



Mid Programme Report

February 2025



THE PLANET, WE ARE NATURE

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The Environmental Leadership Programme (ELP2) has reached its midpoint in Year 2, marking a period of significant development and transition. As the programme prepares to move from UpRising's leadership to The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, this report examines our programme developments over the past year as we deliver the ELP2 to its second cohort.

Building on findings from a recent [UpRising report commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation examining meaningful youth engagement through hybrid delivery](#), and our learning from Year 1, we have enhanced our delivery approach in several key areas over the last year:

- Introduction of a refined badge system with gamification elements, providing clearer progression pathways and aiming for increased participant engagement
- Streamlined digital ecosystem, based on Year 1 participant feedback, reducing platform overwhelm while maintaining effective communication
- Enhanced support framework serving diverse participant needs, with 24% of participants having additional needs and 15% disclosing disabilities in Year 2
- Strengthened nature connection approach through dedicated staffing and improved activity structure
- More strategic communication planning with key objectives focussed around widening engagement in the West Midlands

As we implement this organisational transition and move into the second half of Year 2, we remain focused on our core mission: supporting young people to develop as environmental leaders while fostering meaningful connections with nature. This report outlines our progress, challenges, and priorities for continued development.



Photo taken by a participant as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.



Transition to The Wildlife Trusts

In Spring 2025, during the delivery of the ELP2 to our second cohort, the ELP2 programme is transitioning from being led by the project's current lead partner, UpRising, to The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT). Importantly, the entire delivery team will transfer with the programme, ensuring complete continuity of delivery and participant support. This means participants will continue working with the same Programme Leads and Programme Delivery and Support Officers who have built relationships with the cohort since this programme began in October 2024.

This strategic change will:

- Enhance the programme's environmental expertise through The Wildlife Trusts' established network
- Maintain the strong youth leadership development framework established by UpRising Leadership
- Build on existing regional partnerships in the West Midlands
- Provide opportunities for wider geographical reach through The Wildlife Trusts' national network
- Ensure programme quality and consistency through retention of the experienced delivery team

The transition has been carefully planned to maintain:

- Consistent delivery of all programme elements including the badge system and support framework
- Uninterrupted participant support from familiar team members
- Regular communication with stakeholders and partners
- Strong regional relationships built during Years 1 and 2
- Programme momentum and development based on Year 1 learnings



Photo taken by a participant as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.

Key programme developments from Year 1 to Year 2

Enhanced badge system

As highlighted in the YFF report's recommendations around maintaining strong support frameworks, clear progression pathways are essential for participant engagement in hybrid delivery. Building on this evidence and early observations from Year 2, we have refined and gamified our badge system to provide more engaging and transparent achievement criteria for participants.

For Year 2, we have introduced several features to enhance engagement:

- Interactive progress tracking visualisations in Mighty Networks
- We take time to recognise achievements in our monthly sessions with group leaders
- Badges are integrated across our online platforms and are represented digitally to encourage engagement, progress and peer recognition
- Customisable learning pathways within each badge area with participants able to make choices over how they individually achieve milestones

Early indicators suggest this gamified approach is supporting stronger retention rates in Year 2.

"I really like the outline of the course and letting us know important events throughout the course." - Year 2 programme participant

Participants' programme journeys are measured through the completion of sessions under 5 different headings, each represented by a badge. Throughout the programme, the completion of sessions and extra activities contribute towards their ability to win a badge.

Upon graduation of the programme, their personal certificate reflects how many badges they have won, and as such, how many elements of the programme journey they complete. Each badge now includes flexible options for demonstrating learning while maintaining core requirements.



Exploring Green Leadership: This foundational badge develops participants' understanding of environmental leadership and their own leadership potential, exploring what it means to be a green leader in today's world.



Personal Connection to Nature: This badge focuses on deepening participants' individual relationships with nature, understanding its benefits for wellbeing and environmental advocacy, and developing regular nature connection practices.



Community, Advocacy and Influence: This badge equips participants with the skills to build movements, influence change, and effectively advocate for environmental causes within their communities.



