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IMPACT REPORT 2025/26

Our Year for Wildlife

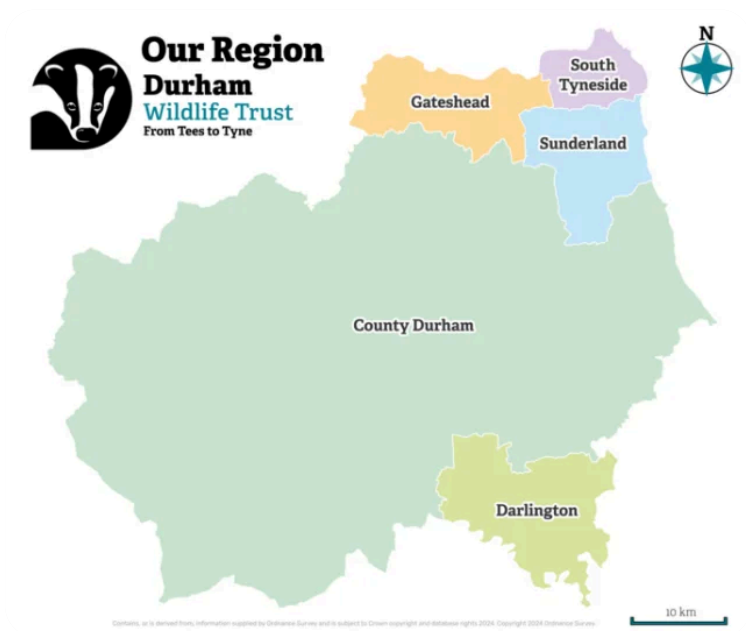


Durham
Wildlife Trust
From Tees to Tyne

From Tees to Tyne

Who we are

Durham Wildlife Trust is a leading conservation charity committed to protecting and restoring natural habitats on land and sea across County Durham, Darlington, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside. With over 50 years of expertise, the Trust manages more than 3,500 acres of diverse ecosystems, enhancing biodiversity and fostering environmental education. Through innovative projects and strong community engagement, we work to create lasting, sustainable impacts on the region's wildlife and natural landscapes.



OUR MISSION

**Nature restored
from Tees to
Tyne**

Our people

455

Volunteers

Contributed more than
30,000 hours to the Trust in
25/26

36

Staff

Delivering on more than 56
different projects over the
year

8,722

Members

Continuing their support for
nature, to enable all of our
work

1

Nature is in recovery

30% of land and sea by 2030

2

People are taking meaningful action for nature

3

Nature-based solutions are central to solving local and global problems

[View the Durham Wildlife Trust 2030 Strategy →](#)

01 Nature Recovery

Durham Wildlife Trust delivers nature recovery through a mix of landscape-scale habitat restoration, species protection, community engagement and partnership-led environmental projects. Our work spans uplands, lowlands, coast, rivers, woodlands, wetlands and urban green spaces.



24,000+

volunteer hours given to Trust Nature Recovery programmes in 25/26, supporting reserves management, conservation grazing and community initiatives.

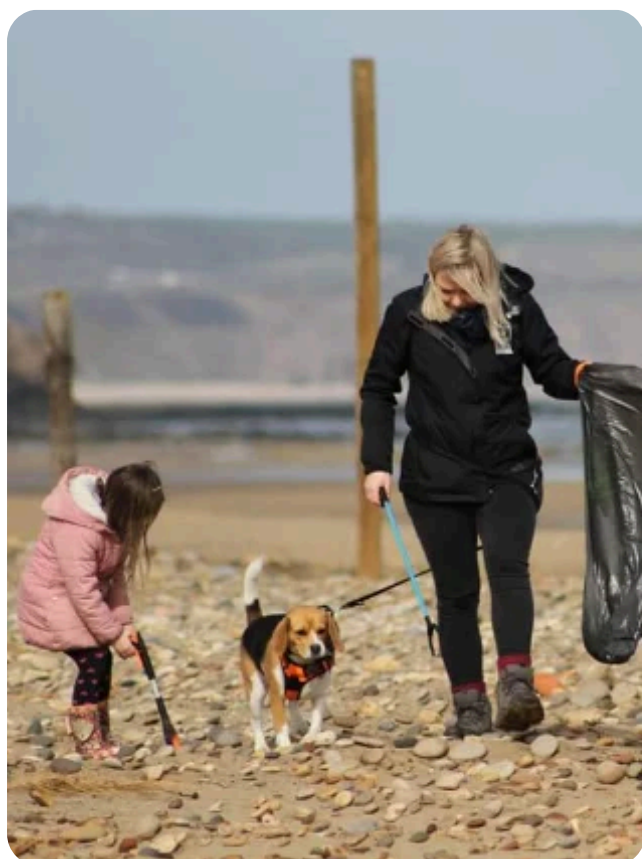
4.5 ha of woodland creation	22.5 km of path and accessibility improvements	88.2 ha of meadow and scrub management
5.4 ha cleared of invasive non-native plant species	12 km+ of fencing created and maintained, including new kissing gates	2,000 bags of litter removed from our shores and watercourses

