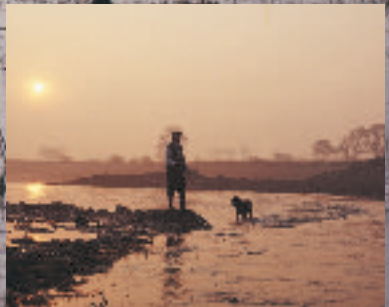


# Wildlife Habitat Trust

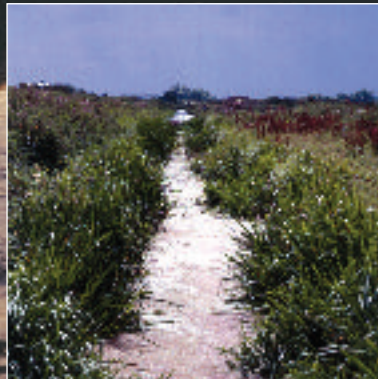
The shooter's fund for conservation



## *Habitats under threat*

Britain retains just a fragment of the semi-natural habitats which existed before industrialisation. Centuries of development, urbanisation and the intensification of farming have steadily eroded our once-extensive areas of wilderness, and the process continues.

Wetlands remain under particular pressure. Man has always selected the level sites along the floodplains of rivers or close to the edges of tidal estuaries for building towns, cities and ports, while the rich alluvial soils of our river valleys have proved amongst the most attractive for farming. Today, wetlands and wildfowl remain under threat from drainage and development, from water abstraction and from coastal erosion brought about by rising sea levels.





## *A commitment to conserve*



National conservation groups and wildlife trusts control many important conservation sites, but around Britain some of the most valuable wetlands have been protected by shooting enthusiasts. On the face of it, hunters may seem unlikely guardians of wildlife and wild places, but successive generations of sportsmen have recognised that protecting wildlife habitats is the key to sustainable hunting. There remains a huge commitment amongst shooting enthusiasts for protecting and managing wildlife habitat, and local shooting groups – especially wildfowling clubs – represent a powerful resource for conservation. Not only do they protect many thousands of acres of prime wildfowl habitat, but they are actively involved in creating new wetland sites for shooting and conservation.

Wildfowling clubs have plenty of enthusiasm, together with the muscle power needed to undertake site management, but what they often lack are the resources to acquire the land in the first place.

That is where the Wildlife Habitat Trust can help. Often all that is needed to enable a land purchase or management project to go ahead is a modest loan or a pump-priming grant, together with the professional expertise and advice to set a scheme on the right tracks. Over 20 years the Trust has provided more than three quarters of a million pounds, much of it to local wildfowling clubs. That investment has resulted in the acquisition of nearly 4,000 acres of land and sporting rights, a real result for shooting and conservation.

## Pioneering steps



Nearly a hundred years ago the Wildfowlers Association of Great Britain and Ireland (WAGBI) was formed by a small group of wildfowlers who were concerned about the drainage and destruction of wildfowl habitat and the loss of access to coastal marshes by wildfowlers.

Concern for wildfowl conservation remained at the heart of WAGBI. In the 1950s many local wildfowling clubs were formed, and these were encouraged to rear and release ducks and geese. Wildfowl numbers were boosted and the contribution made to the understanding of bird migration through the return of leg rings was considerable. But WAGBI soon recognised that to conserve birds it was first necessary to control and manage wildfowl habitat. Wildfowling clubs turned from rearing ducks to creating their own local wildfowl reserves.

## A Trust is born

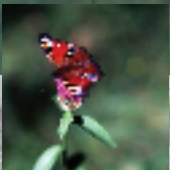
As pressure on wildfowling grounds increased, clubs considered acquiring their own marshes. The purchase in 1963 of Bridgemarsh Island in the Crouch estuary by members of the South Essex Wildfowlers was supported by a direct loan of £600 from WAGBI. However, when larger marshes came on the market in the 1980s there was no practical means whereby land purchase by wildfowlers could be supported, so in 1986 two South Essex club members, John Fuller and David Gray, asked the



British Association for Shooting and Conservation, as WAGBI had now become, to create a dedicated fund which could be used to secure land for shooting and conservation in the UK. Their request was warmly supported at BASC's Annual General Meeting and the Wildlife Habitat Trust was born.