Innovation and Change: This practical badge develops participants' abilities to design, implement and evaluate effective nature connection campaigns, fostering creative approaches to environmental engagement.

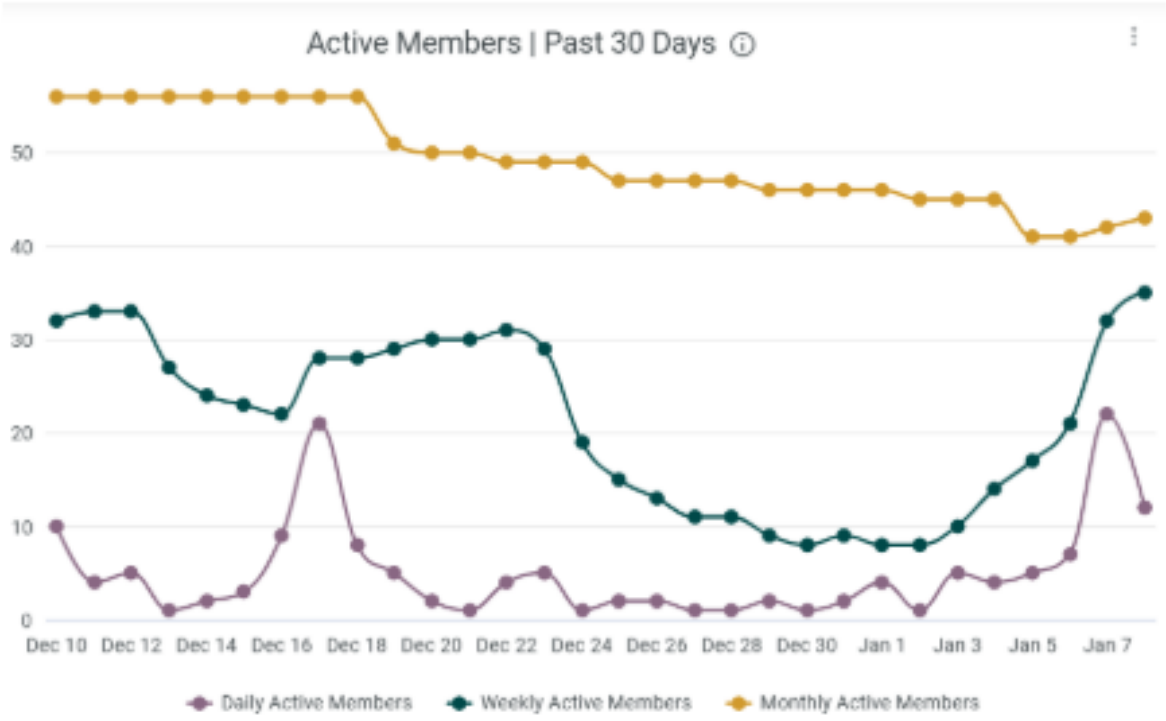


Action and Opportunity: This final badge focuses on translating programme learning into career development, helping participants identify and access opportunities in the environmental sector.

Programme improvements through the badge system

- The badge system allows us to better communicate themes and elements of the programme to participants, with clear session categorisation
- We clearly offer flexible attendance options whilst maintaining clear expectations of programme engagement (e.g. 3/4 or 4/5 sessions to be completed to achieve each badge)

- Providing online catch-up options via Mighty Network for recorded sessions and missed content
- Options to submit work or documentation in a variety of formats to suit the participant best (written/visual/audio)
- The badges are fully integrated into the programme delivery, for example through our digital infrastructure with Salesforce and Mighty Networks and within data collection through our monthly reflection logs
- Badges support our team's ability to track progress, as well as supporting individual participants to better track and record their own programme journey and progress with more personalised progress monitoring
- Badges put a clear focus on skill development, both for the team and individual participants, with clear links to campaign development, alignment to career development, leadership development and sector pathways
- Badges have supported us to highlight key themes within our programme, and we have emphasised some parts of our curriculum, making them mandatory (e.g. completion of the 'Nature Connection 101' session)



As one Programme Delivery Officer notes: "The enhanced badge system has really helped participants stay motivated and see their progress more clearly. The ability to choose their own pathways while maintaining clear goals has been particularly effective for engagement."