Working in partnership

Partnership projects such as Heart of Durham cared for 118 hectares of woodland, wetland, meadow and more on the Northumbrian Water estate, and Links with Nature revived 340 hectares of Sunderland Council greenspaces in the Coalfield area of Sunderland, connecting local people with safe, natural places.

A Great North Fen

The Trust has continued working on a Great North Fen, the largest of our nature recovery projects, securing £80,000 in Northumbrian Water Branchout funding for investigation work and wetland restoration at Ricknall Carrs and Morden.



Beach Care: source to seas

Through the Beach Care partnership with Durham County Council and the Heritage Coast Partnership, 2,000 bags of litter were removed from our shores and watercourses.

“ Beach cleans are great for keeping fit, wellbeing and are great locations. Also doing something worthwhile that benefits nature.

Beach Care Volunteer

Milkwellburn Wood



Milkwellburn Wood is a large and much-loved woodland in the heart of the Derwent Valley, just outside Blackhall Mill and Chopwell. Covering 79 hectares, it has a rich history shaped by both industry and nature. Once an ancient semi-natural woodland, parts of the site were replanted with conifers after years of commercial use and coal mining.

Today, Durham Wildlife Trust is working hard to return Milkwellburn Wood to its roots through a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) restoration programme, gradually replacing conifers with native broadleaf trees. This is already helping species like bluebells, primroses and greater woodrush thrive again, and creating a diverse mix of habitats, from wet alder woodland to heathland with bilberry and heather. The wood is also home to tawny owls, woodcock and willow warblers, with red kites and buzzards often soaring overhead.



The red line boundary shows the land purchased by the Trust; the original Milkwellburn Wood runs along the three more heavily wooded sides.

NEW IN 25/26

5.9 ha **3,000+**

grassland purchased

trees planted

Planting covers 60% of the new land, with 40% kept as open grassland. The purchase increases the size of the reserve and provides a unique opportunity to expand and better connect existing habitats.



02 Meaningful Action for Nature

Empowering communities and inspiring collective action is central to Durham Wildlife Trust's mission and a key pillar of our 2030 strategy. Our 'Team Wilder' approach focuses on enabling people to build collective power and drive positive change in their communities. By addressing common barriers to participation, such as access to safe spaces, appropriate equipment and funding for community initiatives, we have helped create opportunities for individuals to reconnect with nature. As a result, communities have reported significant benefits, including improved mental wellbeing, reduced social isolation and increased physical activity.

6,000

people took part in
Education and Engagement
events

2,400+

primary school students
reached

93

sessions, in school and at
Trust nature reserves

By engaging communities and the wider public in our work, we create a ripple effect where more can be achieved for nature through collective care and action.

450+

+21%

active volunteers taking action for nature, a 21% increase on the previous financial year

City of Nature

Nextdoor Nature continued to support and strengthen community networks, working with more than 15 active groups. By listening to the needs of the communities we serve, the Trust developed and secured funding from the National Lottery Community Fund for the City of Nature programme. Over the next three years it will work in partnership with the International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS) to connect people with nature for the first time and foster nature connectedness throughout urban communities.

3,000

more people of all ages at our engagement events, from bat walks to wildflower talks to pond dipping

Connecting Through Nature

By partnering with all local authorities in our patch, the Trust can influence and support nature engagement on a larger scale. In 25/26, our work with Sunderland City Council supported their application to Nature Towns and Cities. The Council was funded to work with the Trust on Connecting Through Nature, supporting Sunderland residents by listening to their needs and helping them care for their local green spaces, crafting a legacy of community ownership.



