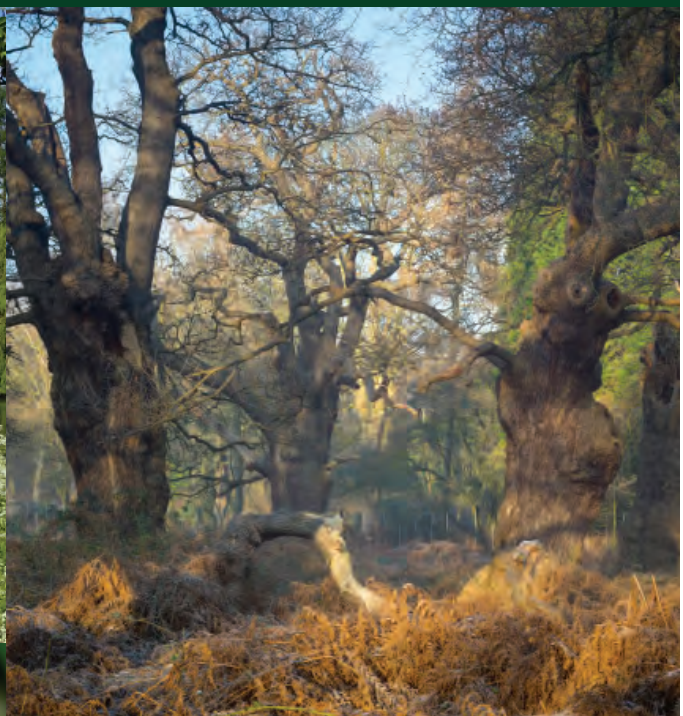




THE
ROYAL
PARKS

BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

2020 - 2030





FOREWORD

The landscapes and wildlife of the Royal Parks have both shaped and been shaped by human activity since before the parks' creation nearly 600 years ago. The importance of biodiversity in our 5,000 acres of historic parkland in the heart of London is reflected in the names of the parks – from The Green Park to Bushy Park. In recent years, The Royal Parks has become a leader in the protection and encouragement of wildlife within public parks.

As well as conserving nature for its intrinsic value, The Royal Parks provides opportunities for people to experience, interact with and appreciate nature and heritage alongside a wide range of recreational and educational opportunities. Access to nature delivers significant health and wellbeing benefits for people. Space to relax, exercise and socialise, with the opportunity to experience nature are among the important reasons why people visit the Royal Parks, and ever more so in the Covid-19 pandemic. Volunteering is also a key part of our story, providing essential support in the management of the parks and wildlife, whilst we strive to provide the best experience for our volunteers.

We are facing a global Climate Emergency. Our parks and their wildlife are subject to numerous and increasing pressures, including climate change, pollution, the spread of animal and plant diseases, as well as the demands of ever rising visitor numbers. Over the past 50 years there has been an unprecedented and accelerating deterioration of nature, with The United Nations stating in 2019 that "The loss of species, ecosystems and genetic diversity is already a global and generational threat to human well-being... Protecting the invaluable contributions of nature to people will be the defining challenge of decades to come."

As a charity, we have the opportunity to build on our expertise in the management of parks for wildlife and people, to help combat these challenges to our natural environment including through positive engagement with our visitors. This ten-year framework aims to deliver transformative change to help us, our partners and visitors to conserve and enhance our rich natural heritage for future generations.

Loyd Grossman CBE
The Royal Parks Chairman



THE ROYAL PARKS BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

Having shaped and been shaped by the development of the parks over their 600 year history, habitats and species are integral to the landscapes, history and sense of place of the Royal Parks. The wildlife of the parks is greatly valued by our visitors, and access to nature provides a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits for people and local communities. We also have legal duties to protect our nature conservation designations and protected species, and a responsibility to maintain the parks, including their biodiversity, in good condition for future generations.

The landscapes and rich biodiversity of the Royal Parks reflect their management as Royal parklands and hunting grounds, with increasing public access provided since 1845. We are working with volunteers and partners to lead the way in the provision of wildlife rich habitats in urban parks. The parks provide some of London's best opportunities

for people to experience and interact with wildlife, and to escape the bustle of the city, whilst the landscapes, habitats and species of the parks form some of London's most iconic views, framing state ceremonies and events which attract visitors from around the world.