BASC looked at ways of building up the Trust's resources and hit upon the idea of selling an annual stamp to supporters. The 'duck stamp' has long been used in the United States to raise revenue for wildfowl conservation and in 1991 the first UK hunter's habitat stamp was launched. Soon, thousands of British wildfowlers and shooters were buying the £5 habitat stamp. The Wildlife Habitat (Conservation) Stamp Trust (WHCST) was established in 1992 to run the UK Habitat Conservation Stamp programme and act as the WHT's commercial arm.

The Wildlife Habitat Charitable Trust (WHCT) was also established in 1992 to take advantage of the benefits of charitable status and to expand the WHT operation, providing increased support for the conservation of wildlife and habitats through the provision of grants.



## How the WHIT works



The Wildlife Habitat Trust is the only body which is solely dedicated to providing financial backing for shooting and conservation in the UK. It is administered by BASC, but has two independent Trustees who are elected annually at the association's Annual General Meeting. BASC members seeking support for their projects apply to the Trust by contacting the Conservation department at BASC Headquarters. Details of their proposed scheme are relayed to the Trustees and other support staff, and a decision is made. Where funding approval is given, the Trust will normally offer a loan representing a proportion of the project cost, repayable over an agreed term. After repayment, the money is recycled to benefit further projects.

Many of the schemes which the Trust has supported have involved the purchase of land or sporting rights. Land purchases may be complex and sensitive transactions, and the Trustees will always endeavour to give a quick decision to applicants. In addition, BASC's professional conservation staff will advise and assist applicants in the structuring of their projects and in applications for additional funding under agri-environment schemes such as Defra's Stewardship programme.



Since its inception, support from the Trust has enabled the purchase of 2,686 acres of land for shooting and conservation at a sale price of more than £1.5m and has provided nearly £48,000 to enable the acquisition of a further 1,250 acres of sporting rights.

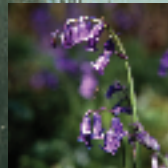
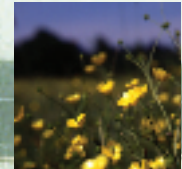
Typically, support has been granted to BASC affiliated wildfowling clubs for the purchase of salt marsh, freshwater grazing marsh, reed bed or other coastal wetland habitat. However, a very wide range of projects has been supported, including the purchase of scrub woodland and meadow, the creation of a wildflower meadow and other habitat management work by small BASC clubs or by individual members.

*Real results for shooting and conservation*

Where appropriate an outright grant may be offered, normally for habitat improvement work. To take advantage of the benefits of charitable giving, grants may additionally be made by the Wildlife Habitat Charitable Trust. Projects supported by grant aid have included conservation of Biodiversity Action Plan species such as the grey partridge, improvement of salt marsh lagoons in Lincolnshire, managed coastal retreat in Essex and wetland habitat improvement in Kent.

## *New and extended reserves*

In some cases public recognition has been given to the quality of BASC members' work through the inclusion of sites within National or Local Nature Reserves, opening up the opportunity of additional public funding of management work and protecting members' sporting interests. WHT funded projects have resulted in the creation of a new National Nature Reserve at Lough Beg in Northern Ireland and a Local Nature Reserve at Wigtown Bay on the Scottish Solway coast. In addition, WHT funded projects have resulted in the extension of existing Reserves at Hamford Water, Essex; the Ribble Estuary, Lancashire; and Y Foryd Bay in Wales.



# Where the money comes from

The Wildlife Habitat Trust was conceived as a shooters' own fund to benefit shooting and conservation, and the biggest contributors have been BASC members themselves. Financial support has come from regular auctions of goods and sporting promises donated by members, from the sale of badges, paintings and artwork, and from a huge number of individual gifts.

