

# Somerset Wildlands

Annual report 2022-23



**Somerset  
Wildlands**

Registered Charity 1191953





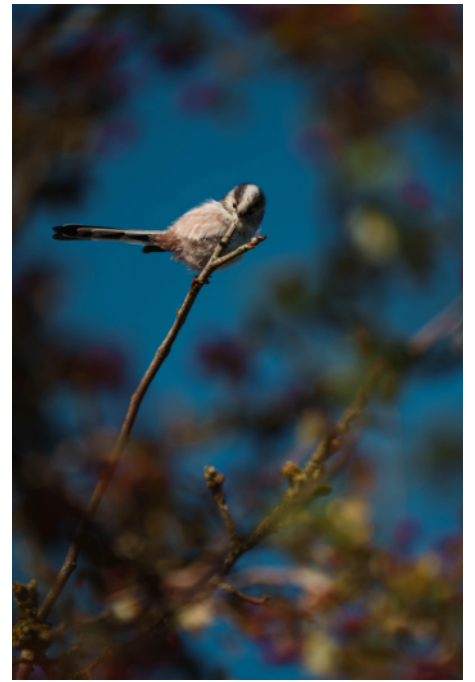
Image shows an aerial picture of the border between Waste Drove rewilding site and a neighbouring field in July 2022



## Somerset Wildlands' impact and achievements in 2022-23

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- **Completed its second purchase of land in September 2022.** As with the previous purchase of 2021-22 it involved a philanthropic loan via We Have the Power Funding Nature initiative. This 73 acre site at Athelney will form an outstanding wild stepping stone and is helping to publicly launch Somerset Wildlands. Combined with pre-existing affiliated sites, this means as of the end of 2022-23 there are more than 105 acres being wilded under the auspices of Somerset Wildlands.
- Entered discussions with a **number of existing landowners** looking to rewild their own lands inspired by or in association with Somerset Wildlands. In some instances this may involve the lease or transfer of land to Somerset Wildlands to rewild in perpetuity.
- **Raised £79,837.65 in unrestricted funds in the period to April 2023, paying back £33,000 in loans for land.** This income was generated through donations from a range of Trusts and major donors (six awards totalling £60,000), and through donations through the online membership, one-off donations and gift aid. More information is available in the financial review.
- **Launched a new website**, re-built from scratch and launched a membership scheme to encourage regular giving. As part of this process the donor handling system, mailing system and several other technical features were revamped and streamlined.
- **Developed a fundraising strategy** for Trusts and Grants in association with Tebourba Consulting, to build on existing work in major donor and public donations.
- **Recruited a team of volunteer wardens** to look after the new site at Athelney. Currently we have six wardens operating on a rotational basis.
- Presented Somerset Wildlands' ideas and strategy to a range of stakeholders such as Bristol Rewilding Group, Local Wildlife Trusts, Vivo Barefoot Foundation, Somerset Beaver Group, Wild Westbury, Stoke St. Gregory Envirogroup and others.
- Widespread networking and communication of Somerset Wildlands' mission with the broader wildlife community, building relationships with conservation NGOs, supporters, potential donors, carbon trading companies and a range of other organisations.
- Building our network of supporters and volunteers. **As part of this we launched a new membership scheme in Autumn 2022**, which as of the end-of-year had an annual income of over £5,000.
- Created additional marketing materials, such as a **short promotional film made by The Big Picture and funded by the Matthew Good Foundations.**
- Working with and facilitating groups from the University of Bristol, University of Sussex and the University of Birmingham on issues ranging from soil carbon and chemistry, acoustic monitoring and underground archaeology.
- Gained **media attention** for its activities - appearing on podcasts, broadcast and online and print media.



**LEFT** View towards Glastonbury from Waste Drove site, winter 2019 **RIGHT** Long tailed tit at Athelney (Matt Jarvis).

## Vision

Our vision is to create a wilder future and a fantastic wildlife core for the South-West of England.

The Somerset Levels were once a vast wild wetland. From pelicans to lynx, beavers to sturgeons, its wetlands, woods and estuaries teemed with wildlife, much of it now gone. Somerset

spread and adapt naturally. This natural habitat restoration will help to store and sequester carbon dioxide, and provide a host of social benefits. It will demonstrate new avenues and approaches to rewilding and encourage others to get involved.

