

ANNUAL REVIEW

2022

2023

WELCOME

2023 was the first year of our new strategic plan.

Some of our ambitions will be familiar. The BES continues to shine a spotlight on ecology through our internationally renowned journals; we continue to bring ecologists from different disciplines together, taking evidence from the field and lab to the heart of government; and we continue to support our global membership in over 120 countries.

But there are new ambitions, backed by a £2.7 million investment.

An ecological understanding of the world has never been more pivotal to the future of life on Earth. Our landmark report published this year, *The Future*

of Ecological Research, articulates a clear vision for how ecology can help humanity respond to the biodiversity and climate crises.

It was therefore sobering to launch our second major report this year that set out in stark terms how ecological research is significantly underfunded in the UK compared to other areas of research.

If we are to meet our international commitments to restore biodiversity, funding the science that furthers our understanding of the natural world should be seen as an investment.



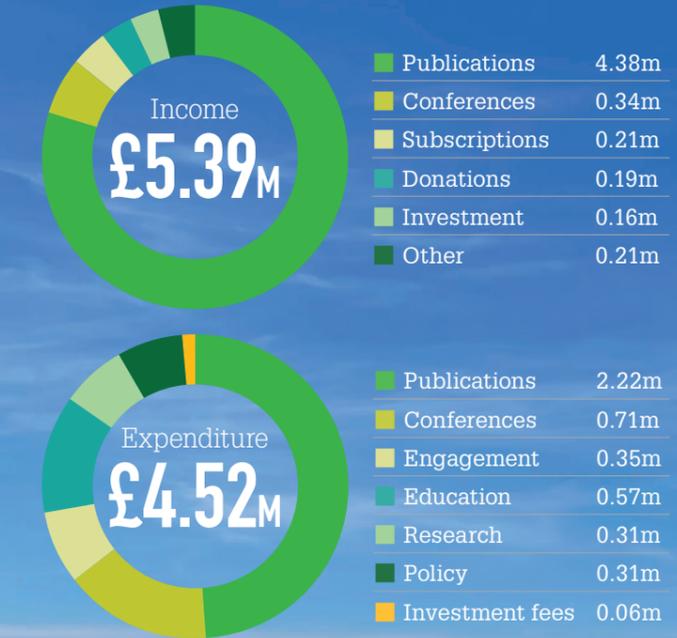
Ecologists study the interactions of living things and their environment, sharing understanding of these critical ecosystems as they are now – and how they may change in the future.

WE ARE
EVIDENCE-LED
BOLD
INCLUSIVE

OUR GOALS

1. Deepening understanding of the living world by advancing ecology
2. Putting ecology at the heart of political decision-making
3. Nurturing a growing community that is strong, equitable and collaborative
4. Celebrating the wonder of ecology to excite, encourage and support the next generation
5. Becoming more sustainable and leading the way in best practice

IN 2022 WE INVESTED £4.52M IN FOSTERING ECOLOGY



90%

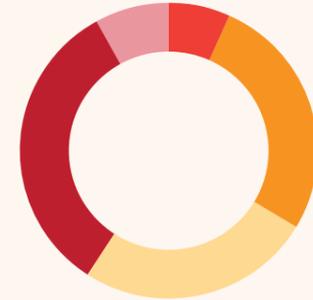
of our carbon budget is spent on 'additionality' – we invest in projects like restoring the peatlands at Cashel Forest Trust

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

In 2023, the BES invested over **£500,000**, funding and supporting 150 students and researchers from more than **30** countries across the world.

Funding was awarded to projects that increased our understanding of the natural world.

From studying the historic population structure and foraging ecology of fin whales, to investigating changes in plant metabolism, to studying bat responses, our funding advances ecological science.



