



THE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION FUND

Activity Report 2025



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A note from our Founder and Chair

2025 has been a year of ambition, growth, and consolidation for the Ecological Restoration Fund (ERF). Building on the foundations of previous years, we have deepened partnerships, sharpened our strategic focus, and helped our partners deliver impact at scale for nature, people, and climate.

As rising temperatures, habitat loss, and unsustainable exploitation continue to erode the natural systems that sustain life, the urgency to act has never been greater. Our mission is clear: protect and regenerate nature so people and planet can thrive together. Through strategic funding to our partners, we champion conservation solutions that create tangible economic, social, and cultural opportunities, empowering communities to flourish. By backing initiatives that support sustainable livelihoods, reinforce local governance, and preserve cultural heritage, we ensure that environmental stewardship is inseparable from human well-being. This approach is not optional— it is the foundation for resilience, ensuring that communities and ecosystems prosper together.

Our work this year reflects three core priorities:

- Expanding support for advocacy and campaigns that defend environmental protections and drive systemic change.
- Elevating ocean health as a central pillar of our giving, recognising its critical role for marine biodiversity, economic prosperity and climate stability.
- Strengthening commitments to large-scale protection and restoration, ensuring that landscapes, ecosystems and local communities can thrive for generations to come.

2025 brought remarkable progress across our partner network. Highlights include Oceans 5 securing the High Seas Treaty, River Action's legal wins for UK rivers, and ClientEarth's precedent-setting litigation in Spain. World Land Trust expanded protected areas to safeguard critical habitats in South America, while BirdLife International launched an initiative along the African–Eurasian Flyway, stretching from the Arctic to Africa, to restore vital migratory bird habitats and support the communities that depend on them.

We were delighted to award several new grants to advance critical initiatives: the Environmental Justice Foundation's fight against destructive fishing and defence of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy, the European Environmental Bureau's Hands-Off Nature campaign to protect the EU's Habitats Directive, Fauna & Flora's expansion of its global marine program, and the Lifescape Project's legal work to advance nature restoration in the UK and the EU.

Internally, we have invested in our operational capacity to deliver our vision. We welcomed Olivia Couchman and Will Steadman as Grants Directors, bringing expertise that will help us increase our giving.

Looking ahead to 2026, we will deepen our commitment to marine protection and restoration, recognising the ocean's central role in planetary health. With nearly 90% of marine fish stocks fully exploited or overfished and marine biodiversity in rapid decline, expanding our focus on ocean conservation is both urgent and essential. We will also continue to champion local solutions, prioritising work that empowers local organisations and delivers lasting benefits for communities.

Our focus for the year ahead is to sustain momentum while making thoughtful decisions about new opportunities and relationships. These choices will shape ERF's next chapter and ensure that our funding continues to deliver measurable, lasting impact.

Thank you to our Trustees, partners and team for your unwavering commitment. Together, we are proving that bold, collaborative action can secure a thriving future for nature, people and climate.

**DANIEL HOTZ, FOUNDER AND CHAIR,
ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION FUND**





"Our mission is clear: protect and regenerate nature so people and planet can thrive together. Through strategic funding to our partners, we champion conservation solutions that create tangible economic, social, and cultural opportunities, empowering communities to flourish."





Our work so far

£49.97m

To date, from 2022, ERF has made £49.975 million in grants

29

ERF directly supports 29 partners

41

With at least 41 further organisations receiving ERF funding indirectly through our partners

Countries with active ERF-funded projects or groups





Policy Advocacy and Campaigning

POLICY ADVOCACY is used to protect biodiversity and promote sustainable practices by influencing legislation and regulatory policies, including international commitments, and working to hold governments accountable to their environmental responsibilities.



OCEANS5

2025 marked a pivotal year for marine conservation, with Oceans 5 at the forefront of global policy advocacy. The High Seas Treaty, after being ratified by 60 countries, crossed the threshold to come into force. 75 countries had ratified the treaty by December 2025. It will take effect from January 2026 and is the first legally binding global framework dedicated to protecting marine biodiversity in international waters. The treaty establishes new governance mechanisms for high-seas marine protected areas (MPAs), environmental impact assessments, and equitable sharing of marine genetic resources.

