanley Beardwell

[Mr George Roger Brignull](#)

Mrs Barbara Mary Brown

[Ms Kate Clifton](#)

Miss Mary Colton

[Mr John James Cox](#)

Dr Colin Fletcher Davies

[Mr Leslie Thomas Davies](#)

Mrs Jean Margaret Davis

[Mr Anthony Dines](#)

Mr David Rupert Drury Edmunds

[Mr Clive Fenner](#)

Mrs Joyce Iris Freeman

[Mrs Rose Gordon](#)

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Mr Brian Hinds

[Mr George Edward Kent](#)

Mrs Vivienne Lake

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Mr John Dean Millar

[Mr John William Murray](#)

Mr Harold Malcolm Norris

[Mr Roy Robert Outten](#)

Mrs Barbara Fraser Pudney

[Ms Helen Josephine Rowe](#)

Mr Robert Arthur Shortman

[Mr Roy Sydney Skelton](#)

Mrs Marian Louise Spade

[Mr Henry John Cunningham Stones](#)

Ms Sonia Elizabeth Triggs

[Mrs Betty June Vesey](#)

Miss Olive Edith Wheaton

[Ms Elizabeth Ida Wilson](#)

Funders

We are grateful for every donation given to the Trust. Individuals, Trusts and Foundations made an incredible difference to the impact of our work in 2023 by giving us significant funds towards our core activity and projects. By the end of the year, we had more than 100 supporters of our Fir Tree Wood campaign to secure the future of this beautiful woodland in the heart of Danbury Ridge. Thank you to everyone who donated.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but special thanks to the generosity of:

[Biffa Award](#)

Branch Out

[Community 360](#)

Defra

[Derbyshire Environmental Trust](#)

DP World Community Investment Fund

[Enovert Community Trust](#)

Environment Agency

[National Highways](#)

National Lottery Heritage Fund

[Natural England](#)

North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance

[The Hervey Benham Charitable Trust](#)

The Hiscox Foundation

[The Joyce Fletcher Charitable Trust](#)

The Simon Gibson Charitable Trust

[The Thomas Family Charitable Trust](#)

Corporate Members

A special thanks to our Investors in Wildlife, locally minded businesses across Essex working to make business wilder. You are helping us to build a 'green alliance'. Together we are greater than the sum of our parts.

