

THE BY BROOK SUSTAINABILITY CALENDAR

MAY – NATURE

Welcome to the latest edition of the By Brook Sustainability Calendar. This month we look at nature and specifically how humans are impacting the natural world.

For too long, people have seen themselves as separate from the natural world; we have sought to control nature for our own benefits. In response, David Attenborough has stated, 'If we have become powerful enough to change the entire planet, then we are powerful enough to moderate our impact – to work with nature rather than against it.'

What happens when we seek to control nature?

We get a biodiversity crisis. The Living Planet Index tells us that populations of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles have seen an alarming average drop of 68% since 1970. So in two human generations the planet has lost over two thirds of its animal population.

Why is this a problem?

Species are interconnected. Each species interacts with other species that produce benefits to people, like clean air, clean water, and healthy soils for efficient food production. When one species goes extinct or its population declines, then other species are affected, negatively impacting our ecosystem and the benefits it provides.

When does this happen?

This is happening right now. If we were coalminers, the dead canaries would be piled up around us.

Is this happening everywhere?

Unfortunately, yes. The Living Planet Index shows that the Caribbean and Latin America regions have suffered the largest declines, while freshwater habitats are the most degraded. Here in the UK, we have little to be proud of, sitting in the bottom 10% of the world's most nature-depleted countries. Our green and pleasant land is increasingly devoid of biodiversity. Seventy bird species are on the Red List, meaning they are threatened with extinction. This includes the swift and house martin, and even the once-ubiquitous house sparrow.

Isn't nature resilient?

Fortunately, yes, but we need to give nature chance to thrive. In the UK, attention has turned from individual nature reserves to networks for nature, with a focus on 're-wilding' – the large-scale restoration of ecosystems to a point where nature can take care of itself. Re-wilding seeks to reinstate natural processes and, where appropriate, missing species – allowing them to shape the landscape and its habitats. For more, see www.rewildingbritain.org.uk



Beaver on the River Avon
Photo by Bevis Watts

What missing species are Important?

While all species play their part in an ecosystem, some are particularly vital – known as keystone species – often predators such as lynx and wolves (hunted to extinction in Britain 1,600 and 250 years ago respectively) but also grazers and browsers such as wild boar and wild horses. One keystone species is the beaver, dubbed nature's great engineer, recently reported living wild on the River Avon just a few miles from here. Will we see beavers on the By Brook within the next few years?

What can we do in a practical way?

- Let parts of your garden go wild.
- Grow organic.
- Stop using pesticides and herbicides – for more info see www.gardenorganic.org.uk
- Plant nectar rich flowers and shrubs and don't mow your lawn in May to encourage bees and other pollinators - www.plantlife.org.uk
- Put up bird, bat and insect boxes - www.rspb.org.uk
- Make a pond - even a tiny one is great for nature www.wiltshirewildlife.org.uk
- Plant trees and hedges on your own land - www.woodlandtrust.org.uk
- Plant trees with other organisations – with communities in the drylands of Africa (www.treeaid.org) or more locally in the Avon River catchment area (www.avonneedstrees.org.uk)
- Become a member of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and other conservation bodies (many referenced in this article) - join their campaigns or even become a volunteer.

But most of all get out and enjoy nature this spring and summer

We care for the things we love, so make sure you revel in the wonders of nature;

- Simply walk the footpaths of our wonderful By Brook Valley - keep an eye out for otters especially at dawn and dusk.
- Have a great day out at Slimbridge, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust HQ near the River Severn, where you can canoe or coracle through the reeds - www.wwt.org.uk
- Walk through the meadows at Clattinger Farm near Cirencester in June to see spectacular wildflowers – orchids, meadow saffron and tubular water-dropwort... www.wiltshirewildlife.org
- Get up early in May to listen to the dawn chorus - you won't regret it - or forget it - www.rspb.org.uk
- Watch and listen out for our summer visitors, especially swifts, swallows and house martins - these amazing birds fly all the way from Africa, some covering over 6,000 miles!
- While you're out, use an app like Seek to become a nature identification expert - www.inaturalist.org

And finally, an appeal

Are you a landowner wanting to enhance nature on your land? Please get in contact to see if we can bring together some funding and volunteers for your project.

Next month we cover Water. Meanwhile, if you have comments or ideas about any topics we've covered or should cover, contact us at mike@vertigosdc.com



Canoeing at Slimbridge