Digital ecosystem and communications

Our report for YFF found that successful hybrid delivery requires careful integration of digital platforms with clear purposes and user pathways. On the ELP2 we use a combination of two online platforms for programme delivery:

1. Slack is our communication platform. It is an online messaging app that allows our Programme Team so communicate and share programme information with the cohort directly and through whole cohort channels. It also enables our participants to

Impact on engagement

Initial feedback from the Programme Delivery Team indicates that the enhanced badge system is supporting stronger engagement:

- Improved engagement with 66 participants currently engaging with the programme
- Higher completion rates of monthly Nature Connection activities
- Increased participant interaction on digital platforms (82 active on Slack, 74 active on Mighty Networks and 469 engagements so far with Year 2 recorded content and online materials)
- Greater peer support and recognition through dedicated group team's encouragement for participants to share monthly Nature Connection Activities with one another in the 'chat' channel

The following graph shows our digital platform has maintained good engagement since the start of the programme with a slight drop off in accordance with Christmas and the programme's Winter Break.

collaborate, share, and reflect together. We also use Slack as a virtual notice board, sharing information on other opportunities.

- We have 82 active members on Slack
- This year we have streamlined the number of channels we use to communicate with participants, reducing overwhelm
- The platform hosts dedicated group channels fostering smaller group connections, monitored by group leaders
- Enhanced nature connection sharing in chat channels
- Peak engagement periods aligned with key programme activities (as demonstrated in the graph below)



2. Mighty Networks is a customisable online learning platform. It combines community features, course hosting, and membership management in one place, allowing the ELP2 team to host programme information, materials and session recordings.

- We have 74 active members on Mighty Networks (out of 75 total members)
- We have enhanced our pre-session content structure, flipping the learning by offering resources to participants before their sessions to read and engage with materials, then using session time to discuss this in the group setting, ask questions and engage learning activities and reflections
- Delivery of the programme through the badge system is integrated into the Mighty Network platform
- Participants actively partake in the watching of session recordings and engaging with session content uploaded on the platform with 469 views so far for Year 2 content

Strengthened support structure

Building on Year 1 experience and drawing from our facilitation guide and participant support documentation, we have enhanced our support framework to better serve the diverse needs of our cohort:

Pastoral, Access, Welfare and Safeguarding framework

ELP2's PAWS (Pastoral, Access, Welfare and Safeguarding) process is managed via our CRM system, Salesforce. Each participant that applies for a place on the programme has a participant record on Salesforce which all their information feeds into. Their information is gathered via our onboarding forms.

Drawing from our monitoring of participant support needs, we strive to accommodate all individuals across both online engagement and in-person session access. This is important as our programme proactively recruits and supports young people with additional needs, with our current cohort including:

- 24% of participants with additional needs
- 15% of participants with disclosed disabilities
- Various mental health, neurodiversity, and physical health considerations



Art produced by a participant as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.

Through this framework we can be sure to identify participant needs and adjust our delivery accordingly through:

- **Accessibility measures such as -**
 - Clear documentation of support needs identified through our PAWS process
 - Advance sharing of session information and materials through Mighty Networks
 - Flexible attendance options including online catch-up
 - Transport support for in-person sessions
 - Multiple pathways for engagement and participation
 - Access to quiet spaces at in-person events when needed
 - Technical and practical support including
 - Session recording access via Mighty Networks
 - Clear communication pathways set out for participants in the Programme Handbook
 - Digital engagement support



Photo of a snow sculpture produced by a participant as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.

Group Leader system

Our three Group Leaders (Sofia, Jen, and Benjamin) provide structured support through:

- Pre-programme welcome calls with each participant
- Early weeks orientation meetings
- Regular group check-ins
- Dedicated private Slack channels for each group
- Primary point of contact for session attendance and support needs

This support structure reflects our understanding of participants' diverse needs and circumstances, from caring responsibilities to health considerations, ensuring the programme remains accessible and engaging for all participants.

