



# STATE OF THE PLANET ADDRESS



**WWF IS IN THE BEST POSSIBLE SHAPE TO ACHIEVE THE IMPACT WE NEED IN OUR URGENT, RENEWED MISSION TO BRING OUR WORLD BACK TO LIFE**



## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Looking back at the year in review, it is heartening to see the strength and depth of WWF-UK's achievements. All the more so since those successes were accomplished in the face of some very concerning backward steps from both political and business leaders on their net-zero and nature-positive commitments.

That rowing back was precisely the opposite of what we needed in the face of a climate and nature crisis. WWF and our partners remain determined to press forward. The businesses we work with are showing that climate and nature can be at the heart of their strategies.

It was encouraging to see the framework for creating transition plans to a net zero future welcomed by businesses. WWF has made a real difference, through our work on the government's taskforce – making the case for businesses to consider their impact on nature in their transition plans. Next, we need the new government to honour its pledge to make the plans mandatory.

We continued to achieve impressive results, working with partners, through the Save Our Wild Isles campaign. Notably this year, with the RSPB and £1 million in match funding from our partner Aviva, the campaign's Community Fund supported 20,000 people and almost 250 grassroots community projects to take action for nature. As part of the campaign, we created Nature's Workforce – an online resource to help employees call for nature-friendly action in their organisations. Take-up has been strong, with more than 26,000 people using the site in the first two months.

It was also announced in December that the Wild Isles TV series, presented by Sir David Attenborough and co-produced by the BBC with WWF and the RSPB, was 2023's third-most watched factual show in the UK. The series gave us an invaluable opportunity to reach many millions with compelling messages about the beauty and fragility of UK nature and the urgent need to protect and restore it.

You can read more in these pages about our many achievements this year. But in truth, there is a very great deal more to be done, and rapidly diminishing time. Indeed, it will be on the watch of the new UK government – five crucial years – that the world must act decisively if we're to bring nature and the climate back from the brink. And the UK must play its full part.

With this urgent need for change, colleagues worked with an external group who challenged our thinking as we developed the next stage of our strategy, which has now been endorsed by the board of trustees. Through a new, sharper focus we will prioritise tackling deforestation, especially where it is caused by food

production. We will support the WWF global network to achieve ever stronger impact to restore large-scale critical habitats for precious species. We will inspire greater numbers of people to take action for our natural world. And we will press governments, financial institutions and UK businesses to vastly raise their ambition to tackle climate change and restore nature.

Among the promising initiatives that could help is the work we have done with the UK grocery sector, towards a 2030 goal of halving the environmental impact of the average UK shopping basket. As we pass this to the Institute of Grocery Distribution, there is a real opportunity for this industry to make a big difference. We will watch its initiatives and progress with great interest.

We've strengthened our governance across the whole WWF network, as we apply the recommendations of an independent review to improve how we embed human rights in our conservation work programmes. The latest report sets out how we have recruited over 40 new positions across the network linked to safeguarding and human rights, and appointed 18 people from Indigenous and First Nations groups to governance roles. By January 2024, 96% of the 291 landscapes and seascapes where WWF works were being, or had been, screened for environmental and social risks. Every WWF office now has a clear complaints system at a country level to ensure we can be held to account. We will continue to strengthen our ways of working in this very important area.

Within WWF-UK, the guidance of the trustees has continued to strengthen our governance, and the board itself has continued to evolve. It covers a broad range of skills and knowledge and is well placed to give expert support to the focus of our new strategy – and we continue to diversify representation. I offer thanks to my fellow trustees for all their hard work.

Our sincere thanks also go to His Majesty King Charles III, following the announcement this year that he will continue his long-standing commitment to WWF-UK as our Patron. The influence of his lifelong support for nature and the climate was exemplified in his excellent speech at the UN climate conference in Dubai.

And I offer my thanks and congratulations to every member of staff at WWF for a very strong year, despite the many economic, political and environmental challenges. With their dedication, ability and commitment, WWF is in the best possible shape to achieve the impact we need in our urgent, renewed mission to bring our world back to life.

**Dave Lewis**





# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This year there have been alarming signs that our precious planet remains under grave pressure. And yet there have been reversals and softening of environmental commitments from both government and business. Despite this, we and our supporters remain determined. Our goal is even more urgent – to do everything possible to help bring our world back to life.

Our latest Living Planet Report shows that continued habitat destruction and pollution have contributed to a 73% fall in average global wildlife populations since 1970. And after a year of record monthly average temperatures, the UN secretary general noted the target of staying within the 1.5°C warming target was “hanging by a thread”.

