

Stroud Landscape Project

National Trust Images/ Phil Brass



Climate and nature emergencies

Our climate is changing at a faster rate than ever and nature in the UK is in trouble. Bees, birds, butterflies and other wildlife are in danger of being lost forever.

The challenge ahead is huge but the Stroud Landscape Project and its partners are confronting the climate and nature emergencies head-on.

The solution is a simple one – create havens for wildlife that boost biodiversity.

As one of the National Trust's most pioneering partnership-based conservation projects, the Stroud Landscape Project is thinking big and the scale of work's even bigger. Wildflower grasslands are being created, ancient woodlands restored, wildlife corridors established and lost species reintroduced.

Something really special has started but we're not doing it alone. Our partners and private landowners are critical in delivering sustainable conservation on a truly landscape-scale.

Stroud Landscape Project: the story so far

The first phase of our shared partnership vision and strategy to connect Woodchester Park with the Commons is already well underway. With the help of local landowners, the project's delivering landscape-scale conservation and connectivity by building a coherent and resilient network to support nature's recovery.

- **Partnerships** with 24 private landowners
- **8 hectares of wildflower meadows created** on land between Woodchester Park and the commons
- **Largest ever reintroduction** of the globally endangered large blue butterfly in the UK
- **7 hectares of Priority Habitat created** at Boundary Court Farm
- **273kg of wildflower seed harvested and sown** on and off our land
- **Programme of vegetation management** established with partners on Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons
- **Habitat surveys completed** on 200 hectares of private land
- **10 hectares of land lost to non-native species** on Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons restored to grassland
- **40 hectares of grassland habitat benefitting** from invasive, non-native species management

Globally endangered butterfly reintroduced

Despite the pandemic and all the associated restrictions, 2020 was another brilliant and successful year for the Stroud Landscape Project.

The highlight was the reintroduction of the globally endangered large blue butterfly onto Rodborough Common.

The project marked the largest ever reintroduction of the butterfly in the UK with 1,100 larvae released on the 351 hectare site after five years of prepping for their return. An estimated 750 butterflies successfully emerged last summer.

It's the largest and rarest of all

British blue butterflies. It was last recorded on Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons 150 years ago and was declared extinct in Britain in 1979.

Partnership working was fundamental to the successful reintroduction. Butterfly Conservation, the Limestone's Living Legacies Back from the Brink project, Natural England, Royal Entomological Society and the Minchinhampton and Rodborough Committees of Commoners all worked together to create the right conditions for the butterfly including the introduction of an innovative grazing regime and programme of scrub control.



National Trust Images/ Ross Hoddinott



Sowing the seeds for nature's recovery

With the help and support of local landowners, our programme of wildflower seed harvesting and sowing continues to go from strength to strength.

Since launching the Stroud Landscape Project, the ranger team set aside time every summer to collect wildflower seeds from fields around Stroud.

The collected seeds are then spread over other areas of grassland to help improve plant diversity.

A tiny plant called yellow rattle can be beneficial when collecting seed. It acts as a parasite on the roots

of grasses causing them to grow less vigorously, which allows more space for other plants.

By increasing the presence of yellow rattle in the fields around Stroud, more diverse wildflower-rich grasslands will develop, providing an ideal habitat for pollinating insects like bees and butterflies.

One of the places that is benefitting from the collected seed is the Bristol and Gloucestershire Gliding Club. The club have been working with the project team to improve biodiversity and make more space for nature on fields that they own.

In the first year we harvested over 270kg of seed from seven donor sites. The seed was then sown over 11 hectares of land connecting Woodchester Park with the Commons.

We're delighted that our seed harvesting and sowing partnerships with local landowners have achieved so much in such a short space of time - delivering on the project's ambition to create more wildflower grasslands in the west Cotswolds.

We're continuing to build capacity and are now looking for more wildflower seed collection and sowing sites. If you're interested, or know someone who might be, we would love to hear from you

What is landscape-scale conservation?

It's a question we often get asked.

Landscape-scale conservation approaches, like the Stroud Landscape Project, aim to work in partnership with landowners to help improve the overall quality of the wider landscape by increasing connectivity and reducing habitat fragmentation.

By working on a landscape-scale, the Stroud Landscape Project protects species-rich spaces and helps join them together by creating a network of habitat or wildlife corridors.

The more connections between habitats we can create, the more it will help wildlife to move across the landscape and thrive.

Butterflies and cows: a perfect wildlife partnership on the Commons

Butterflies are helping the Stroud Landscape Project team and its partners spot long-term variations in biodiversity on Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons.

