



**BTO**

Looking out for birds



AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE



A close-up photograph of a green parrot with a bright red beak and a small red patch around its eye. The parrot is looking out from a circular hole in the rough, textured bark of a tree trunk. The background is a dark, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest setting.

BTO's 60,000 volunteers monitor change in the environment, delivering the information used to plan and assess conservation action, and informing decision-making processes for the benefits of society, wildlife and the natural world.

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## THE PROBLEM

Many commentators, research studies and reports point to an unprecedented environmental crisis and the associated loss of biodiversity on a global scale. Over coming decades we will continue to face complex challenges resulting from climate change, pressures on land use, pollution and a growing call on the planet's resources. Scientific principles underpin our understanding of these issues and our ability to address them, but in some quarters, that science is under attack.



Ensuring that society can respond effectively depends on organisations like the BTO playing a strong role and making our voice heard. BTO works with others to inspire society with our knowledge, but, given the magnitude of the current crisis, we need your help to increase the impact of our work.

## WHAT CAN BTO OFFER?

BTO has a great reputation for monitoring birds and engaging people in science, generating enviable long-term data sets from the observations of tens of thousands of volunteers. The scientific research and knowledge enabled through this gold-standard approach supports our understanding of the environment and informs a wide range of policy issues and management decisions, including agri-environment schemes to address biodiversity loss on farmland and wind farm developments to minimise impacts on vulnerable bird populations. In the context of ongoing climatic and land use changes, uncertain future policies, and issues of societal engagement with science, our distinctive approach delivers multiple benefits. For example, we continue to:

- collect, curate and share knowledge of long-term population change in birds, amassing over 90 years of records, and millions of observations of all bird species;
- deliver internationally recognised leadership in bird-ringing and other monitoring methods, supporting hundreds of peer-reviewed scientific papers;
- inspire the public by unravelling the mysteries of migration in new and accessible ways;
- underpin the Government's contributions to global, European and national conservation treaties and agreements.

However, governments and society neither fully recognise nor often understand the fundamental importance of this scientific knowledge in supporting conservation of the environment. Where there is a lack of understanding, there is a risk of a lack of support.







## WHY BIRDS?

Perched at the top of ecological food chains, birds are ideal barometers of wildlife and environmental health. They are easy to observe, with hundreds of thousands of people in the UK able and willing to watch birds and make their observations available to science. This means that birds and people together can provide us with a highly cost-effective measure of the health of our environment. This approach also delivers significant societal benefits through health and well-being, additionally strengthening public engagement with science.

Established for over 80 years, the knowledge gathered by BTO is the longest-running and most comprehensive nature data set in the world. It tells us how wildlife has fared alongside rapid human development, and how it is affected by changes in land use and climate. Our data provide a natural barometer of the state of the environment in a fast-changing world. Many speak of an impending crisis for wildlife, and whilst our scientific knowledge confirms that the challenges for birds, and indeed for other biodiversity, are considerable, the narrative should not solely be about decline. Our stories should be about change, where appropriate about restoration and recovery and, where justified, about hope.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

BTO is confident in responding effectively to changes in the world around us. Aside from the environmental challenge, rapid political, technological and social changes require that we use new approaches to deliver our objectives. The UK's future relationship with Europe will have profound implications for the science and environment sectors in which we operate. The Government's ambitious 25 Year Plan for the Environment in England, and equivalent environmental policy developments in the devolved administrations, provide new opportunities for BTO to contribute underpinning knowledge and expertise.

Technological innovation brings new ways to sense and observe the natural world, enabling volunteers to monitor additional components of the environment. At the same time, mobile and web developments have rapidly increased access to data and information to all. New digital partnerships are required to deliver funds and maximise opportunities for public reach.

Connecting people with nature is a flourishing concept and there are significant opportunities for BTO to contribute through the experience of our volunteer network, and by opening participation to new audiences: we need more diverse voices and views. New partnerships in health, education and well-being, with established authenticity and traction, are required to address issues of diversity, such as improving opportunities for young people, those living in deprived areas and those looking to improve their mental health. Working with others, BTO can build greater empathy and support for birds, mass participation in, and engagement with, nature, and improve public understanding of science.



## OUR PLANS

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BTO has created this Agenda for Change which contains 10 actions that we need your help to deliver:

- Applying our scientific approach we will make the presence, absence, decline and recovery of birds a vivid and inspirational reality to many;
- We will create deeper, more resonant relationships with our supporters;
- We will engage more widely with a multiplicity of new audiences, working with others to shape and deliver the products of our scientific and inspirational knowledge;
- We will stay at the forefront of technological advancement in our quest for knowledge so it adds value to the observations of our citizen scientists;
- We will give as much weight to how we use and communicate our knowledge as we do to the rigorous scientific manner in which it is generated;

- We will work in partnership to deliver the necessary critical mass to meet and surpass both our own, and others', expectations of our work;
- We will become much more accessible and relevant to wider society, inspiring a new generation to participate in the understanding of, and engagement with, the natural world;
- We will realise the potential of the BTO volunteer community to help society to understand how nature improves well-being;
- We will identify and overcome barriers to engagement and participation with resonant communications and inspiring narratives;
- We will secure a significant uplift in the financial support available to us, using this to fuel our increasing contribution to the conservation of nature.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Andy Clements". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'A' and 'C'.

Dr Andy Clements, BTO CEO







## **British Trust for Ornithology**

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PHOTO CREDITS: Snipe by Niko Pekonen, Rose-ringed Parakeet by Gaurav Mittal, Curlew by Alan Price, BTO Bird Camp by Robert Read, Oystercatcher by Indrek Ladva, Birdwatchers by David Tipling, Bird ringer by Cathy Ryden