Increasing temperatures have consequences. Coral reefs experienced the worst planet-wide mass bleaching on record. Wildfires blazed across many parts of the world, including widespread destruction of forests, homes, infrastructure and wildlife across parts of Greece this summer. In response, our supporters acted with speed and generosity to help those fighting the fires and restoring habitats and wildlife in the wake of the fires.

This is the indomitable spirit I see every day – from volunteers, partners, supporters and staff. And it gives me hope that while humanity may cause the problems, we can also be the solution.

This year, I saw how collaboration can bring results for vital nature restoration. In Scotland, I joined our partners and many volunteers who are helping to restore the UK’s decimated seagrass meadows and return native oysters to the Firth of Forth. With its incredible capacity to store carbon and provide habitat for a huge abundance of wildlife, seagrass offers enormous potential. And in Wales, I saw first-hand how we’re helping a community-owned regenerative ocean farm measure the benefits of their sustainable seaweed project. Our projects across the UK are showing how ambitious ideas can make a difference. And they’re testing solutions that could help other nations.

The majority of the work we fund and support is overseas. I’ve been delighted to see the innovative coral restoration work WWF is supporting in the Philippines. And the large-scale community-based conservation our fundraising is supporting in Tanzania and Kenya. This work is restoring migratory corridors for wildlife such as elephants and lions, and reducing the risk of wildlife destroying crops or harming people. And on a visit to China, I met with partners to discuss how a sustainable approach to supply chains could be a force for good, especially in tackling deforestation.

Nearly eight million hectares of primary forest have been lost globally in the last two years alone, which is why protecting forests was central to our campaigning this year. We launched WWF’s Forest Pathways report, a blueprint on how to protect and restore the world’s forests. We hosted Colombia’s former president Juan Manuel Santos and Indigenous activist and member of WWF-Brazil’s board Txai Surui to speak about the fate of the Amazon at our State of the Planet Address. This supported our successful call for the UK government to announce new legislation to protect forests, which will require companies to ensure they avoid products from illegally deforested land. We continue to push for this law to be passed, so we can rid our supermarket shelves of goods that contribute to illegal deforestation.

We stepped up our urgent work in the Amazon and our support resulted in a new national park being announced in Colombia to protect some of the world’s richest biodiversity. It’s an important step towards securing lasting protection for 30% of Colombia’s land by 2030. Two of our ambassadors, Ellie Goulding and Cel Spellman, helped us shine a global spotlight on our work to protect the Amazon as they visited Colombia and Brazil. Deforestation is slowing in both countries, but there is still much to be done.

Our new strategy will continue to focus on tackling deforestation, as we plan and shape our work for the next three years. We will build on our strengths as we redouble our efforts to get the world back on track so it can meet essential global commitments to nature and the climate.

We’ll strive for more successes in protecting wildlife, such as this year’s announcement that Kenya’s black rhino population has more than doubled since the 1980s, to more than 1,000. And we’ll use our scientific knowhow to help plan the most effective conservation.

This year we supported the first national scientific survey of snow leopards in India. Our global reach and strong relationships with local partners, communities and Indigenous peoples gives us a unique ability to protect species and restore critical landscapes.

We know that as well as relying on nature for food, water and clean air, we depend on a resilient and functioning natural world for a healthy society and economy. So in our new strategy, we’ll build on the role we’ve played as part of the UK government’s Transition Plan Taskforce. We’ll continue to press financial institutions and big businesses to speed up their transition to an economy that actively helps to tackle climate change and supports our precious natural world.

None of this progress with governments would be possible without being able to demonstrate a strong mandate for environmental action. It doesn’t come much bigger than the Restore Nature Now march in London, which was possibly the UK’s largest ever gathering in support of nature. With many colleagues from WWF, I joined more than 200 organisations and 60,000 supporters of all ages at the march. Together, we showed the new UK government that the public really does want action.

Speaking up for nature and wanting urgent change is what unites our supporters and partners. Despite a cost of living crisis, we have seen your continued generosity and commitment. Together, you have helped us raise more than £90 million this year, with an incredible 319,000 new people choosing to give us their valuable support. I am enormously grateful to each and every one of you who has volunteered your time and expertise, taken campaigning actions or made a donation, however large or small. Thank you. Your support inspires everything we do.

**Tanya Steele**

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**THE INDOMITABLE SPIRIT I SEE EVERY DAY - FROM VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, SUPPORTERS AND STAFF - GIVES ME HOPE THAT WHILE HUMANITY MAY CAUSE THE PROBLEMS, WE CAN ALSO BE THE SOLUTION**