Their short-term responses to changes in land management and the environment are helping us to better understand what is happening on the grasslands across the Commons.

Although many require different and unique environments to complete their life cycle, the constant link is a healthy grassland and scrub-edge habitat managed through grazing and scrub clearance.

Cattle grazing is essential to the management of the commons. The Stroud Landscape Project is working in collaboration with the graziers to maintain a balanced grassland ecosystem and it's the butterflies that helping to guide the annual grazing scheme.

Using data collated over several years with partners such as Butterfly Conservation, trends have been identified that help understand the bigger picture.

The community of graziers are continuing with their established management technique of targeting areas with small, temporary grazing areas created using electric fences. This allows the cows, including Luing, Hereford and Long-Horns, to graze some of the slopes that are traditionally less attractive to them.

Through this targeted approach to conservation grazing, the grass sward is gradually being restored, creating opportunities for herbs, orchids and wildflowers to thrive.

In turn, the increase in plant diversity is supporting populations of rare butterflies like the Duke of Burgundy and small blue.



National Trust Images/Rob Skinner

2020 was like no other on Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons. The long-term grazing partnership with the Common's graziers produced some of the best limestone grassland the project has recorded.

Through determination and strengthening local partnerships, the Stroud Landscape Project is playing a major role in nature's recovery.

Woodland restoration at Woodchester Park



National Trust Images/ Andrew Butler

In the 19th Century, Woodchester Park was a grand country estate with a chain of lakes in the bottom of the valley, surrounded by grassland on the lower slopes and ancient woodland along the top edges of the valley.

Fast forward to the 1950's and much of the natural woodlands were cleared and replaced by conifer plantations for timber production, otherwise known as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). It is thought 40% of ancient woodlands were converted into plantations at this time.

Conifer plantations can have a particularly negative impact on the ecology of ancient woodlands, as they block out light leading to a species-poor woodland floor.

As part of the Stroud Landscape Project we've recently started work on an area of PAWS restoration, covering four and a half hectares in the middle of Woodchester Park.

The area was planted with western red cedar trees in the early 1960's. The aim is to remove all the cedar trees, and re-plant with native broadleaves, such as beech, oak, hazel, cherry and hawthorn. Some areas will also be allowed to regenerate naturally allowing native trees to self-seed.

This continuity means that the woodland has time to develop unique ecological habitats for plants, fungi, invertebrates and other wildlife.

The woodland will take some time to flourish and mature but it's an exciting start for the restoration work. In years to come Woodchester Park will once again be full of diverse habitats.

“The native broadleaf trees that will be planted will provide a much better habitat for wildlife and will also add to the amazing autumn colour at Woodchester Park”
Max Dancer, Area Ranger

Limestone grasslands that were lost when the cedar trees were planted are also being returned as part of the project. The grassland restoration work will enhance the feeding grounds for the rare greater horseshoe bats that have made the park their home.