Zplan Wealth Management	City & Country	Galloper Wind Farm Ltd	Lemon Fencing Ltd	Purple Bear Group	Trending District Council
3D Oak Limited	Clacton On Sea Golf Club	Gardenature	Liz Lake Associates Ltd	Qinetiq Shoeburyness	Thames Card Technology Ltd
A Duke & Son	Claridon Group Ltd	Gardens Of Peace Muslim Cemetery Trust	Local Business Domination	Quadrant Security Services Land & Marine Ltd	Thames Water Utilities Ltd
A R Adams (Funeral Directors) Ltd	Cleancare International	George Thompson Ltd	LSJ Engineering Ltd	Rawley Plant Ltd	The Big Green Internet Ltd
Abbott Fasteners Ltd	Clearstone Energy Limited	GIS Spatial Mapping	Lucy & Co	R Gwinnell & Sons	The CME Personnel Consultancy
Accuro Environmental Ltd	Clifford Brown & Grimsey Insurance	Globalnet IT Innovations Ltd	LWFC&G Ltd	Rawley Plant Ltd	The DS Group
ACL (Adult Community Learning) Essex	Brokers Ltd	Glorcroft Limited	M Lucking & Sons	Rayleigh Town Council	The Finishing Line Ltd
Actual Health and Safety	CNG Business Advice T/A Smart Support	GN Surveys Ltd	M P Chartered Architects	Raytel Group Ltd	The Full Works Ltd
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Alchemize Ltd	Colne Stoves & Fireplaces	Great Dunmow Town Council	Mantair Ltd	RHS Garden Hyde Hall	Tibury Green Power Limited
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Anglian Water Services Ltd	Complete Intacare Hygiene	Green Robins	Marks Hall Estate	Riverside Veterinary Group	Tim Moya Associates
Animal Health Co Ltd	Complete Locksmith Services Ltd	Greetings	Marmi Ltd	RL Solutions Ltd	Timber Tec
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Birketts LLP	Diamond Press Ltd	HSQE Ltd	Nicholls Law	Scott Wallis Seeds Ltd	VIRIDIS Urban & Rural Ltd
Bitwise IT Ltd	Downwell Demolition Ltd	Hugh Pearl Land Drainage Ltd	North Benfleet Hall Fishery	Sealife Adventure/Miller Leisure Ltd	Waldegraves Farm Ltd
Bizphit	Dura Composites Ltd	Hunter And Sons Tree Services	Oak View Landscapes Limited	Sheridan Accountancy Services Ltd	WAVEDATA Ltd
Blackburn & Co Ltd	East Saxon Training	Hygiene Contracts Limited	Office Needs (Essex) Ltd	Shipman Security Systems Ltd	Whirledge & Nott
Bland Landscapes Ltd	Eastwood Tile Warehouse	I D Corcoran Building Contractors Ltd	Old Park Meadow Ltd	Sibbons Plant Hire	Wickham Engineering
Blatella Films Ltd	Edmund Carr	Ian Wallinhurst Kar Co Ltd	Olympus Keymed Ltd	Silver City Estates Ltd	Wilkin & Sons Ltd
Bowling Garrard Electrical Ltd	Electrical Solutions	IDC Greenscapes Ltd	One to One Personnel Ltd	Simply Washrooms Ltd	Willow Garden Day Nursery
Braintree District Council	Ellisons Solicitors	Image On Group Ltd	Ongar Wildlife Society	Skinandbliss.Com Ltd	Wire Free Protection Ltd
Brents of Brentwood Ltd	Elm House Veterinary Centre	IMD (UK) Ltd.	Organisation For Responsible Businesses B)	Solar Green Ltd	Witham Town Council
Brett Aggregates	Endeavour Drilling Ltd	Immervox Ltd	Osea Leisure Park	South Woodham Ferrers TC	Woodfashoners Ltd
Brewster Motors Essex Ltd	EPC-Group UK	Impamark	Palmer's Solicitors	Southfields Veterinary Specialists	Woodham Ferrers Water Ski Club
Bright & Sons Ltd	Essex & Suffolk Insurance Brokers	Industrial Metal Services	Peak Security Systems Ltd	space282	Wormell Plant/hire
Brown & Carroll (London) Ltd	Essex & Suffolk Water PLC	Infotec Consulting	Peldon Hall Farms	Spains Hall Partnership	Wow Balloons
Business And Finance Consulting	Essex Chambers Of Commerce	Ingrebourne Valley Ltd	Perrywood Garden Centre & Nurseries Ltd	SRC Group	Writtle University College
Limited T/A Queen Davies	Essex County Council Environment & Economy	Islandbridge Properties Ltd	Pest Defence Ltd	SS&C Financial Services	Zeelandia
C J Bardwell Ltd	Essex Digital Copiers	IT Lifecycle Services Ltd	PJR Communications Ltd	International Ltd	Zest Recycle Ltd
Cadman Construction Ltd	Essex Mechanical Services	J & D Foods	Platt Rushton	St Cedd's School	
Calfordseaden LLP	Essex Reclamation Ltd	J B Russell Engineers Ltd	Plummer Electrical Engineering	St Georges Pest Control Ltd	
Call Of The Wild Zoo	Essex Security Services Ltd	Javalin Network Services Ltd	PMR Solutions Ltd	Stanley Bragg Architects Ltd	
Calor Gas	Estuary Housing Association Ltd	Joy Creative	PMV Essex Ltd	Stebbing Parish Council	
Capel Court Plc	European Refrigeration Ltd	Kaizen Consultancy Ltd	PNP Trees	S-Tech Solar Ltd	
Carbon Sure Consulting Ltd	Excalibur Screwbolts Ltd	Kelly Turkeys	Port Flair Ltd	Stewart Landscape Construction Ltd	
Castle Point Borough Council	Express Environmental Solutions Ltd	Kingswood Group Ltd	Port Of London Authority	Stillwater Management	
CBD Pure Life	F H Ives Ltd	KJL Group	Port of Tilbury London Ltd	Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome	
CEME Limited	F P Guiver & Sons Limited	L Holmes Dental Laboratory	Premier Print & Promotions Ltd	StreetsWhittle & Partners LLP	
Champion Services Group Ltd	Fen Farm Caravan Site	Langdon Hills Golf Club	Prestige Conjouring	Stubbers Adventure Centre	
Channels Golf Club Ltd	Fenn Wright	Lathcoats Farm Shop	Primassure Ltd Insuring Essex	Summerdale Veterinary Centre	
Chatbox Productions	Firstead Properties Ltd	Laurie Wood Associates Ltd.	Growth	Swallow Aquatic	
Chelmer Marquees Ltd	Fisco Tools Ltd	Lawsons (Whetstone) Ltd	Priority Support Services Ltd	Systematics International Ltd	
Chelmsford City Council	Formara Ltd	Leisure Hire Marquees Ltd	Procram Agriculture Ltd	T J Evers Ltd	
Chorus Advisers Ltd	G & K Groundworks Ltd			Talis Projects Ltd	
				Tarmac	
				TechWise Ltd	

The good, the bad and the ugly

2023 was a busy but satisfying year at the Trust. Perhaps most importantly, our Strategic Plan was refreshed in early 2023 and now aligns with the Royal Society of Wildlife Trust's strategy to 2030. It reaffirms the commitment of the Trust to its two key strategic aims.