Our formation as a charity in 2017 has provided the opportunity to take stock, to consolidate and strengthen how we deliver for biodiversity. The accelerating loss of nature and climate change threaten our quality of life.

The Royal Parks recently declared a Climate Emergency. Although we have been committed to improving our sustainability for many years, we recognise that we must urgently do more to both reduce the impact of how we operate, and maximise the delivery of the environmental and societal benefits which the parks provide for London and our visitors, with biodiversity enhancement key.

OUR 2030 VISION FOR BIODIVERSITY

The Royal Parks will be healthier, more resilient and better connected for wildlife and people in the heart of London.

OUR OBJECTIVES

To achieve this Vision, we aim to deliver three core objectives:

1. To increase the resilience of biodiversity in the Royal Parks to Climate Change and deliver wider sustainability objectives.
2. To protect, conserve and enhance priority and characteristic habitats and species in the Royal Parks by identifying and delivering effective habitat management and creation projects.
3. To provide sensitive and sustainable access to nature for all; welcoming, engaging and working with visitors and volunteers to deliver long-term benefits for wildlife and people's wellbeing.

There are three key approaches which help us deliver these objectives:

- Maintaining and developing strong and effective partnerships.
- Developing and implementing best working practices.
- Identifying, prioritising and delivering biodiversity actions.



THE BIODIVERSITY OF THE ROYAL PARKS

Biodiversity is the variety of species of wild plants, animals, fungi and other organisms, together with the ecosystems that support them, and which are vital for our health and wellbeing.



170,000 trees
(1461 veteran trees in Richmond Park alone)

15 miles of river
(and two lost rivers)

Nearly 1,000ha of grassland
(1/3 of which is acid grassland)

More than 400,000 records of over 6,000 species

4,720 species of invertebrate, and counting
(including species new to science such as the Bushy gnat *Grzegorzekia bushyae*)

3 billion ants in 400,000 anthills in Richmond Park



13 children's playgrounds and 6 educational facilities

Modern hockey, parkrun and streetlights were born in our parks

Over 1000 volunteers working for nature

Over 77 million visitors

30,000 people engaged with learning programmes

Over 600 structures
(195 of which are listed)

THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY

Nature is essential for human existence: sustaining the quality of air, water and soils; regulating our climate; providing pollination and controlling pests; and reducing the impact of natural hazards. Despite this, globally biodiversity is under unprecedented pressure. The United Nations identified in 2019 that around 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, with grave implications for people around the world.

Species Extinctions

- The parks have been managed more positively for wildlife for the past 30 years. However, we know that some species are declining, for example amphibians due to increased summer drought, whilst pollinator populations are decreasing globally. The relative isolation of the parks increases the risk of local extinctions.
- We strive to increase the resilience of the parks through targeted management, for example providing forage for pollinators, and increasing water retention of ponds.
- Similarly, an increasing number of invasive species inhabit the parks, some of which cause harm to habitats and other wildlife. Grey squirrels damage trees; floating pennywort, water fern and New Zealand swamp stonecrop choke waterbodies; whilst oak processionary moth poses a risk to human health and reduces tree vitality.
- We will continue to work with partners to remain constantly vigilant to these threats, and to implement evidence-led and co-ordinated action informed by best practice and up-to-date pest control and biosecurity strategies.

Habitat Loss and Damage

- The Royal Parks are subjected to a number of pressures which impact the extent and value of wildlife habitats. For example, ever increasing numbers of visitors are eroding and widening footpaths with an associated loss of grassland habitats. Soil compaction from access can impact grassland condition as well as tree health.
- We work hard to improve the quality, diversity and robustness of habitats, for example through grassland management and reedbed creation, and increasingly protect sensitive habitats, such as fencing veteran trees.

Wildlife and Tree Pests and Diseases

- Tree populations and the character of the parks are being harmed by established and emerging pests and diseases. We are actively tackling bleeding canker of horse chestnut, acute oak decline, massaria fungal disease of London plane and Phytophthora of sweet chestnut, for example. We are working with partners such as Forest Research and DEFRA to monitor such pests and diseases, whilst undertaking and supporting research as to how best to respond

THE BENEFITS OF ACCESS TO NATURE

The Royal Parks welcome over 77 million visitors a year, the majority living and working locally as well as UK and international tourists. 96% of visitors surveyed in 2017-2018 stated that experiencing nature was an important reason why they visited our parks. There is extensive evidence of the benefits that access to nature provides for people.