ERF has supported efforts to bring the treaty into effect through the work of Oceans 5 and their sub-grantees, particularly the High Seas Alliance. In the months leading up to ratification, Oceans 5 grantees provided coordinated policy analysis and government outreach that helped secure new national endorsements, including from the UK, Brazil, and South Korea, and contributed technical input to the draft rules of procedure for the planning and setup committee for the incoming treaty. Looking ahead, Oceans 5 will continue to drive preparations for the first high-seas MPA proposals and ensure that implementation of the treaty is ambitious, transparent, and inclusive.

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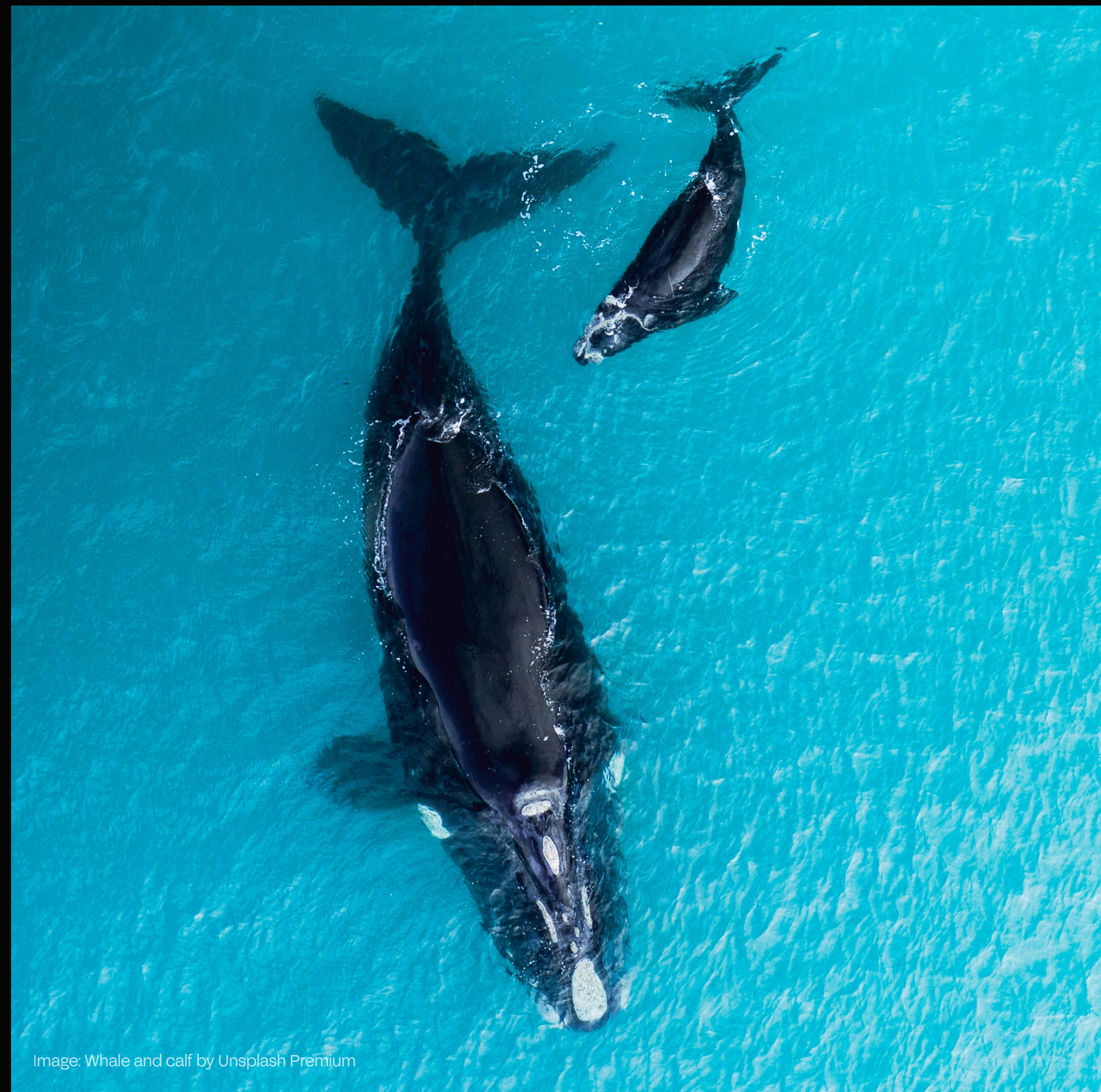


