

## **Wildlife Groundswell**

### **Reawakening the Lizard: Nature Recovery across the Lizard peninsula**

#### **Initial thoughts and ideas for a Nature Recovery Project on The Lizard**

##### **The need for nature recovery on the Lizard**

Wild and remote, the Lizard peninsula is renowned for its semi-natural habitats, particularly its heathland and coastal fringe. Human settlements are scattered across a predominantly farmed landscape. However, despite the rural countryside and numerous environmental designations (including at international, national and county level), many species and habitats on the Lizard are in decline

Farming practices, pollution, visitor pressure and climate changes all contribute – and existing efforts to manage sites and species have tended to be small-scale and piecemeal. Habitats are fragmented and shrinking, whilst once common species are disappearing from the peninsula. It is clear that a more ambitious restorative approach is needed.

##### **Project Framework**

The Lizard is a distinctive area of 15,000ha, bound by the sea on three sides, and is mainland Britain's most southerly point. Wild and remote, it is steeped in cultural heritage and has a strong sense of place. The Lizard is dominated by a windswept heathland plateau cut by valleys of enclosed broadleaved woodland and farmland and surrounded by dramatic cliffs, coves and sandy beaches. The peninsula is home to a rich mosaic of rare and endangered habitats which, in turn, support locally and nationally important populations of plants and animals, some of which are largely or wholly confined to The Lizard. Human settlements are scattered across the peninsula with a local economy broadly dependant on farming and tourism. Much of the Lizard is protected by environmental designations which includes The Lizard National Nature Reserve (NNR), two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and 11 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), as well as non-statutory sites. The whole of the Lizard peninsula lies within the Cornwall National Landscape.

The peninsula has been famed amongst botanists as one of Britain's five botanical meccas since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, boasts a wealth of plant species that are largely or wholly absent from the rest of Great Britain, growing in vegetation types not known elsewhere on earth. Recent zoological survey has highlighted the area's importance for lichens and mosses, invertebrates and birds.

But despite such fame, plethora of designations and an apparently idyllic rural landscape, many species and habitats are in continued decline. Farming practices,

pollution, visitor pressure and climate changes all contribute – and existing efforts to manage sites and species have tended to be small-scale and piecemeal. Habitats are fragmented and shrinking, whilst once common species are silently disappearing from the peninsula. It is clear protection is not enough.

1 *National Nature Reserve* covering 16% of the land

1 **National Landscape**

2 *Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)*

27 non-statutory wildlife sites...that's 4% of land

c.9,000 people

>30 gale days pa

15,000ha total land cover

**£120M - £535M** ecosystem services value

3,928ha covered by Section 41 Habitats of Principal Importance

1 of the most botanically biodiverse regions in UK

**5km** = distance  
`maritime` species inland

**550** Red Data Book species

11 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (biological)

**28%** land designated for nature..... but only **24%** is *well-managed for nature*

The peninsula can be seen as a landscape in two halves: the wild heaths and dramatic coastline of the unenclosed commons on the serpentine plateau (the 'Wild Landscape'), and the intimate and ancient enclosed landscape of farmed fields and woodland on the softer, more fertile Devonian shales to the north (the 'Settled Landscape'). This project will deliver nature's recovery through collaborative working and effective habitat management, working across both landscapes.

Being underpinned by evidence, land management on the Lizard will take account of the human activities that have shaped our special cultural landscape, to restore nature, involving individuals and organisations from across the peninsula, including the Linking

the Lizard Countryside Partnership, Wildlife Groundswell, landowners, farmers, local businesses, schools, parish councils, naturalists, scientists and local communities.

### **Project aim/vision**

**Nature on the Lizard peninsula is restored to create a connected, diverse landscape, rich in plants and animals, benefitting wildlife and people**

### **Project objectives**

Within the Wild Landscape:

- Deliver conservation at the broad landscape scale to expand and link the major, but fragmented, heathland and coastal blocks, to create a ‘Super’ NNR within the wild landscape.
- Introduce a welter of small-scale, focused operations, mimicking traditional activity, that create myriad microhabitats for many of the rarer species – plants, lichens, fungi, butterflies, dragonflies, bees and other invertebrates, birds, bats, fish .....

Within the Settled Landscape:

- Focus on the enclosed, ‘farmed’ landscape, working with farmers and other landowners to build ‘hubs’ of nature around existing features (woodlands, pasture, heathland, watercourses) to create and restore lost habitats such as hay meadows, marshy rush pasture, scrub and actively worked woodland.
- Explore innovative management regimes that mimic the many historic land uses, where necessary, promoting the evolution of new sustainable land-uses, such as premium conservation meats and local coppice products.

Overarching aims

- Strengthen and encourage local communities to rise to the challenge of recovering nature through i) fun, inspirational and practical learning; ii) monitoring and assessing nature (citizen science); iii) tackling practical conservation action on the ground; and iv) proselytising about The Lizard’s unique wildlife.
- Explore the options for a sustainable finance model to ensure the long-term viability of nature's recovery on The Lizard (including locally generated income from tourism, local food supply, habitat banking using carbon credits and Biodiversity Net Gain)

#### Habitats of interest:

- Heathland – of international importance
- Coastal grassland with rock outcrops – with species of international importance including rare plants, lichens and invertebrates
- Woodlands along the Helford River and associated valleys
- Streams
- Ponds and damp grasslands
- Meadows
- Cornish hedges

#### Species of interest:

- Rare and threatened plants: some are only found on the Lizard
- Rare and threatened lichens: some are only found on the Lizard within Britain
- Farmland birds including yellowhammer, curl bunting and corn bunting
- Invertebrates: marsh fritillary, small pearl-bordered fritillary and silver-studded blue butterflies; rare bee, beetle and spider species
- Mammals: bats, otter, water vole and harvest mouse

#### Broader ideas:

- Tourist ‘tax’ to fund nature’s recovery within our community
- Local food for local people – linking with the *Eat the Lizard* project to encourage nature-friendly farming to feed our local communities
- Sustainable wildlife-friendly businesses, linked to land management, tourism, transport, hospitality, ‘green’ building
- Creative approach: involvement with artists, the performance arts, creative writing, Cornish and Lizard culture
- Environmental education and experience in and around schools

This project will reverse the decline using a community-led, restorative approach to rebuild nature at a landscape scale. It will strengthen existing community buy-in, harness local expertise, and support more farmers and landowners to adopt nature-friendly land management practices across the Lizard. By improving the condition of land and through expanding, buffering and connecting sites diverse in habitats and species, we will re-establish a healthy, resilient ecosystem for the benefit of wildlife as well as people, across both the Wild and Settled Landscapes.