Health and Wellbeing

- The Royal Parks provide some of London's largest areas of natural greenspace, where people can unwind and escape the bustle of the city.
- The parks provide a wide range of opportunities for exercise, whether a short walk in a lunch break, joining a structured walk or running event, or playing sport. Increased exercise helps combat a range of health issues, such as obesity which is estimated to affect around 1 in every 4 adults and around 1 in every 5 children aged 10 to 11 in England. Research, including by the charity Mind, identifies how spending time in nature can combat mental health problems including anxiety and depression.
- Some doctors prescribe access to nature, recognising the range of health benefits this provides in a very cost-effective way, and there is potential for 'nature' or 'social' prescribing within the Parks.
- Volunteering in the Parks, such as bulb planting, habitat management and wildlife recording, provides essential support for park management, whilst providing health and wellbeing benefits for people

Engagement

- We provide opportunities for children and adults to experience and learn about nature. Access to nature has been shown to help physical, educational, social and emotional development. 'Nature deficit disorder' is of increasing concern.

Climate Change Mitigation

- The parks help mitigate the effects of Climate Change, controlling storm water

and acting as 'heat sinks' to combat the urban heat island effect. A recent study estimated that Kensington Gardens generated an evening cooling effect from 20 metres up to 440 metres beyond the park boundary.

Valuing Nature

These and other benefits can be valued through natural capital accounting.

A Natural Capital Account (2017) prepared for London's public greenspace found that London's public parks have a gross asset value in excess of £91 billion, help Londoners avoid £950 million every year in health costs and support recreational activities with a value of £926 million per year.

A 2019 study has estimated that the net natural capital asset value of Greenwich Park is £375 million.



WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY AND LEGAL DUTY TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY

The Royal Parks charity manages the parks on behalf of the UK Government, with the parks owned by the Crown. We are responsible for the protection of their landscapes, biodiversity and heritage for future generations, and the provision of parks for people.

We have a legal duty to maintain the condition of the designated features of internationally and nationally protected sites, with The Royal Parks managing one Special Area of Conservation, two Sites of Special Scientific Interest, one National Nature Reserve and a World Heritage Site. All our parks are also identified as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, with the value of these SINCs, wildlife corridors and biodiversity recognised in the London Plan and local planning policy.

We also need to consider protected species, such as bats, great crested newts, reptiles, badgers and nesting birds.

With Brexit, the legal framework for biodiversity is changing, for example with the passage of the Environment Bill through Parliament in 2020. We will monitor how these changes might affect the way we work, for example the introduction of a Nature Recovery Network and requirements for development to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain.

BIODIVERSITY IS KEY TO OUR CHARITABLE PURPOSE

Biodiversity forms the focus of one of our five charitable objects:

- To maintain and develop the biodiversity of the Royal Parks, including the protection of their wildlife and natural environment, together with promoting sustainability in the management and use of the Royal Parks*

Biodiversity also runs as a thread through and is a balancing act with the other four charitable objects, as a key aspect of the Parks' landscapes and heritage, and given its importance to visitors and local communities:

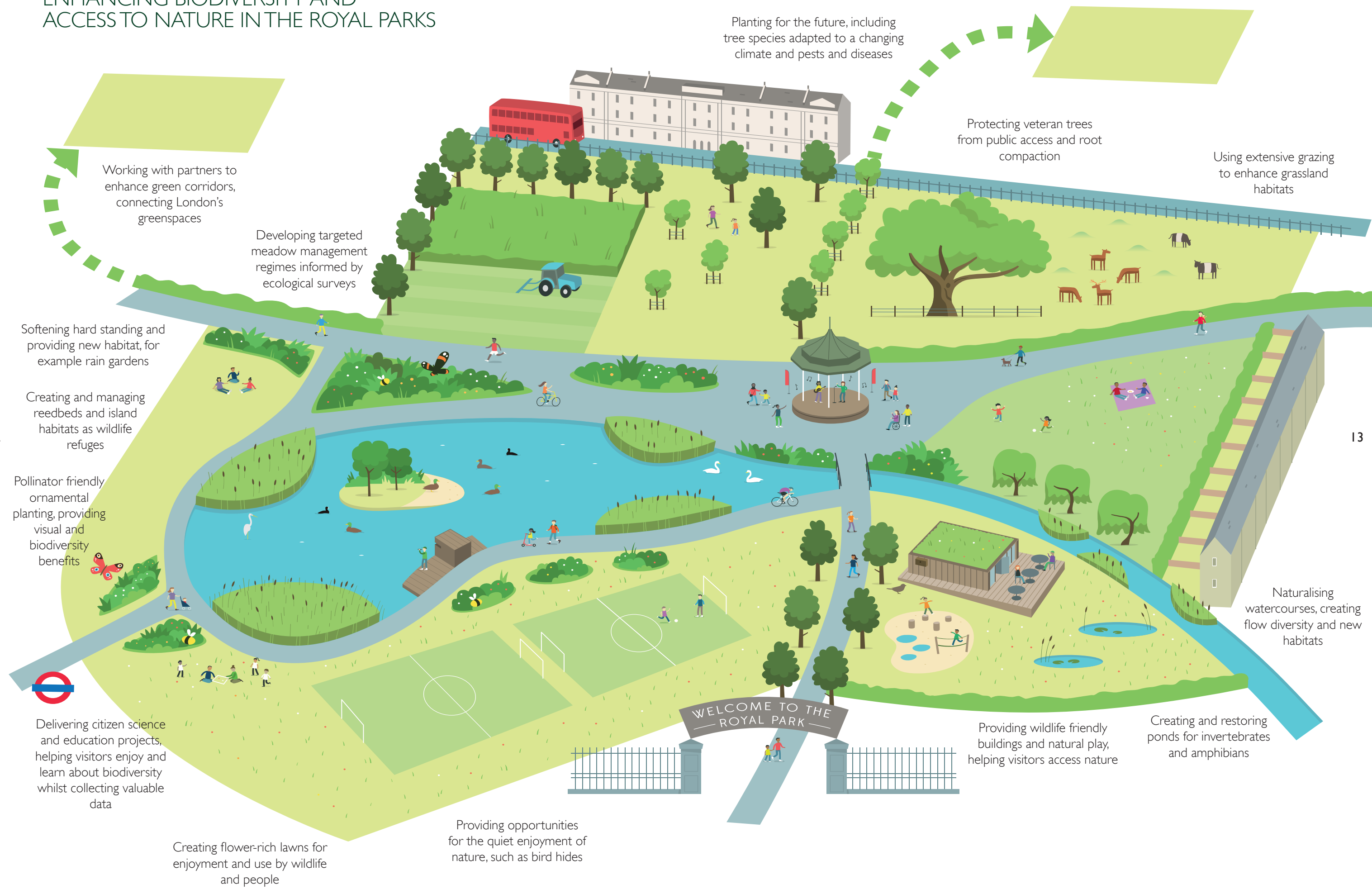
- To protect, conserve, maintain and care for the Royal Parks, including their natural and designed landscapes and built environment, to a high standard consistent with their historic, horticultural, environmental and architectural importance*
- To promote the use and enjoyment of the Royal Parks for public recreation, health and well-being including through the provision of sporting and cultural activities and events which effectively advance the objects*
- To support the advancement of education by promoting public understanding of the history, culture, heritage and natural environment of the Royal Parks and (by way of comparison) elsewhere*
- To promote national heritage including by hosting and facilitating ceremonies of state or of national importance within and in the vicinity of the Royal Parks*

OUR 2030 VISION FOR BIODIVERSITY

The Royal Parks will be more resilient, healthier and better connected for wildlife and people in the heart of London.