% OF FUNDING ALLOCATED TO EACH GRANT SCHEME

Outreach	7
Small Research	27
Ecologists in Africa	26
Large Research	33
Training and Travel	8

“”

The grant from the BES not only helped me to travel and participate in Butterfly Conservation’s Ninth International Symposium, but also gave me the confidence to apply for other grants

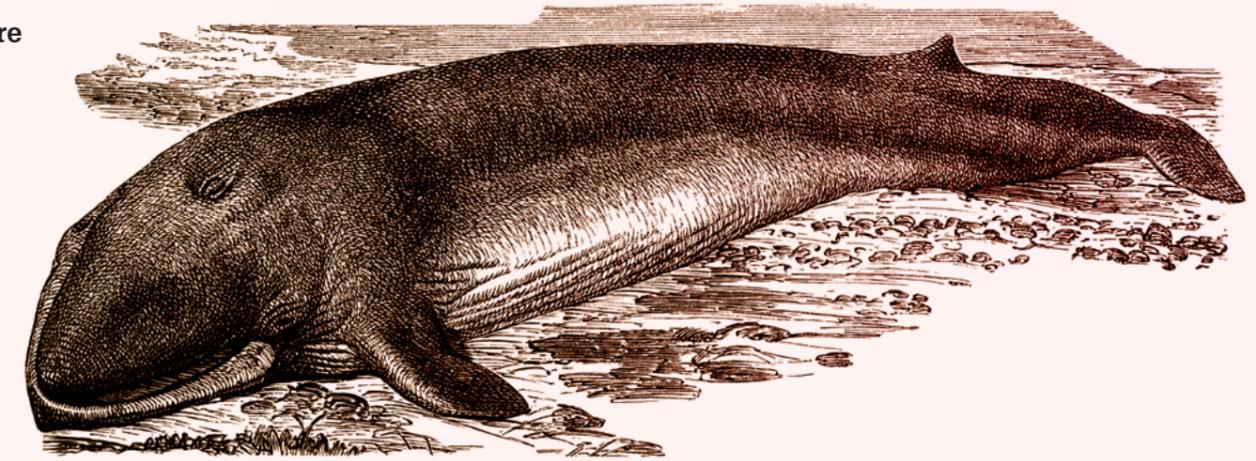
Uttaran Bandyopadhy from the Wildlife Institute of India



Grants were also awarded to innovative projects promoting ecology to a wider audience:

- **Wild Things: using improvised comedy to explore and communicate biodiversity conservation**
- **‘Hort-Ecology’: exploring connections within gardening and ecological science**
- **Not only boats: the wonderful world of marina-inhabitants**

And nearly 80 PhD students and postgraduate researchers were awarded Training and Travel grants to attend courses and conferences where they could present their research.



← **Evans Nkrumah** used the funding to monitor bat responses to habitat change in Ghana. The funding supported 20 students to carry out monitoring and Evans will continue to use the equipment purchased to train interested students in the future.

“The BES’s support has been transformative, providing me with the means to conduct impactful research, connect with a vibrant scientific community, and engage with wider audiences.”

↑ **Danielle Buss** from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology was awarded a Large Research Grant to study the historic population structure and foraging ecology of fin whales in the North Atlantic during the Industrial Revolution.

Dr Erola Fenolosa from the University of Oxford was awarded the BES John L Harper Small Research grant award, to investigate changes in plant metabolism as a response to disturbance.

100 YEARS OLD AND STILL PUSHING BOUNDARIES

“This is the critical decade. The decade in which we must take real action against climate change and its lower profile but equally devastating twin, biodiversity loss.

We need to look at ecology at the largest scales to understand how ecological and human systems interweave. Our hope is that together these reports will show both the perilous trajectory that ecological research is on and the potential for exciting future research directions. Now more than ever, ecologists need the funding and tools to help secure a future for all life on earth.”

Yadvinder Malhi is president of the British Ecological Society and professor of ecosystem science at the University of Oxford

WE PUBLISHED TWO LANDMARK REPORTS THIS YEAR



The Future of Ecological Research identifies the grand challenges for ecology and sets out a clear vision for the next 25 years. Priority themes include:

Making sure ecological systems are resilient to a rapidly changing world;

Transforming nature-restoration projects into living laboratories to test approaches such as rewilding;

And using artificial intelligence and new modelling approaches to better understand the enormous complexities of ecosystems at the ecological frontiers such as soils, forest canopies and the deep ocean.



The Trends in UK Funding for Ecology We analysed changes in the amount of United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding available for ecological research in the UK. Although funding for ecological research increased 1.5 times between 2006 and 2021, funding for other research areas increased 2.8 times.

The proportion of UKRI funding given to ecology decreased over this period – at a time when ecological research has never been so vital.