Image: Whale and calf by Unsplash Premium



Image: Hands off nature campaign poster



Image: Goats high in the mountains by Ales Krivec on Unsplash



In response to growing threats to the European Union's (EU) environmental protections, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), along with ClientEarth, BirdLife International, and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) launched the Hands-Off Nature campaign to safeguard the integrity of Europe's nature laws. Together, these organisations rapidly mobilised public support across the continent, galvanising nearly 200,000 citizens in just ten days to oppose proposed rollbacks to important EU nature and biodiversity legislation.

The campaign demonstrated the power of coordinated advocacy and citizen engagement in defending environmental progress. Through strategic communications, digital mobilisation, and direct engagement with EU policymakers, the coalition ensured that public concern for nature

could not be ignored. Our partners' efforts helped spotlight the importance of maintaining strong legal protections for habitats, species, and ecosystems that underpin Europe's resilience to climate change and biodiversity loss.

In response, the European Commission acknowledged the widespread public opposition and stated it would take this feedback into consideration. Although the recently released Environmental Omnibus does not yet reflect the campaign's core demands, the early success of #HandsOffNature and the scale of public engagement underscore how collective action, expert legal advocacy and public participation can together shape the broader conversation and keep nature at the heart of EU policy.

200,000 citizens

opposed proposed rollbacks to EU legislation



Litigation

LITIGATION uses legal actions to protect biodiversity and enforce environmental laws. This includes challenging environmentally harmful activities in court and working to hold governments and corporations accountable to their environmental responsibilities.



Image: A shark is hauled in as bycatch by Abbie Trayler-Smith, Greenpeace

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

1.0 ClientEarth

2.0 River Action

ClientEarth[Ⓢ]

ClientEarth, together with the NGO Oceana, has filed a legal case against the Spanish government, alleging negligence over Spanish vessels fishing illegally in West African waters. The lawsuit focuses on Spain's failure to investigate vessels that disable their Automatic Identification System (AIS), a requirement under EU fisheries regulations designed to ensure transparency and maritime safety. Analysis by Global Fishing Watch, an organisation that tracks and exposes illegal fishing activity, shows that several Spanish-flagged vessels operating near Senegal and Guinea-Bissau deactivated their AIS for extended periods between 2020 and 2023, with one vessel reportedly remaining offline for over a year.

This lack of oversight has serious consequences. Foreign-owned vessels, mostly Spanish, make up 73% of West Africa's industrial fleet, depleting local fish stocks and threatening coastal communities' food security, livelihoods, and economic stability. Despite EU laws obliging member states to enforce compliance, Spanish authorities have reportedly declined to investigate these incidents, citing legal loopholes.

The case seeks to compel Spain to uphold EU regulations, ensuring accountability for its fleet and protecting marine ecosystems. It also aims to set a precedent for EU-wide enforcement, strengthening oversight of European fishing operations globally and safeguarding the rights and livelihoods of affected communities.

The case aims to compel Spain to uphold EU regulations and set a precedent for EU-wide enforcement.



Image: Trawler in Aegean Sea © EJF



Image: Sea fishing, trawler by Westside on Adobe Stock



Image: Wye Valley Photo by Rob Wicks on Unsplash

RIVERACTION

River Action, a UK-based organisation dedicated to restoring river ecosystems through community engagement and policy advocacy, achieved several significant wins in 2025. In the Wye Valley, the group supported a successful High Court ruling that classified chicken manure from industrial-scale poultry farms as waste, meaning local authorities can require stricter disposal controls. The case challenged the argument that manure should be treated as a harmless by-product, despite agricultural waste being the UK's largest source of water pollution. The Wye catchment is among the worst affected in the country, with as many as 23 million chickens farmed, contributing to high phosphorus and nitrogen levels in the river that fuel algal blooms, reduce oxygen, and suffocate the wildlife.