ENHANCING BIODIVERSITY AND ACCESS TO NATURE IN THE ROYAL PARKS



Working with partners to enhance green corridors, connecting London's greenspaces

Planting for the future, including tree species adapted to a changing climate and pests and diseases

Protecting veteran trees from public access and root compaction

Using extensive grazing to enhance grassland habitats

Developing targeted meadow management regimes informed by ecological surveys

Softening hard standing and providing new habitat, for example rain gardens

Creating and managing reedbeds and island habitats as wildlife refuges

Pollinator friendly ornamental planting, providing visual and biodiversity benefits

Delivering citizen science and education projects, helping visitors enjoy and learn about biodiversity whilst collecting valuable data

Creating flower-rich lawns for enjoyment and use by wildlife and people

Providing opportunities for the quiet enjoyment of nature, such as bird hides

Providing wildlife friendly buildings and natural play, helping visitors access nature

Creating and restoring ponds for invertebrates and amphibians

Naturalising watercourses, creating flow diversity and new habitats

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WELCOME TO THE ROYAL PARK

INCREASE RESILIENCE

Objective 1:

To increase the resilience of biodiversity in the Royal Parks to Climate Change and deliver wider sustainability objectives.

Climate Change and environmental degradation (such as water, air, soil and light pollution) have been identified as major contributors to declining global biodiversity, all of which also impact our health and wellbeing. Urban areas such as London are particularly vulnerable, with rising temperatures adding to the urban heat island effect, and legal air pollution limits regularly exceeded.

The Royal Park's Climate Emergency declaration states our commitment to do more to address these environmental challenges.

The parks provide a wide range of benefits for our city and visitors to help mitigate environmental change, including carbon capture, flood and drought alleviation, cooling for people and wildlife, and providing access to nature. We will take action to maximise these benefits, increasing the resilience of the parks and London to environmental change, whilst also addressing our own environmental footprint.

We will become even greener, reduce our carbon footprint and be an exemplar of good practice.

We aim to:

- Following our declaration of Climate Emergency, and led by the Sustainability Strategy, deliver coordinated action across The Royal Parks to deliver mitigation and increase resilience through all of our activities, from management planning, implementation of park management, to the delivery of engagement and learning activities.
- Better understand, maximise and communicate the benefits that the Royal Parks provide for visitors and biodiversity, developing a Natural Capital Account and Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Parks.
- Develop and implement management strategies to combat threats and increase the resilience of the parks' landscapes and biodiversity, including Tree Selection Guidance and Biosecurity policies and procedures.

PROTECT, CONSERVE AND ENHANCE

Objective 2:

To protect, conserve and enhance priority and characteristic habitats and species in the Royal Parks by identifying and delivering effective habitat management and creation projects.

The Royal Parks provide nature reserves through London, supporting a diverse range of habitats and species: from those of international value to those which are characteristic of London and the parks. However, global biodiversity is facing unparalleled threats, and it is recognised that traditional approaches to nature conservation have failed to halt biodiversity loss.

The challenge to The Royal Parks is to protect, conserve and enhance habitats across all our parks, addressing shared characteristics and challenges but also recognising priorities of individual parks. We seek to prioritise our activities to maximise the best use of resources, whilst ensuring that we learn from and share our extensive experience to deliver the best outcomes for wildlife and improve the wellbeing of visitors and local communities within our historic landscapes.

We aim to:

- Develop and deliver biodiversity survey and monitoring proposals for each park, focussing on their characteristic and priority habitats and species
- Develop management guidance for Grasslands; Woodland and Scrub; Trees; Waterbodies and Wetlands; Horticulture and the Built Environment.
- Deliver biodiversity enhancement projects including hedgerow and native/scrub planting; creating and restoring breeding habitats for birds and amphibians; and delivering specific management and restoration plans for key habitats in each park including lakes and grasslands.
- Deliver biodiversity enhancement and engagement programmes, such as Mission: Invertebrate and Greenwich Park Revealed, complementing wider volunteering and learning initiatives.



ACCESS TO NATURE

Objective 3:

To provide sensitive and sustainable access to nature for all; welcoming, engaging and working with visitors and volunteers to deliver long-term benefits for wildlife and people's wellbeing.

We know how important access to urban greenspace is for people's health and wellbeing. However, the increasing number of visitors to the parks are impacting wildlife, through issues such as trampling and erosion to wildlife feeding.

It is therefore critical that we take sustained and coordinated action to address these impacts, whilst ensuring that all visitors continue to have the opportunity to experience nature now and in the future.

We will continue to welcome people into the parks, whilst engaging and educating visitors to engender a greater sense of awareness and appreciation of nature.

