



Climate Change Resilience for Blean Woods and Seasalter Levels

Together with Kent Wildlife Trust and Canterbury City Council, the RSPB is embarking on an ambitious landscape-scale project to restore habitats and boost biodiversity in a landscape that is increasingly impacted by the effects of climate change. Located between Canterbury and the North Kent coast, Blean Woods stands as one of England's largest and most ecologically important woodland complexes, while Seasalter Levels provides a significant area of freshwater grazing marsh. Through a programme of restoration and practical conservation measures, that will involve the surrounding communities, the project will build climate change resilience into these sites, creating sustainable habitats for a range of wildlife and beautiful places for people to visit.

The project has been awarded a grant of £1,884,900 from the Defra Green Recovery Challenge Fund, a short-term competitive fund to kick-start environmental renewal. The grant will enable the partnership to deliver a suite of projects at Blean Woods, Wraik Hill and Seasalter Levels until March 2022 that will improve and restore an area of over 1700ha, increase biodiversity and create five new jobs. The Green Recovery Challenge Fund has been developed by Defra and arm's length bodies including Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission, with funds distributed and monitored by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Seasalter Levels

The work at Seasalter Levels will be the culmination of over 20 years of planning and partnership working to restore this Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) into an outstanding wetland nature reserve. The success of breeding waders at Seasalter Levels has been severely impacted due to the lack of muddy pools that are the essential foraging grounds for flightless chicks. The installation of new hydrological features and grazing infrastructure will enable water to be retained on the grazing marsh for longer periods during the spring and summer months, the time when lapwing and redshank are raising their young. These interventions will facilitate the restoration of 228ha of wetlands, while also supporting the wider range of Defra Indicator species including breeding waders, wintering waterfowl, grasshopper, warblers and rare invertebrates.



Credit: RSPB-images Rof Williams

Wraik Hill

Wraik Hill Local Nature Reserve, managed by Canterbury City Council in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust, is a valuable green corridor and wildlife site providing a direct link between Seasalter and the Blean. Over the past 30 years the individual landholdings have been acquired by Canterbury City Council to create a reserve comprised of scrub, ponds and species-rich grassland, a rare habitat combination in Kent. It already holds significant interest with species such as nightingale and green-winged orchids found there. The site benefits from a Kent Wildlife Trust Canterbury Area Warden and, during the project, the reserve will be enhanced by new fencing, pond clearance, accessibility improvements, scrub removal and new interpretation, all of which will see the reserve reach its full potential.

Blean Woods

Blean Woods is one of the most extensive and ecologically important woodland landscapes in England. It is a stronghold for specialist woodland birds that are under threat and holds the largest population of one of the UK's rarest butterflies, the heath fritillary.

In Southern England we are already experiencing increasingly dry and warmer summers and, as a result of climate change these conditions are expected to increase. The installation of drainage ditches and channels in the Blean has, over time, further contributed to the drying out of the woodland floor and this is having a significant impact on the wet micro-habitats within the wood. The reduction of these habitats leads to a reduction in insects, an issue that is undoubtedly contributing to the significant declines in woodland bird species seen in recent years.



Credit: RSPB-images Jackie Cooper

The Blean Woods re-wetting project will deliver hydrological infrastructure, seeking to reduce the loss of water and create better, wetter habitats for woodland specialist breeding birds and invertebrates. The project will also include community volunteering to increase local engagement with the development of the site, a bog restoration project and the introduction of grazing as a management tool. By actively adjusting forest management now, restoring wet features and introducing grazing to create open glades, we will create habitats that are resilient to climate change and that will support and nurture woodland bird populations.

Contact

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Green Recovery Challenge Fund