As it increases both the abundance and diversity of life Somerset Wildlands will seek to maximise social value. It will work to ensure that the cultural

*"I love what Somerset Wildlands are doing - taking pieces of land and simply leaving them to rewild! The difference between these and the surrounding farmland was incredible" - Stephen Moss.*

Wildlands is aiming to restore some of that lost wildlife and wildness through a process of distributed rewilding. Using its 'stepping stones' approach, Somerset Wildlands will purchase or otherwise acquire plots of land as they become available and create a distributed network of wilded sites, boosting wildlife populations and providing opportunities for species reintroductions and for wildlife to

benefits of rewilding are realised, while maintaining the focus on protecting and providing space for nature. It will encourage citizen-science and education, with particular efforts to engage young people.

## Goal

By 2030 Somerset Wildlands hopes to have 1,000 acres of new land undergoing rewilding in the Somerset Levels. It will do this through a mixture of land purchase and leasing, and by building up and encouraging a network of affiliated small landowners to form independent stepping stones. This is clearly a stretch target, but it one worth having. Along the way we will create a community of interest and support around rewilding in the Somerset Levels.

## Priority Activities

Somerset Wildlands has three priority activities laid out in its strategy. These continued in 2022-23:

- Acquire land for nature (by raising funds to purchase or lease it; or by working to manage the land of others)
- Develop a network of affiliated small landowners

- Communicate the benefits of rewilding and nature restoration and engage people in seeking long term change.

The trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission.

## People

Somerset Wildlands currently has one member of staff – the Executive Director Alasdair Cameron. For the whole of the 2022-23 reporting period he was employed 3.5 days a week working for Somerset Wildlands.

In addition to a permanent member of staff, the Charity has engaged occasional contractors just as Peter Cooper Consulting, Derek Gow Consulting and Tebourba Consulting to assist with ecological work, Trustee engagement and fundraising.

Somerset Wildlands has also begun to recruit a team of volunteer wardens to study and protect its sites. So far these volunteers are being drawn from the organisation's membership.

**BELOW** Flowers and wetland plants blooming at Waste Drove site in summer 2022, six years into passive rewilding





## Financial review

In 2022-2023 Somerset Wildlands had an income of £79,837.65, an increase of around £20,000 since the previous year. Over the same period expenditure was £76,326.68. £27,497 was carried over into the period from 2021-22. At the end of the year £31,019.05 was carried forward to 2023-24. Of total expenditure, £33,000 was loan repayments on land purchase (more below), meaning the organisation had a operational surplus of £3510.97 for the 2022-23 period.

Thanks to its awards from Trusts and Major donors, and public fundraising the organisation was funded for the year in terms of basic operational costs, and has secured promises for sufficient basic operational funds for 2023-24. This income has been generated by a range of Trusts and individual donors, as well as through funds donated through the website or other online platforms. This includes memberships and one-off donations. The breakdown is explained in more detail below.

### *Loans for land purchase*

Over the period a further £460,000 of debt has been acquired, on generous terms over five years, which was used to secure the purchase of a 73-acre piece of land at Athelney. A total of £33,000 of debt has been returned, leaving an

outstanding debt of £477,000 on two pieces of land (one loan of £460k another of £50k). All of this debt has been secured though *We Have the Power's* Funding Nature programme, which provides philanthropic loans on generous terms to charities and communities groups to purchase land for nature on initial five-year terms. This is a significant amount of debt for an organisation of this scale, however the nature of the loans and the terms on which they were agreed has satisfied the Trustees that it does not represent an unacceptable risk for the organisation. It is not the Charity's intention to take on any more debt until significant progress has been made on repayment.

### *Reserves*

The charity has a policy on reserves which states that it is the Charity's intention not to go below £12,000 in cash (representing about 3 months of basic operation). This is to ensure that the charity can pay its bills, and to ensure that sufficient funds are available to cover administration obligations in the event of an unexpected event. This policy will be kept under review.

### *Individual giving*

Fundraising from the general public and website has been conducted largely through online activities and fundraising drives. A total of £17,597 has been received through one-off and recurring donations and associated gift aid. both directly. Some of this involved larger personal donations (>£1,000) alongside large numbers of smaller donations and associated GiftAid. An additional £2239.95 was left over from the purchase of land and forms part of the debt received.

