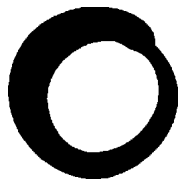


# **How to win**

## **Saving wildlife sites**



**Friends of  
the Earth**

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**This is an extract**

A full copy of How to win: Saving wildlife sites can be downloaded from Friends of the Earth's website.

[http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/local/saving\\_wildlife\\_sites/](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/local/saving_wildlife_sites/)

## **2 Who to tackle – responsibility for nature conservation in the UK**

Ultimate responsibility for nature conservation in England lies with the Secretary of State for the Environment in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). In Wales and Scotland powers are largely devolved to their first ministers via the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament respectively. In Northern Ireland the Assembly is likely to take a similar role shortly although at the time of writing the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland has this function. In practice, however, day-to-day responsibility falls primarily to the Government's wildlife agencies and to local authorities.

### **1 The role of the wildlife agencies**

The wildlife agencies (confusingly also referred to as the nature conservation agencies, the statutory bodies or the country agencies) are the official Government bodies responsible for nature conservation in the UK. In England, the agency specifically responsible for wildlife is English Nature (EN), while wider countryside issues are covered by the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission). Elsewhere in the UK these functions are combined so the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) is the equivalent of both these agencies in Wales, in Scotland it is Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and in Northern Ireland the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), a division of the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland.

There is also a UK co-ordinating body, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) which assists in developing common standards and policies between the agencies and oversees the UK response to international laws, conventions and treaties relating to wildlife protection, such as the European Birds Directive, the Ramsar Convention and CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of World Fauna and Flora).

The agencies are government-funded with budgetary control devolved to the Assemblies and Scottish Parliament. Their broad duties are:

- identifying nature conservation strategies
- notification, protection and to some extent management of SSSIs within their legal remit

- management and protection of National Nature Reserves
- advising Government on nature conservation and planning policy
- encouraging community involvement in nature conservation
- consulting with local authorities, other statutory organisations and private companies
- commissioning or supporting research and disseminating knowledge about nature conservation.



### **Key point**

**The wildlife agencies must act in the public interest and have a legal obligation to supply certain information relating to designated sites, such as SSSIs.**

In England, Wales and Scotland, the agencies are organised into area teams dealing with the day-to-day management of designated sites, liaising with site owners and the public and giving advice to local authorities and other organisations as they are required to by law. Each also has a national head office co-ordinating national strategy, research and policy.



### **Top Tip**

**Local teams are usually knowledgeable and are a useful source of information. Even if a local agency team is not aware of a particular issue it is worth seeking their views. Generally they should be treated as allies but do remember the agencies are official bodies, and may not be as sympathetic to campaigns as you would expect. Even where they are sympathetic they have limited resources and their statutory role means they may not be able to go as far you would wish in supporting your cause.**

## **2 The role of local authorities**

Nature conservation should be an integral part of the work of local authorities and some do take an active approach to conservation, although their legal powers are piecemeal and inadequate. Councils co-operate frequently with the wildlife agencies and with voluntary bodies such as the Wildlife Trusts.

Local authorities can initiate and support nature conservation by:

- recording information on local wildlife sites
- appointing conservation officers and establishing links with wildlife agencies
- preparing a local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)
- providing information for the public and raising awareness.

These are not all legal obligations and the degree to which local authorities involve themselves with nature conservation varies from place to place – there are competing demands for resources and many other pressures. Authorities may choose not to support nature conservation where they see a trade off with jobs or money. They are all, however, open to persuasion and lobbying.



### **Key point**

**Authorities are required to incorporate biodiversity matters in 'community strategies'. They have specific duties with respect to SSSIs under Schedule 9 of the CRoW Act and most oversee designations of local wildlife sites.**

## **3 Landowners and farmers**

Whatever the legal ins and outs of government policies and responsibilities it is important to recognise that when it comes to the crunch, nature conservation in the UK relies on positive action taken by farmers and landowners. Very few of our most important wildlife sites are managed solely for nature conservation and whilst the positive management for wildlife of some protected areas can now be imposed in certain circumstances nature conservation rightly relies for the most part on the willing co-operation of the landowner or farmer.

Building constructive relationships with these people on the front line is an important, often vital, first step in protecting wildlife. No two farmers are the same; some will be helpful some won't, but we strongly advise you to seek to work with farmers if possible. Organisations such as the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and some County Wildlife Trusts offer advice to farmers on agri-environment schemes and grants and wildlife friendly farming (see How to find out more, Section 9, for details).

Unfortunately, farmers and landowners groups, such as the National Farmers Union (NFU) and Country Landowners Association (CLA), are unlikely to be overtly helpful and may well be the opposite.