30 by 30

which is '30% of land and sea in Essex actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030.

1 in 4

1 in 4 people in Essex taking action for nature and climate by 2030.

The good

Several strategic developments in 2023 have **laid the foundations for future success**. Most notable among these is perhaps the **Impact Framework** and all of the associated processes that form part of it. This Framework defines the Trust's Key Performance Indicators that enable us to measure and track our performance in the areas where we need to have the most impact. This has brought significant clarity and priority to our work across all areas, enabling Board and the Strategic Leadership Team to monitor at the appropriate levels, and enabling the Trust to celebrate impact with our members and supporters.

Another significant area of strategic progress is in the **multi-year Digital Transformation Project**. This has involved putting in place the organisation's systems infrastructure for the next decade through upgrading and implementing new systems across all critical areas of activity, significantly modernising the Trust.

The bad

One of our priorities in 2024 must be to **develop an overarching Conservation Strategy** for the Trust. Although we have a clear vision for a Wilder Essex, a new Strategic Plan, and detailed operational plans that enable us to prioritise our conservation efforts, we need to have full confidence that the work we do between now and 2030 will have the greatest possible impact on wildlife in our county.

Conservation is fast-moving and rapidly changing; underpinned by science and research, as well as new thinking. There are opportunities emerging to **manage the cost of maintaining and improving our nature reserves** in ways that are more financially sustainable. We need to step back and develop a strategy that enables us to **gain the most ground over the next 5-6 years**.

The ugly

Despite our best efforts to manage costs and compete for commercial income and charitable funds, we are working in an environment that is characterised by **increasing operating costs and increasing competition for funds**. We have been working to planned deficit budgets in order to reduce our free reserves and manage our costs, based on a five-year 'Glide Path'. However, it has become apparent that we will need to take some more significant measures early in 2024 to reduce our costs, increase our income, and 'correct our course' in order to be back on **the path to long-term financial sustainability**.

Financial summary

Essex Wildlife Trust year ended 31 December 2023

Financial review

The Trust incurred an operating loss for a second consecutive year in 2023 as it continued to increase spending to deliver its strategic plan. Operating costs grew by £0.8m (8%) to £10.6m, including an extra £0.7m spent on charitable activities. Income of £9.2m was also £0.8m greater than in 2022, leaving the operating deficit unchanged at £1.4m. As I mentioned in previous financial reviews, the Trustees have approved medium-term financial plans which show operating deficits while income is grown to meet the higher level of expenditure the Trust needs to deliver all aspects of its strategic plan. The operating loss in 2023 was in line with these plans.

Investment markets had a better year in 2023 than in 2022 as inflation was brought under control and potential reductions in interest rates were recognised in investment valuations. The Group's investments delivered gains of £0.7m in the year after losses of £1.8m in 2022. However, the revaluation of a donated legacy property and of the Trust's liabilities to the RSWT's defined benefit pension scheme offset £0.5m of these investment gains. The Group's total funds fell by £1.2m in the year from £30.9m to £29.7m.

Income from grants and donations increased from £0.3m to £1.3m while legacy income doubled from £0.9m to £1.8m. Both figures can vary significantly from year to year, as can income for supporting the management of the Trust's reserves, which, at £0.4m was £1.2m less than in 2022. Membership income is more stable and grew slightly to £1.5m, reflecting an increase in memberships. Income from trading activities at the Trust's 10 NDCs increased by £0.4m to £2.8m, as the impact of Covid -19 on activity was finally overcome, while the costs of earning that income increased by £0.2m to £2.4m. The Trust's ecological consultancy had a poor year, slipping from a small profit in 2022 to a loss of £0.1m.

In the balance sheet, the largest change was the reduction in the amount of cash held either in bank accounts or on short-term deposit, which at £1.0m, was £1.3m less than at the end of 2022. These funds were spent on meeting the Group's operating deficit for the year. The deficit also explains the decrease in the Group's total unrestricted funds of £1.5m to £6.7m. These free funds are just 23% of the Group's total funds, with the remaining 77% being restricted for use on specific purposes or held as endowment funds.

The last two years of planned operating losses have allowed the Trust to make progress in delivering its strategy, as set out elsewhere in this Impact Report. Further losses, albeit of a lower amount, are anticipated in the next two to three years to allow the momentum of this progress to continue, before a balanced result is achieved once more.