In October 2022 the charity launched its membership scheme, encouraging people to become



<b>Carried over from 2021-22</b>	<b>£27,497</b>
<b>Income in 2022-23</b>	
Trusts and Major Donations (>£5000)	£60,000
Individual donors, membership, gift aid	£17,597
Cash left over from loan for land purchase	£2239.95
<b>Total income in 2022-23</b>	<b>£79,837.65</b>
<b>Expenditure in 2022-23</b>	
Core operations, staff	£42,462.68
Loan repayments	£33,000
Land purchase fees not covered in loans	£900
<b>Total expenditure 2022-23</b>	<b>£76,362.68</b>
<b>Operational surplus</b>	<b>£3510.97</b>
<b>Carried forward to 2023-24</b>	<b>£31,019.05</b>

regular donors in exchange for opportunities to become involved. So far this has around 55 regular givers, generating in excess of £5,000 on an annual basis. Growing this will be an important task in the year ahead. As well as providing income the membership has provided the basis for the volunteer site wardens.

funding. These donors are listed below. Several of these are part of multi-year commitments.

Bayesian Shift  
 Founders Pledge  
 Vivo Barefoot Live Barefoot Foundation  
 Frederick Mulder Foundation  
 Corton Hill Trust  
 Mr. Ben Goldsmith

*“The island of Athelney saw the entire future destiny of England hung in the balance; so to learn that the area around it will be restored to its former condition of wildness is the most wonderful and romantic news” - Tom Holland.*

*Major donors*  
 Somerset Wildlands received several donations of at least £5,000, totalling £60,000 in 2022-2023, and providing the bulk of its operational

*Income from land or charitable activities*  
 To date the charity has not generated any income from activities (e.g. land management,



**ABOVE** Archaeologists searching for marsh forts at Athelney site in 2023 (Theo Reeves University of Birmingham) **OPPOSITE PAGE** From top to bottom anti-clockwise: aerial image of Athelney site in March 2023 (Theo Reeves University of Birmingham); a field at Athelney in September 2022, a similar field in Summer 2023.

agri-environment schemes etc), however now that land has been secured it is anticipated that income will be generated from a range of sources such as government run agri-environment schemes, ecosystem services and the like. These payments will go towards helping reduce the debt acquired during the land purchase.

To this end Somerset Wildlands is in discussions with a range of agencies and consultants and is exploring income from ELMS, flood water storage, carbon storage, biodiversity net gain and voluntary nature credits. Participation in any of these schemes will be subject to Trustee approval.

A contract for a one-off trial of flood water storage has been agreed which will generate a small amount of income. Should this be successful, repeated Somerset Wildlands will investigate the potential chance to make it a regular source of income.

## Structure, governance and management

The Charity is registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), and is governed in accordance with its founding document.

The initial Trustees were invited by the Founder of the Charity, and further trustees can be appointed at the Trustees discretion, in discussion with the Director, as laid out in the governing document.

Over the course of the year one Trustee resigned and is yet to be replaced, with a recruitment process ongoing at the time of reporting.

## Administrative details

Charity Name: Somerset Wildlands

Charity Number: 1191953

Address: Polygon Cottage, North Green St, Bristol, BS8 4NE

Email: [contact@somersetwildlands.org](mailto:contact@somersetwildlands.org)

The charity is currently organised with an Executive Director (Alasdair Cameron, who also founded the Charity) and a board of trustees. The Board of Trustees has elected a Chair, currently David Powell.



## Rewilding the 'Birthplace of England'

In September 2022 Somerset Wildlands embarked on its **most exciting rewilding acquisition** to date by purchasing land at Cutts Road in Athelney, just below the Isle of Athelney in the south-west of the Levels.

At 73 acres it is our largest wild stepping stone so far, and also our most historically interesting. **It was here, in what was once the impenetrable marshes surrounding the Isle of Athelney, that Alfred the Great**, King of the West Saxons, hid from the Vikings during their wars of the 9th century. The swamps and marshes of the Somerset Levels provided Alfred with sanctuary and a place to regroup, before he went on to defeat the Viking leader Guthrum and lay the foundations for the first unified Kingdom of England.

**We think that the idea of rewilding what is effectively the 'birthplace of England' is an interesting symbol of the kind of future we can build together**, and of how we can bring back life and wildness to all of our lives. We can't take the land back to Alfred's time, but we can allow it to develop as a wild space into the future, and a wonderful haven for nature. While at the time of writing the site was just at the very beginning of its rewilding journey, we can already begin to see changes as the grazing pressure is reduced and the land begins to 'wild up' with an increase in insect life, and the emergence of small patches of willow scrub.