Facilitation development

This programme year the team have been working together to develop the consistency and quality of facilitation of sessions and participant experiences across the programme. We have done this through:

- Surveying our facilitation team to explore skills and confidence levels
- Developing a programme facilitation style guide
- Working with an external consultant to explore further training and development opportunities for the team

Our aim is to develop both our current team's facilitation skills but also to develop our systems around programme facilitation to ensure every participant engaging with the ELP2 has a high-quality and recognisable experience. For us, this includes:

- An inclusive and safe environment attuned to cultural safety and accessibility considerations, with flexible support options
- An interesting and dynamic programme experience centred around nature, with multi-sensory engagement techniques focussed on creating a consistent participant experience when engaging with both online and in-person sessions
- Discussion-based learning that integrates opportunities for debate, critical thinking and reflective practice

- A balance of professionalism and approachability, where participants feel they have power, equity and a responsibility to both each other and the programme team

Data collection and evaluation

Addressing Year 1 challenges around response rates and participants finding the programme data collection requests to be complex, we have made changes in the following areas for Year 2:

Streamlined collection methods

- We have reduced survey frequency, with data collection points at the start and end of the programme, and end of each term including:
 - Termly reflection logs
 - Pre and post-programme surveys
 - Nature connection activity tracking
 - Nature Connection Index
 - Pre and Post Coaching surveys
 - Campaign impact evaluation
- Where possible we integrate data collection with regular session activities such as through session reflections, Keep, Add, Takeaways, and collecting photo evidence

Encouraging response rates

- We use clear messaging throughout the programme, reiterating the importance and purpose of our data collection
- We have implemented a new tracking system using Salesforce and Mighty Networks integrated with our badge system
- We follow up data requests with regular completion reminders for participants

Impact on engagement

Programme team observations and data from Term 1 demonstrate strong engagement:

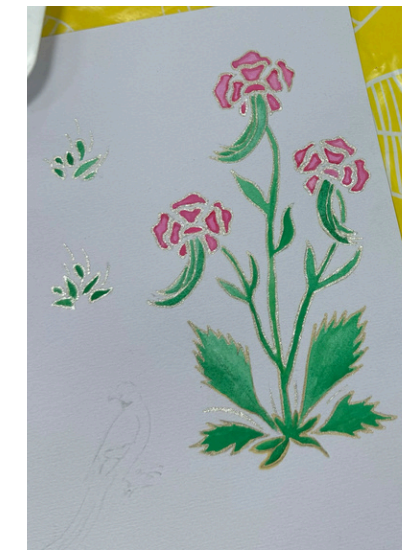
- Active participation of 66 participants as of December 2024
- High online session attendance, averaging 40 participants per session
- Strong catch-up engagement through session recordings, with up to 13 participants catching up per session
- Particularly strong engagement in early programme elements:
 - Welcome to ELP2: 53 total participants (40 live, 13 catch-up)
 - Nature Connection 101: 56 total participants (44 live, 11 catch-up)
 - Leadership 101: 53 total participants (43 live, 10 catch-up)

Digital platform engagement shows consistent activity:

- Slack: 82 total members with peak activity periods:
 - 19-25 October 2024 (post-launch engagement)
 - 4-19 November 2024 (coinciding with Nature Connection activities)
- Mighty Networks: 75 total members with 74 active users
 - 469 engagements with online session recordings and materials
 - Consistent engagement throughout Term 1
 - Some seasonal decrease during winter break



Art produced by participants as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.



Nature Connection and campaigning

Nature Connection development

- This year we have recruited a member of the Delivery Team specifically focussed on Nature Connection to ensure this pivotal theme is integrated throughout every element of our programme, and to enhance the quantity and quality of the Nature Connection opportunities participants have access to. This role was added in response to Year 1 feedback about strengthening environmental engagement.
- Enhanced monthly activity structure with clear progression pathways, including structured activities like RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and moon journaling (***evidence of which you can see throughout this report***)
 - 36 participants took part in Nature Connection activities around the programme launch participating in nature themed crafts, owl pellet dissections, campfire lighting, den building and nature murals
 - 33 participants took part in Nature Connection activities in October based around exploring their local green space
 - 20 participants took part in Nature Connection activities in November based around creating nature-based art - art pieces ranged from snowmen and nature murals to drawings, paintings and photographs
 - 15 participants took part in Nature Connection activities in December where they were encouraged to watch a nature documentary with a variety of different nature documentaries selected and recommended by participants
- Improved documentation processes allowing multiple formats (written, visual, audio) to accommodate different learning styles and accessibility needs
- Integration with campaign development milestones, ensuring nature connection principles inform campaign design and delivery

Campaign support framework

Part of our mission with the ELP2 programme is for our impact to be wider than just the cohorts of participants - to transcend those engaging directly with the programme and curriculum to support pro-environmental change in the West Midlands and beyond.