WE PUBLISHED THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE SET OF DATA YET ON ANONYMISING AUTHORS DURING PEER REVIEW

We concluded a three-year randomised controlled trial of double-anonymous peer review. The study showed that in traditional single-anonymous peer review, authors from wealthier countries benefit from being identified to reviewers, but that this advantage disappears under double-anonymous review. Authors from less wealthy countries, however, fared similarly under both models – they were not disadvantaged in single-anonymous peer review, nor did they benefit under double-anonymous review. On the back of these results the BES journals have started moving to double-anonymous peer review, making peer review in our journals more equitable.

Every year, the calibre of images for our Capturing Ecology competition grows, as do the threats to species they depict.

We want Capturing Ecology to be a celebration of our planet's vast tapestry of life, not its memorial.



OUR POLICY WORK

Influencing the UK governments

Better understanding of the ecological evidence means better decisions are made for biodiversity, as well as climate mitigation and adaptation. The BES bring together academics, government departments, landowners and environmental NGOs to help ensure that relevant government policies address the increasing pressures on the UK's wildlife and landscapes. Working with academics and practitioners, we create reports and briefings on key environmental policy areas, including nature-based solutions, protected areas, regenerative agriculture and COP meetings. Our policy fellowships – where early career researchers are placed in agencies across the nations – puts ecologists into the heart of government.

NOVEMBER 2023

- **Workshop with NatureScot explores systemic change towards regenerative agriculture and informs Scotland's Agriculture Bill and the Natural Environment Bill**
- Workshop with Defra discusses biodiversity metrics to use in the new water catchment plans
- Policy Guide to Wales published

OCTOBER

- **Upcoming BES report on regenerative agriculture shared with Scottish Government's Chief Scientific Adviser to support definition in Scotland**
- Pie and Pint event on prioritising conservation approaches informs the consultation on the new Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plan.

SEPTEMBER

- **Expert workshop discusses barriers to uptake of riparian woodlands in Scotland**
- Access to Nature public survey launches – results to be presented to Defra in 2024
- Rewilding policy training event with the University of Hull

APRIL

- **Roundtable on Access to Nature hosted at BES London with reps from Natural England, Defra, Forestry Commission, city councils, AONB and National Parks**
- With the Vincent Wildlife Trust, training given to undergraduates from the University of Aberystwyth, along with local landowners, local authorities, Natural Resources Wales and eNGOs

MAY

- Consultation response on Net Benefit for Biodiversity in Wales
- Policy webinar with the Civil Servant Climate and Environment network attended by nearly 150 from the civil service community and academia

JUNE

- **List of expert ecologists submitted to Defra and the British Standards Institution to inform standards for biodiversity credits**

JULY

- Policy training workshop for the Macroecology Special Interest Group

AUGUST

- **Policy Fellowships placed in Natural Resources Wales and Scottish Government**

MARCH

- **BES report on protected areas discussed during an evidence session of the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee's enquiry on protected areas**
- Panel discussion on ethical fieldwork and how to avoid 'helicopter science'
- 'Caffi Ecology' event hosted in Cardiff on Net Benefits for Biodiversity

FEBRUARY

- Protected areas evidence submitted to the Office for Environmental Protection

JANUARY 2023

- **Consultation response on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)**

DECEMBER 2022

- **UK policy briefing on COP 15 published**
- Nearly 130 civil servants and academics join a webinar with the Civil Servant Climate and Environment network focusing on protected areas

YOUR BES

Ecology is a welcoming and inclusive discipline. We strive as a Society to celebrate our diverse voices and to nurture a love of ecology from first steps through to a lifelong career.

From Connecting Schools with Nature, where our team worked with over 70 schools in the north east of England giving grants and sharing expertise on how to encourage wildlife, through to the legendary four-day Annual Meeting attracting delegates and exhibitors from all over the world, the pictures here tell a story of the curiosity, generosity, passion and fun shared over 2022–23.



← Wet weather won't stop our fun! The BES Undergraduate Summer School continues in all weather

→ Science is seen up close as a BES Summer School student

↓ A collision of ideas across generations at the BES Annual Meeting 2022



↓ North-England schools go green thanks to the Connecting Schools to Nature project



← A sign of a hard day's work at Laurel Avenue Primary School as part of the Connecting School's to Nature project



↑ The Annual Meeting welcomes the global scientific community

← Summer School staff smiles





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