Nextdoor Nature

Nextdoor Nature holds a community organising philosophy that offers an opportunity for real change through diversifying participation and audiences to deliver sustainable communities. Building interconnection between and through local groups is a starting point for meaningful action. The hope is to help communities, who are often on the margins themselves, play a full role in the recovery and support of nature.

Through Nextdoor Nature the Trust has continued to support initiatives across Sunderland, South Tyneside, Durham and Darlington, giving communities the skills, tools and opportunities to take action for nature in their own neighbourhood, establishing wild habitats, supporting community gardens, rewilding school grounds and supporting green corridors in areas of economic and natural deprivation.

Leach Grove, Darlington

Worked with Leach Grove Community group on a pocket of land beside the housing estate who sought advice on habitat mapping. It culminated in 2,000 spring bulbs planted with volunteers from the estate and further afield.

South Shields

Actively supporting the development of a wildlife habitat, facilitating partnership and community cohesion, an example of nature recovery in an urban setting.

Sunderland & Durham

Worked with a number of groups including Washington Mind, Age UK, Climate Action Sunderland, Back on the Map, Friends of Mowbray Park, Mowbray Park Community Garden, numerous Eco-Church groups across Durham and Sherburn Parish Council.



Nextdoor Nature group at a community event in Sunderland City

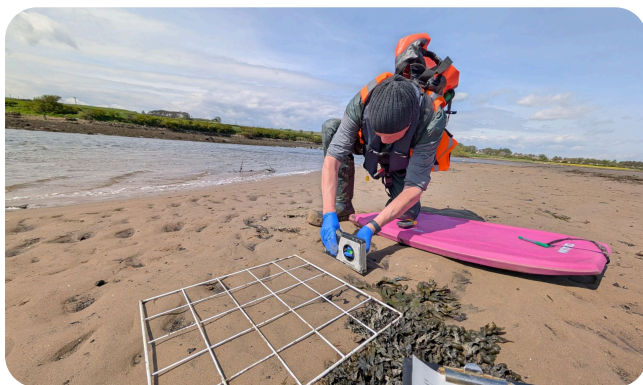
Community organising is patient, relational work. Trust is built in a person, not a project.

It takes months of consistent presence before a group feels confident enough to lead for itself. The Nextdoor Nature Officer is the thread that holds a network of over fifteen active groups together and thanks to funding from the Barbour Foundation, the programme will continue next financial year.

03 Nature-based Solutions

Nature-based solutions let Durham Wildlife Trust tackle climate change, nature loss and human health together, rather than as separate problems. Restoring peatlands, woodlands and wetlands locks up carbon, rebuilds resilient ecosystems and gives people better access to green space that supports physical and mental wellbeing. As such, the Trust is a trusted delivery partner for local authorities and businesses pursuing social value and biodiversity net gain, delivering programmes with both environment and public health outcomes.

Investing in nature is essential infrastructure for a resilient, healthier Tyne to Tees.



Coastal resilience with Stronger Shores

The Trust hosts two officers for this Defra-funded project on behalf of the North Sea Wildlife Trusts. Hosted by South Tyneside Council and part of the £200m Flood and Coastal Innovation Programmes, it helps the North East coast and its communities cope with flooding, erosion and climate change. Our Marine Engagement Officer brought more of the world within our seas to life, and our Seagrass and Seaweed Research Officer delivered ongoing trials of seagrass and kelp restoration techniques.



Health & wellbeing

The Trust continued delivery of Links with Nature, a partnership programme in the Coalfield area of Sunderland. Alongside Sunderland Council, Links with Nature has improved spaces for nature and for people, delivering a health and wellbeing six week programme to 60 people in 25/26 and engaging a further 900 people in community events, walks and talks. In addition, Wild About Brain Health, funded by Alzheimer's Research UK, ran nature sessions for adults aimed at supporting cognitive function.



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Links with Nature

Links with Nature is a multi-year partnership project restoring 13 greenspaces across Sunderland's Coalfield area and reconnecting local communities with them. It combines habitat recovery with resident engagement: practical volunteering, guided walks, wildlife monitoring and wellbeing activities, alongside green social prescribing to support health outcomes.

Funders include the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Sunderland Council, with further support from North East Community Forest and Northumbrian Water's Bluespaces Programme. Delivery partners include Sunderland City Council and Wear Rivers Trust.