River Action's efforts to curb pollution from intensive livestock operations extended beyond the Wye. The group also supported a successful challenge to a proposed 32,000-bird egg production unit near the River Kennet, where planning authorities ultimately rejected the project following strong objections.

Alongside these legal victories on industrial farming pollution, River Action also tackled misleading environmental claims within the food industry. A complaint it filed with the Advertising Standards Authority on 'greenwashing' prompted the regulator to rule that Red Tractor, (the UK's largest certifier of farm products sold in supermarkets), misled the public about its environmental standards. Following this, River Action launched its #UpYourStandards campaign, urging supermarkets to stop relying on Red Tractor as a sustainability mark.



Protection, Restoration and Rewilding

PROTECTION involves the establishment and maintenance of protected areas to prevent further degradation. This can include creating national parks, nature reserves, and enforcing legal protections to safeguard existing ecosystems from harmful human impact.

RESTORATION is primarily concerned with the active repair of degraded ecosystems, focusing on restoring habitats, landscapes, and natural systems to a state of health and functionality. This often involves human-led interventions such as planting trees, rebuilding wetlands, or cleaning up polluted areas.

REWILDING focuses on restoring natural processes and ecological dynamics by allowing nature to take its course with minimal human intervention.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

- | | |
|-----|------------------------|
| 1.0 | BirdLife International |
| 2.0 | Wildlife Trusts |
| 3.0 | World Land Trust |
| 4.0 | Beaver Trust |

Image: Temperate broadleaf woodland in Scotland, Joshua Earle on Unsplash



Image: Lesser Flamingos in the wetlands surrounding Lake Natron, Tanzania © Danica Delmont Shutterstock



Image: Flamingos on Lake Bogoria, Kenya photo by Jason Zhao



In 2025, BirdLife International and the World Bank launched the African–Eurasian Flyway Initiative (AEFI) to restore and protect a key migratory route spanning from the Arctic tundra to Africa’s wetlands.

Each year, more than two billion migratory birds from over 500 species travel this avian superhighway, relying on wetlands, grasslands, and coastal habitats along the way to feed, rest, and breed. These same habitats also sustain local communities, providing clean water, grazing areas, and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. However, key sites are under threat from habitat loss, illegal hunting, and climate change.

The AEFI will build on BirdLife International’s existing strategic networks to mobilise significant international finance to restore degraded wetlands, grasslands, and coastal habitats, ensuring that development planning works with nature, not against it.

Backed by the World Bank’s PROGREEN fund, which supports nature-based solutions, the first phase of the project will build local capacity, pilot restoration methods, and feed lessons into future Bank investments. This will lay the foundation for long-term flyway restoration and community-led habitat management.

Over 2 billion birds

use the African–Eurasian Flyway every year



Image: Exmoor ponies, UK Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash



Image: White-tailed eagle. photo by Jeff Smith



This year, The Wildlife Trusts achieved major milestones across three core programmes: landscape recovery, marine protection, and keystone species restoration. Significant wins include the expansion of the UK's rare Atlantic Temperate Rainforest site for restoration, where the team were able to acquire ten sites totalling 5,360 acres.

The Wildlife Trusts are also working towards securing a ban on bottom trawling in Welsh offshore marine protected areas and developing

strategic coastal realignment plans. The project has identified 20 priority realignment sites across England for delivery over the next decade.

Finally, their efforts to reintroduce lynx continue, with the second phase of social consultation concluded, and national political engagement has been found to be growing. Important progress has also been made in securing legal protection for wild beavers in England and in building policy foundations to enable the future return of large herbivores to UK landscapes.

10 sites

The team were able to acquire ten sites

5,360

Covering a total of 5,360 acres

**WORLD
LAND
TRUST****Saving Land
Saving Species**

In 2025, the Río Machay Reserve in Ecuador was officially declared a Wildlife Refuge and incorporated into the country's National System of Protected Areas. The World Land Trust (WLT) had launched the original appeal to raise funds for the expansion of Río Machay and led the land purchases for the reserve. This recognition means that the reserve now has formal legal protection, government oversight, access to funding and management support to safeguard its ecosystems and wildlife.