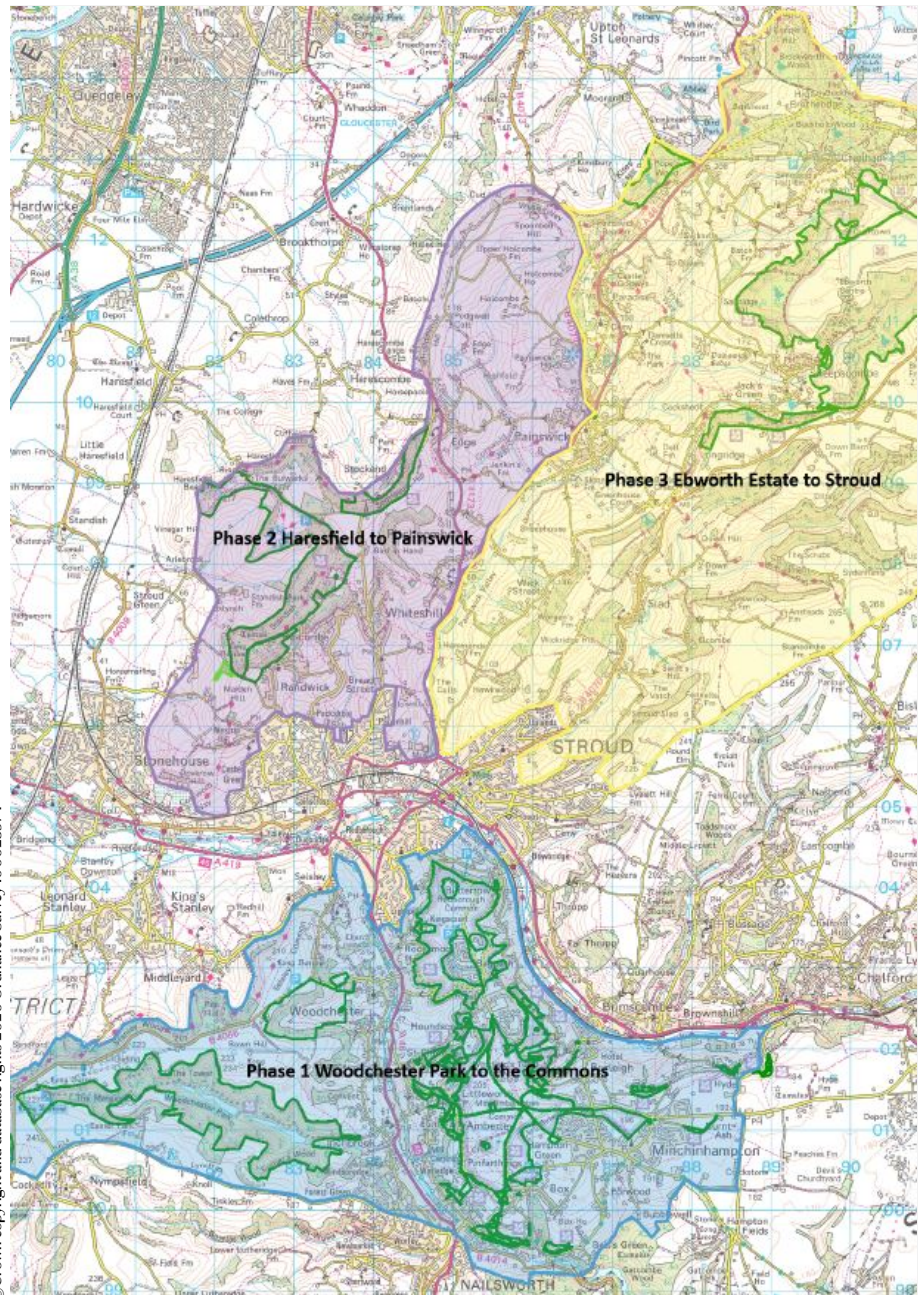
What's next?

The Stroud Landscape Project and its partners are working to transform the landscape around Stroud.

In just a few short years it's already started to create more space for nature by making the network of wildlife sites around the town bigger, better and more connected.

But there's still more to do. Here are just a few things we'll be doing in 2021;

- Increasing wildflower seed harvesting and sowing operations
- Restoring seven hectares of deciduous woodland and grassland at Woodchester Park
- Planting 6,400 native broadleaf trees
- Consolidating and extending landowner partnerships between Woodchester Park and the Commons
- Restoring three hectares of grassland to Priority Habitat and re-seeding two hectares with wildflowers at Boundary Court
- Identifying areas for further endangered species reintroductions
- Developing new partnerships with landowners in the Haresfield area



We're beginning to work on the next phase of the Stroud Landscape Project.

Phase two which will see us working with more landowners to create nature and landscape connections in the Haresfield and Painswick area.

We are now looking to work and develop partnerships with landowners in the Haresfield and Painswick area.

If you, or someone you know is interested in supporting this great conservation project, please get in touch.

Email:
david.armstrong@nationaltrust.org.uk

Tel: 01452 814213



Grants and funding opportunities

To support the delivery of the Stroud Landscape Project's ambitions we're accessing various grants that fund conservation work and the creation of nature recovery networks.

We've recently been successful in an application to the Cotswold Natural Landscape's Caring for the Cotswold fund. The grant will fund the installation of a water supply at Boundary Court Farm, extending the conservation

grazing programme.

We're also applying for grant funding to carry out a range of habitat creation and enhancement projects on land in the Stroud area – including supporting projects on private land that will restore connectivity.

Importantly, many funds are not just aimed at organisations like the National Trust, but are open to anyone with suitable projects.

Supporting the Stroud Landscape Project

We can help you source funding.

If you would like to find out about what funding opportunities might be available to you to help you support the Stroud Landscape Project, please get in touch.

And finally....thank you!

We couldn't end our newsletter without saying a huge and whole-hearted thank you to all the amazing landowners and organisations who have supported the Stroud Landscape Project so far. You have helped us achieve some truly fantastic things for nature and wildlife. Together, we can change the fortunes for wildlife. We'll be in touch with you again soon.

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