We aim to:

- Develop a series of The Royal Parks Position Statements to identify how The Royal Parks will provide for positive public engagement whilst encouraging responsible behaviour by visitors.
- Monitor and develop the Volunteer Community Ranger service which is running in Richmond, Greenwich and Bushy Parks.
- Strengthen and grow our volunteer and engagement programmes to help deliver biodiversity and wellbeing benefits, providing access to nature for all.
- Provide clear and consistent ecological messages to the public through signage, interpretation materials and events.



DELIVERING THE BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

There are three key approaches which will ensure we help us to deliver effective and sustainable change in relation to our biodiversity objectives:

- *Maintaining and developing strong and effective partnerships.*
- *Developing and implementing best working practices.*
- *Identifying, prioritising and delivering biodiversity actions.*

Maintaining and developing strong and effective partnerships

The value of our existing partnerships is huge:

- The Royal Parks' dedicated and experienced volunteer network, Friends and Wildlife Groups and partners deliver public engagement, habitat management and biological recording activities.
- Relationships with other charities, and national and local Government deliver strategic benefits for biodiversity.
- Our work with research establishments is particularly important. We are not alone in the challenges we face, and by working with others can deliver much more.

We will continue to nurture existing and build new relationships, delivering effective and sustainable outcomes for biodiversity.



Developing and implementing best working practices

The Royal Parks benefits from over 600 years of experience managing the parks, with committed and skilled staff, partners and volunteers delivering a wide range of objectives and actions.

However, we face increasing and significant challenges. Although charitable status brings with it opportunities to help address these, it also presents funding risks.

We plan to work even harder and smarter to deliver for biodiversity. We want to consolidate and build on the wealth and breadth of experience and expertise present throughout our organisation, developing our working practices to deliver stronger, more coordinated and more sustainable benefits for wildlife and people.

Identifying, prioritising and delivering biodiversity action

The Framework will be guided through a 10 Year Action Plan, and both will be updated as required to respond to developments in national and local biodiversity policy, any significant changes in the use and environment of the parks, together with the management needs of the Royal Parks.

The initial years of the Action Plan will focus on consolidating and coordinating our existing expertise, procedures and tools to best deliver for biodiversity.

We intend to prioritise and deliver biodiversity action from the outset. Decision making will be based on the best available evidence, including scientific surveys and professional judgement, and be guided by The Royal Parks management planning process.

Informed by our knowledge of the parks' biodiversity, we plan to identify Characteristic and Priority Habitat and Species for each park.

Through the assessment of the Significance and Condition of these features, appropriate Actions will be identified, prioritised and delivered.

CONDITION	GOOD	REINFORCE	REINFORCE AND CONSERVE	CONSERVE
	MEDIUM	REINFORCE AND CREATE	CONSERVE AND CREATE	CONSERVE AND RESTORE
	POOR	CREATE	CREATE AND RESTORE	RESTORE
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
		SIGNIFICANCE →		

ACTIONS FOR BIODIVERSITY

CONDITION	GOOD	REINFORCE > Reinforce hedgerows , planting 250m every year. > Control erosion in Richmond Park, whilst reinforcing access for all .	REINFORCE AND CONSERVE > Reinforce waterfowl populations in the central parks as of London importance > Conserve Richmond and Bushy Parks' Woodlands through agri-environment schemes.	CONSERVE > Maintain veteran tree populations through management and planting. > Conserve Greenwich Park's deer herd by enhancing the Wilderness.
	MEDIUM	REINFORCE AND CREATE > By 2022, create pollinator friendly planting in 50% of all ornamental beds > Publish a Green Infrastructure Audit and Strategy in 2021.	CONSERVE AND CREATE > Conserve and create 5,000m2 of Meadow grassland > Continue to grow and create Conservation Volunteer teams in the central parks	CONSERVE AND RESTORE > Identify options for extensive grazing to restore acid grassland . > Investigate the natural capital value of soils through the Parks in 2020/2021.
	POOR	CREATE > Create 20,000m2 of flower-rich lawns > Install at least 10 bird boxes each year to create new nesting opportunities	CREATE AND RESTORE > Create an Invasive Species Monitoring Framework in 2021. > In 2020/21 restore great crested newt breeding ponds in Richmond and Bushy Parks	RESTORE > In 2020 start restoration of the Woodland Gardens wetlands , Bushy Park. > By 2025, review the potential for species reintroductions .
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
		SIGNIFICANCE →		





FIND OUT MORE

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