The reserve spans 1,160 hectares in the upper Pastaza River basin and protects a rich variety of habitats, from forests to expansive páramo grasslands. These ecosystems shelter at least 35 threatened species, including the iconic Spectacled Bear, and are also home to newly

discovered species such as Seth Macfarlane's Torrent Frog, suggesting a wider hidden diversity in the forests. The forests regulate climate, purify air, and provide clean water for the surrounding communities.

Beyond its ecological value, the reserve supports nearby Indigenous and rural communities by protecting the upstream water sources that supply 100% of the Machay community - nearly 300 families, according to a local partner. This lifeline sustains traditional livelihoods tied to healthy forests and vegetation. The reserve's intact ecosystems also help maintain soil stability, reduce landslide risks, and preserve the natural services people rely on for farming, clean water, and cultural practices.

100%

The reserve protects the water supplies for 100% of the Machay community

35

threatened
species

These ecosystems shelter at least 35 threatened species



Image: Spectacled Bear 2 photo by Bettina Arrigoni



Image: Hyloscirtus sethmacfarlanei in the Río Machay Reserve by Fundación EcoMinga



Image: Beaver at the Knapdale Scottish Wildlife Trust © Steve Gardner



BEAVER TRUST

In February 2025, the UK Government announced plans to return wild-living beavers to English waterways. Within a week, the Beaver Trust, a key government advisor on beaver management and a leading advocate for their reintroduction, played a pivotal role in a historic National Trust-led release in Purbeck, Dorset.

In this landmark conservation moment, two pairs of Eurasian beavers were released into the wild for the first time in England, within Purbeck's National Nature Reserve, an area rich in lakes, watercourses and willow woodland, and home to rare species including water voles and dragonflies. The beavers were relocated from Scotland's River Tay catchment by the Beaver Trust.

Extinct in Britain since the 16th century, beavers are now being reintroduced as important ecosystem engineers, helping to restore degraded landscapes and revive lost wetlands. Beavers are nature's architects, instinctively creating and maintaining habitats that support a remarkable diversity of wildlife. Through their dam-building behaviour, they slow the flow of water across the landscape, forming ponds and wetlands that provide refuge for fish, amphibians, birds, and countless invertebrates.



Current Grants 2025

[See more information here](#)

NAME	LOCATION	PROJECT OR FOCUS	AMOUNT
Beaver Trust	UK	Reintroduction and protection of beavers	£150,000
ClientEarth	Europe	EU policy and legislation	£1.5 m
Coast Funds	Canada	Marine protection through The Great Bear Sea Project	£5.8 m
Environmental Justice Foundation	Europe	Strategic litigation and political advocacy to tackle destructive fishing	£900,000
Environmental Law Foundation	UK	Policy and legislation, with a focus on the rights of rivers	£150,000
European Environmental Bureau	Europe	Policy, legislation and advocacy to protect EU's nature laws	£425,000
Fauna and Flora	Global	Expanding global marine conservation programme	£1.5 m
Hutan	Malaysian Borneo	Rainforest restoration, with a focus on orangutans	£1.5 m
Lifescape Project	UK and Europe	Legal work to advance nature restoration in the UK and EU	£800,000
Oceans 5	Global	Marine conservation, regranteeing to multiple groups	£4.8 m
Pole Pole Foundation	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Rainforest restoration, with a focus on gorillas	£300,000
Rewilding Chile	Chile	Rewilding and species reintroductions	£11.25 m
Rewilding Europe	Europe - including Spain, Bulgaria, Sweden, Scotland, Greece, Italy, Croatia, Ukraine, Germany and Poland	10 rewilding projects across Europe	£9 m
River Action	UK	Freshwater policy and legislation	£200,000
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) / BirdLife International	Africa and Europe	Restoration along the migration route the East Atlantic Flyway	£3 m
Wildlife Trust	UK	Rewilding and reintroductions of beaver, lynx & eagle	£6 m
World Land Trust	Ecuador, Paraguay, Uganda and Tanzania	Restoration of forests and rainforests	£1.5 m