Bob Holmes

Treasurer
Essex Wildlife Trust

Summary Consolidated Statement of Financial Activities	2023 £000's	2022 (restated) £000's
Income		
Donations and Legacies	4,648	2,631
Charitable Activities	1,159	2,690
Other Trading Activities	2,971	2,715
Income from Investments	448	349
Total Income	9,226	8,385
Expenditure		
Charitable Activities	6,609	5,902
Raising Funds	3,955	3,876
Total Expenditure	10,564	9,778
Operating (Deficit)	(1,338)	(1,393)
Net Gains / (Losses) on Investments	664	(1,802)
Losses on revaluation of fixed assets	(147)	-
Defined Benefit Pension Scheme	(347)	(32)
Net Movement in Funds	(1,168)	(3,227)
Funds Brought Forward	30,919	34,146
Funds Carried Forward	29,751	30,919

Summary Consolidated Balance Sheets	2023 £000's	2022 (restated) £000's
Tangible and Intangible Fixed Assets	15,220	15,253
Long Term Investments	12,526	12,110
Stocks	397	413
Debtors	2,040	2,002
Short Term Investments & Cash at Bank and in Hand	1,035	2,366
Creditors falling due within one year	(1,163)	(1,244)
Defined benefit pension scheme (liability) / asset	(304)	19
Total Net Assets	29,751	30,919
Designated Funds	564	449
General Funds	6,107	7,772
Total Unrestricted Funds	6,671	8,221
Restricted Funds	20,036	19,782
Endowment Funds	3,044	2,916
Total Funds	29,751	30,919

These are the summarised accounts. If you would like to view the full audited accounts in more detail, please go to www.essexwt.org.uk or request a copy from Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbots Hall Farm, Great Wigborough, Colchester, Essex CO5 7RZ.



The next chapter



In 2024 we will continue to work with Essex County Council and partners to develop the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**. This will include work to identify geographical targets to ensure meaningful **connectivity** is put in place between existing valuable habitats like ancient woodlands. We will revisit the **Blackwater & Colne Landscape Recovery Scheme**, work on the **Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediments** project, the **Share Our Shores** project, and engage more deeply with the **three Farm Clusters** in the county.

Given the importance of conservation grazing for habitat management and biodiversity of our nature reserves, an aim for 2024 is to establish a **Grazing Team** and strengthen links with **volunteers** to recruit and train **new livestock "lookers"**.

The **Ecological Monitoring Programme** will be progressed on our nature reserves to prioritise specific sites for detailed management planning and designing specific monitoring programmes that may then become the models for use on other reserves.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) at **Abbotts Hall** will continue to be a major focus for activity, with the appointment of a **Project Manager** and with detailed work beginning with the local authority, **Colchester City Council and Natural England**, to register the site for BNG and to complete the mandatory Habitat Management & Monitoring Plan.

One of the most exciting developments in 2024 will be the realignment of our Nature Discovery Centres with a **new vision and purpose** which focuses much more on our centres as **gateways to great wildlife experiences**, where income is the result of great engagement, increased footfall, and improved visitor experiences.

The Membership and Fundraising Team, alongside other staff, will benefit significantly from the **implementation of a new CRM system**, which will enable efficiencies, improved communications, data quality, income and engagement opportunities, as well as links between departments within the Trust. With increased pressure on income, we need to ensure we are adequately **resourced and equipped to maximise charitable income**.

Meanwhile, the **Engagement Strategy** will continue to be embedded in our work, widening access to nature and inspiring people to take action for wildlife, building on our already high levels of education delivery and impact but **placing more emphasis on curriculum mapping** in order to ensure our sessions remain relevant to schools, while evolving our **'community organising' ethos to support local communities**.

Join us

Want to know how else you can help achieve our vision of a Wilder Essex?

Join us: Join thousands of people and become a member. www.essexwt.org.uk/membership

Pledge: Leave a lasting legacy and protect the future of wildlife in Essex. www.essexwt.org.uk/gifts-in-wills

Fundraise: Raise vital funds, while having fun! www.essexwt.org.uk/fundraise

Volunteer: Gain new skills and be part of a passionate community of like-minded people. www.essexwt.org.uk/volunteer

Partner: Support wildlife through your company. www.essexwt.org.uk/corporate

Engage: Raise our profile in your local community by joining your Local Group. www.essexwt.org.uk/local-groups

Campaign: Use your voice to make positive change for nature. www.essexwt.org.uk/campaign

Take action: Support wildlife in your community with Team Wilder. www.essexwt.org.uk/team-wilder

