

## Biodiversity EMERGENCY

### A case for Otley to declare a biodiversity emergency

**Biodiversity is critically important – to your health, to your safety and, probably, to your business or livelihood.**

- In 2019 fifty conservation organisations produced the *State of Nature* report, on how the UK's wildlife is faring. It is not currently possible to give numbers for the loss of biodiversity in Otley, as no baseline exists. There is no reason however to believe Otley is doing any better than England as a whole.
  - 13% of all species in England are threatened with extinction
  - A massive 35% of all species have declined in number
  - More than 40% of insect species are declining and a third are endangered
  - The big butterfly count reported the lowest numbers in 2021 since records began
  - Our native birds have fallen by 11% since 1970
  - Numbers of farm birds have halved!
  - Hedgehogs for instance have fallen by up to 30% in urban areas and 50% in rural areas since 2000, leading to them now being considered a vulnerable species.
- By declaring a biodiversity emergency, Otley Town Council can once again lead environmental change and declare their intention to curb ecological destruction and turn the tide for wildlife. Less than 15% of councils have declared an Biodiversity Emergency, compared to 83% who have declared a Climate Emergency.
- Bath and North East Somerset Council, one of the few that have already declared an emergency said this;

“An Ecological Emergency has been declared by the council in response to the ongoing threat to wildlife and ecosystems. The declaration recognises the essential role nature plays in society and the economy and provides a statement of intent to protect wildlife and habitats, enabling residents to benefit from a green, nature rich environment.”
- Wildlife Friendly Otley has established and outlined the benefit to the public of green spaces rich in biodiversity in our paper, ‘Benefits of rewilding green spaces’ and our paper, ‘Biodiversity Restoration and Wildlife Corridors.’ Please see attached.

- Wildlife Friendly Otley will work closely with the council to build on the declaration with subsequent action plans and strategies, outlining how Otley can proceed after their announcements — including proactively seeking to include both public and expert opinions.

### **Why should biodiversity loss matter to Otley?**

Biodiversity is composed of several levels; starting with genes, then individual species, then communities of creatures and finally entire ecosystems, such as forests where life interplays with the physical environment. These myriad interactions have made Earth habitable for billions of years.

Biodiversity provides us with clean air, fresh water, good quality soil and crop pollination. It helps us fight and adapt to climate change, as well as reduce the impact of natural hazards, through the mechanism of ecosystem services.

Healthy biodiversity provides us with many ecosystem services we take for granted. Plants convert energy from the sun making it available to other life forms. Bacteria and other living organisms break down organic matter into nutrients providing plants with healthy soil to grow in.

Even though we are fortunate to have some accessible green space in Otley, wildlife and therefore biodiversity, here — like everywhere else is suffering; one estimate suggests that, by weight, 97% of the world's vertebrate land animals are now either humans or our farm animals – just 3% are wild.

Despite being predominately urban, Otley and its people are intrinsically part of the natural world. We are a component of, and therefore dependent on, biodiversity and the ecosystem services provided. Higher rates of biodiversity have been directly linked to an increase in human health.

Leeds City Council has recognised the need to protect and improve biodiversity in its Local plan update - green infrastructure, 2021. In which they recognise the importance of protecting the variety of life locally but also reversing the trend of biodiversity loss and achieve improvements through “biodiversity net gain”.

As stated in the Neighbourhood Plan (2018), Otley has 7 different UK priority habitats. The plan also states the ambition to link these “...disparate habitats together in order to provide routes or stepping stones for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of species in the wider environment.” So far no such linking up has happened, if an ambitious project to connect habitats together was launched in Otley this would go a long way to improving local biodiversity.

Otley is also home to a number of important species, including barn owls, bats hedgehogs, otters, and swifts. All of these species rely on intact habitat corridors.

Loss of our surrounding biodiversity affects all of us. Unlike other species however, we have the chance to determine what these effects might be. Biodiversity, therefore, must be protected and restored – not only for the good of nature but also for our communities that depend on them.

It is now our responsibility to halt the accelerating decline of our local biodiversity. Unless we take prompt action, it will continue towards a tipping point at which the loss of insect, bird and mammal life will become irrevocable. This will ultimately have damaging and lasting effects on our human population. Small steps, such as restoring habitat, have disproportionately large positive effects, and are frequently cost neutral as well as acceptable to the public. Otley, with its keen public interest in biodiversity and wildlife recovery, is ideally placed to become a template and an example of the steps which may be taken to reverse the current worrying decline.

## Further reading

### Attached

*Benefits of rewilding green spaces* (2021). Wildlife Friendly Otley

*Biodiversity Restoration and Wildlife Corridors* (2022). Wildlife Friendly Otley

### Online

*The State of the UK's Bats* (2017). Bat Conservation Trust

UK State of Nature Report (2019). The National Biodiversity Network

*UN report: Humans accelerating extinction of other species* (2019). United Nations

*Biodiversity loss: what is causing it and why is it a concern?* (2020). The European Parliament

*Underestimating the Challenges of Avoiding a Ghastly Future* (2021). *Frontiers in Conservation Science*

*The Dasgupta Review* (2021). HM Treasury

*The Sixth Mass Extinction: fact, fiction or speculation?* (2022). *Biological Reviews*

### Paperback

*The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* (2010). Pushpam Kumar et al. (Earthscan)

*What has nature ever done for us?* (2013) Tony Juniper (Profile)

*The Sixth Mass Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014). Elizabeth Kolbert (Bloomsbury)