

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

We must breathe new life into increasingly fragile ecosystems across planet

The UN's Decade on Ecosystem Restoration heralds a massive international effort to restore the natural world, writes **May East**



Ecosystems are highly dynamic communities of plants, animals and micro-organisms. From forests and mountains to freshwater rivers, oceans and coral reefs, the vitality and diversity of Earth's ecosystems are homes to around eight million species, including humans.

The Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 declared by the UN aims to massively scale up restoration efforts to breathe new life into our planet's increasingly fragile ecosystems. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), every year the world is losing 4.7 million hectares of forests – an area bigger than Denmark – and in the last 100 years, half of the world's wetlands have been degraded or drained. As a result, one million species are on the verge of extinction.

The Decade on Ecosystem Restoration has been backed by countries from all latitudes and development stages, expressing support for a massive international effort to restore the natural world, enhance water supply and food security, and fight the climate crisis.

Launching the initiative, Inger Andersen, head of UNEP said: "Pulling together in a global movement for restoration is key to making our societies and economies stronger and fitter for the future."

The UN Decade recognises the vital role forested landscapes play in stabilising the climate by removing up to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. It offers support for 3.2 billion people whose livelihoods are at risk from deforestation caused by unbridled resource extraction and large-scale, resource-intensive agribusiness expansion such as the soya industry in the Brazilian Amazon.

There are already millions of hectares of terrestrial and marine ecosystems under restoration, supported by efforts like the Green Restoration Camps, Global Mangrove Alliance and the Bonn Challenge. Ecosystem restoration manifests itself through actions as varied as cultivating new mangroves,

grass or other plantings, natural or assisted regeneration, agroforestry, soil enhancement measures, or improved and sustainable management of land and sea. In Scotland, Trees for Life have planted nearly two million trees and are restoring the original Caledonian Forests.

The urban ecosystem will also be an important focus of the coming decade. Urban areas occupy less than three per cent of the Earth's land surface, yet are home to more than half of its people. Despite their steel and concrete, bridges and roads, cities and towns are living ecosystems whose condition profoundly impacts on the quality of our lives. Functioning urban ecosystems help clean our air and water, cool urban heat islands, and support our well-being by shielding us from hazards and providing opportunities for rest and play. They can also host a surprising amount of biodiversity.

Restoring urban ecosystems requires awareness and commitment from both citizens and decision-makers. The design challenge is to bring new life rather than merely sustain the currently degraded conditions of soils, green spaces, water courses and hinterlands. It means questioning how activities like food systems, land development, and transportation can be designed to harmonise with and replenish local natural systems. It also means adopting a place-centred approach to counteract the trend of master plans and scale-ability where a particular approach is rolled out around the city with minimal regard to the uniqueness of places.

This decade is about building resilience, reducing vulnerability and increasing the ability of systems to adapt to extreme events. We should welcome the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the development of nature-based solutions that enable us to adapt to climate change, reduce poverty, water and food security and restore our natural world.

May East, Chief International Officer, UNITAR Fellow, Gaia Education

The Big Farmland



Participants are helping to ensure the survival of many of our most cherished farmland bird species, writes **Dave Parish**

Last year more than 1,500 farmers across Britain overcame challenging February conditions to make the 2020 Big Farmland Bird Count (BFBC) the biggest across the UK since it was launched in 2014.

More than 120 bird species were recorded across 1.4 million acres in the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) initiative. Because of the February storms the Big Farmland Bird Count organisers decided to extend the count window by a week in response to calls from farmers who wanted to take part but couldn't do so as thousands of acres were inundated with floodwater.

The UK-wide 2020 count recorded an impressive 25 red-listed species. Of these, fieldfares, starlings, linnets and lapwings were the four most abundant, with over 67,000 spotted in total, equating to 24 per cent of all species recorded. The five most abundant birds seen overall across the UK were wood pigeons, starlings, lapwings, black-headed gulls and rooks.

In Scotland 60 farmers took part and recorded 81 species across 81,362 acres. 19 of these species were red-listed, with the five most commonly seen farmland species in Scotland being blackbird, pheasant, robin, blue tit and carrion crow.

It would be great if more farmers and landowners were to participate for the 2021 count which takes place from 5-14 February 2021 and, as in previous years, it continues to offer a simple means of recording the effect of conservation schemes currently being initiated by farmers and gamekeepers on their land such as supplementary feeding or growing wild bird seed crops and game cover crops. It's

also a good way to assess the overall health of our farmland bird populations.