£2.2m

in project funding

13

greenspaces being restored

Three intended outcomes

Recovering habitats and wildlife across the 13 sites

Making greenspaces more accessible and appealing to local people

Measurable improvements in community health and wellbeing

Finance

Durham Wildlife Trust continues to be a financially resilient organisation, taking the core support of its membership and utilising opportunities from grants and charitable trusts to secure nature's recovery from the Tees to the Tyne.

From acorns, mighty oak trees grow.

In 25/26 we generated income of £2.75m and delivered a total surplus of £67,556. In order to provide some financial security the Trust aims to hold sufficient unrestricted net current assets to cover six months' expenditure. At the end of 25/26, reserves exceeded that level, allowing the Trustees to set a deficit budget in 26/27 to support additional short term staff posts.

£2,753,850

Total income

£2,686,294

Total expenditure

£67,556

Total surplus for the year

£11.17m

Net assets, including £9.3m of land held for conservation purposes

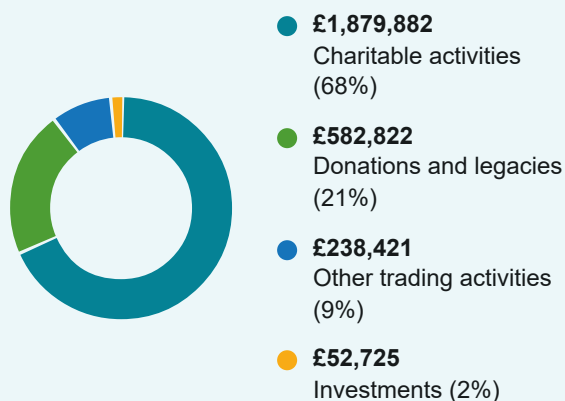
£1.97m

Total cash at bank

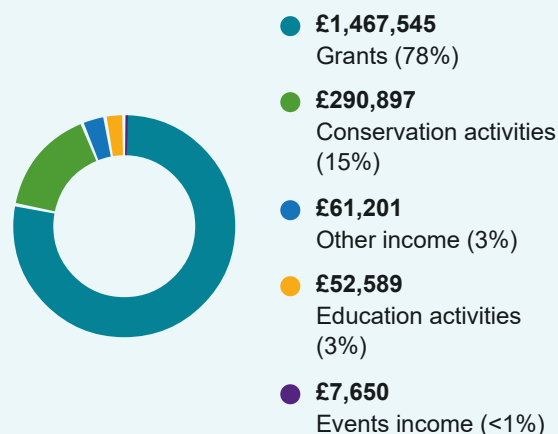
8 months

Unrestricted reserves cover (target - 6 months)

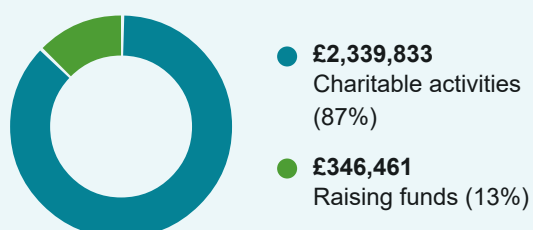
Total income



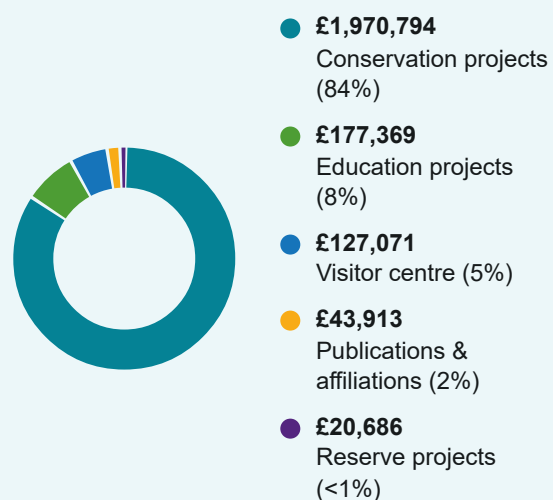
Income from charitable activities



Total expenditure



Expenditure by charitable activity



Source: Durham Wildlife Trust group accounts, year ended 31 March 2026



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Thank you for helping nature recover from Tees to Tyne

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