## Stamp of success

However, the most imaginative means of fund raising has been the Habitat Stamp. Modelled initially on the 'duck stamp' programmes in the United States and elsewhere, the Habitat Stamp scheme invites all BASC members and supporters to buy an annual stamp at a cost of £5 which may be stuck into the BASC membership card to display a personal commitment to conservation. Many wildfowling clubs, including those which themselves have benefited from WHT support, now purchase stamps annually on behalf of each of their members.








Habitat stamps depict wildfowl or game birds, often in a setting unique to a location in which a particular conservation project has been undertaken. The first stamp issued in 1991 depicted pintail in flight over the famous lighthouse at Sutton Bridge on the Wash, whilst subsequent stamps have shown teal over the Ouse Washes, wigeon at Lindisfarne, pink-footed geese over the Solway and long tailed duck over the Blackwater Estuary in Essex.

Some of the most celebrated of Britain's wildlife artists have produced the artwork from which the stamp is produced. Rodger McPhail, Keith Shackleton, Bruce Pearson, Terence Lambert and Julian Novorol are among the many names who have contributed. Each stamp is

accompanied by additional artwork relating to the species depicted, enabling supporters to build up an attractive collection of pictures and memorabilia associated with the stamp whilst helping to boost the Trust's revenue. For those who enjoy collecting badges, an attractive enameled pin badge has been produced every year since the stamp project was launched in 1991, and early Habitat stamp badges are now keenly sought after.



*A record to be  
proud of*

Nearly 70 projects have been supported so far by the WHT, ranging from the purchase of high conservation value coastal wetland and agricultural land for conversion to wildfowl habitat, to woodcock research, boosting grey partridge numbers in Cheshire and the control of mink to benefit water voles on the Somerset Levels. Further work has been funded in the Baltic breeding grounds of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to benefit migratory wildfowl populations overwintering in the UK.

- At Hamford Water in Essex, Little Oakley & District Wildfowlers Association received a loan enabling them to purchase 180 acres of salt marsh. The club's sympathetic management of the site was recognized through its acceptance within a National Nature Reserve.
- When foreshore wildfowling was threatened, WHT helped Lough Foyle Wildfowlers Association, Northern Ireland, to secure a vital 20 acre landholding on the mouth of the river Roe, ensuring continued access by club members to the estuary.
- Through funding from WHT and the Heritage Lottery Fund the Blackwater Wildfowlers Association, Essex, acquired 85 acres of farmland and restored it to wet grazing marsh for overwintering wildfowl and breeding waders.
- WHT provided grant aid in order to enable the control of invasive Spartina grass to restore the habitat at Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve, Northumberland, for overwintering wigeon.
- When a key 221 acres of Solway merse came onto the market. WHT enabled Wigtown Bay wildfowlers, Scotland, to secure its long-term management. The land has been accepted into a Local Nature Reserve, enabling the club to regulate access.
- Through a WHT loan, Dengie Hundred Wildfowlers Club, Essex, purchased 37 acres of reclaimed farmland and broke through an old sea wall to allow the tide to flood it once again. The land is now reverting to salt marsh which will help form a new defence against the North Sea.
- Wetlands in the Baltic States are a crucial link in the flyway used by many of Britain's migratory wildfowl. WHCT grants have aided important wetland conservation projects in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

## What others say

"Without the massive help and assistance of WHT and their staff we could not have raised the finance to purchase our very first piece of marsh. The process was not complicated, the funds arrived on time and the repayments are manageable. We will certainly look to purchase more land with WHT's help in the future."

Steve Copeland, Colchester Wildfowling and Conservation Club

"Continued and increasing support of the WHT by shooters and shooting organisations should be encouraged in order to help even more people share in the success our club has enjoyed. We look forward to seeing the WHT featuring even more prominently in shooting and conservation success stories in the coming years."

Haydn Jones, Gloucestershire Wildfowling Association



"The WHT is a vital element in assisting clubs to purchase land for shooting and conservation and its staff are always supportive and positive. The club would like to thank WHT and its staff in helping to make their club what it is today."

Bill Offord, Tendring and Halstead Wildfowling Association

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