Farmers and gamekeepers are vital in helping to ensure the future survival of many of our most cherished farmland bird species such as skylark, yellowhammer and wild grey partridges. They manage the largest songbird habitat in this country on their land but frequently their efforts to reverse bird declines are largely unrecorded. The Big Farmland Bird Count can help to remedy this.

From our research at our Allerton Project farm in Leicestershire and also now at our Scottish Demonstration Farm at Auchnerran in Aberdeenshire the Trust is gaining a greater understanding of the needs of farmland game and wildlife and the importance of the combined benefit for example of habitat management, winter feeding and targeted legal predator control in the breeding season. We have also come to understand the benefits that can be gained from long-term monitoring of bird numbers in order to identify trends in wildlife populations.

The Big Farmland Bird Count gives farmers and gamekeepers an opportunity to show what their conservation efforts deliver on the ground, not just for game but for many other farmland species and allow farmers to discover the different and often extensive range of birds that are on the farm.

How can land managers and farmers get involved? Download and print the count sheet at www.bfbc.org.uk

Then between 5 and 14 February spend about 30 minutes recording the species and number of birds seen on one particular area of the farm –



somewhere with a good view of around 2 ha of the farm is ideal.

The types of habitat and cropping on and adjacent to the count site should be recorded too to help provide the Trust with more detail about your count location.

To see the highest number of birds we would recommend that the site includes or is close to an area of game or wild seed mix or somewhere that supplementary feeding takes place.

Bird Count is back

↑ The five most commonly seen farmland species in Scotland last year were the blackbird (above), pheasant, robin, blue tit and carrion crow



of overwhelming feelings and return to much needed calmness.

A common example is helping teachers recognise how stress and anxiety are held in the body creating tension headaches, backache and general physical exhaustion. These symptoms can accumulate in a vicious cycle of flow mood, a sense of feeling overwhelmed, sleep disruption and irritability.

Add in the pandemic and we have now, eight months later, a workforce which can often see little light at the end of the tunnel. Additional stress and more to think about it, without the capacity to manage it. For these reasons, Place2Think in our partner schools, and as part of our Scottish Government outreach programme, is more in demand than ever.

Place2Think can even start with someone "dropping in" at the class-

room door, before school starts, helping to remind teachers to breathe and to do what is manageable; to stay alongside their pupils and not expect from themselves or others, more than they can give. This reminder allows the teacher to mirror the same to their class and start their day calmer without transmitting the invisible sensory rocket that anxiety can often be.

It's fantastic that Place2Be can offer virtual Place2Think sessions to school leaders or teachers across Scotland for

free. We don't know what the long-term mental health impact of the pandemic will be, but we do know that school staff will be the ones facing it.

Visit place2be.org.uk/place2think to find out more about Place2Think sessions. Place2Be is grateful for its generous supporters, including the People's Postcode Lottery. **Patricia Lyon, Area Manager, Place2Be**

Teachers need a space sit back and reflect – so we provide it

School staff have somewhere to go to find support in Place2Think, says **Patricia Lyon**

2020 was an undeniably tough year for many, and teachers are no exception. As a children's mental health charity that works within schools, we have heard directly from many teachers who are tired, stressed and in need of more support.

Too often, school staff take worries and frustrations home to friends or family and receive unwanted advice, or worse a dismissive "What are you talking about, teachers get all those school holidays? You've got loads of time to unwind". However, the reality is that many teachers are working at home during holidays preparing for the next term or trying to find time for online training that they didn't get chance to complete during the past term. Place2Think is our service designed for school staff. It provides a confiden-

tial reflective space, individually or in small groups, to process, ponder, cry and laugh about the varied stresses and conundrums faced by everyday teaching in schools. It's the kind of space that so many of us have felt the need for, over the past nine months.

While it can be a place for tears and swear words Place2Think is more often calming, quiet, reflective – a space to switch off and process what is going on inside oneself. These frustrations and conundrums might be personal and need referring on for counselling or wider support, but more often Place2Think can catch these frustrations and conundrums before they grow into more serious issues. Time in Place2Think can provide support by allowing teachers and school leaders to think through and understand a problem earlier, helping to break the wave

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