During our early development of the ELP2 young people told us that feeling like they were part of a wider movement was important to them and their ability to feel like they had power and were making a difference. The campaigning elements of the ELP2 programme supports this.

In Year 2 of the programme, we have continued to improve and develop the Nature Connection Campaign delivery, including:

- Introducing campaigning earlier in the programme so that it is now better integrated throughout the programme journey
- Implementing a more structured group formation process with clear KPIs from the start, including:
 - Engagement targets (15 people minimum)
 - Documentation requirements
 - Impact measurement guidance
- We have developed enhanced resources including a physical workbook to complement the programme's digital resources and planning tools, developed from Year 1 campaign learnings
- Having regular progress monitoring through the Group Leader system
- Integrating expert speakers with campaign experience throughout different programme sessions

Our first Campaign Day of the Year 2 programme took place on Saturday 1st February, formally kickstarting the Nature Connection Campaign part of the programme.

Data collection for Nature Connection Campaigns

Over the past 6 months, we have been reflecting on challenges around quantifying and analysing the impact of Nature Connection Campaigns in Year 1. In response, we have developed new processes and tools to improve our ability to demonstrate campaign impact and support participants to work with data for their NCCs. This has led to a 2 pronged data collection approach that we hope is user-friendly whilst delivering meaningful impact measurement:

- **We are designing pledge postcards** which participants will distribute at their campaign events, providing attendees with a physical takeaway that includes space for writing personal nature pledges, links to Wildlife Trust resources and ELP2 programme information, and encouragement to share their pledge follow-through on social media, creating an ongoing engagement tool that extends impact beyond the initial event
- **We are implementing a QR code system** that generates unique codes for each campaign event, linking to anonymous surveys that gather essential data about event satisfaction, nature accessibility barriers, pledges made, demographic information and travel distance, with clear organisational branding and data protection information that removes GDPR complications while maintaining comprehensive impact measurement

This dual approach ensures consistent data collection across all Nature Connection Campaigns. The system supports both quantitative impact measurement and qualitative feedback collection, providing valuable insights for programme development while remaining manageable for our participants to implement.



Art produced by participants as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.



Development priorities looking ahead

Moving into the second half of the Year 2 programme, we will be continuously development of our Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact framework - we will be building on Year 1 where engagement tracking showed varied response rates by:

- Implementing and monitoring the impact of our enhanced tracking systems integrated with the badge framework
- Developing our data collection around our Coaching scheme to better understand the impact of this part of the programme on participants' journeys
- Refining feedback collection methods to reduce survey fatigue
- Building a stronger evidence base through regular reflection logs and systematic data collection

We will continue monitoring the effectiveness of this year's developments to our Nature Connection Campaign support and data collection, keeping attuned to challenges and successes and looking forward to further refinement of this part of the programme in Year 3, such as:

- Continuing to support campaigns to encourage translating campaign engagement into real world impact
- Strengthening links with local environmental initiatives through The Wildlife Trusts network
- Enhancing the sustainable impact of campaigns

Through our **Share, Learn, Improve** function, we will also be exploring and developing our **recruitment strategy this year**, with a focus on developing meaningful relationships with recruitment organisations and institutions. This project includes:

- Analysing areas of challenge within our Year 1 and 2 recruitment campaigns - specifically looking into Taster Sessions
- Developing our existing relationships with a number of educational institutions across West Midlands to develop a more two way relationship of support and development for young people, including sharing resources and skills session with them
- Leveraging our development work from Year 1, including resources we created for young people around Green Jobs.

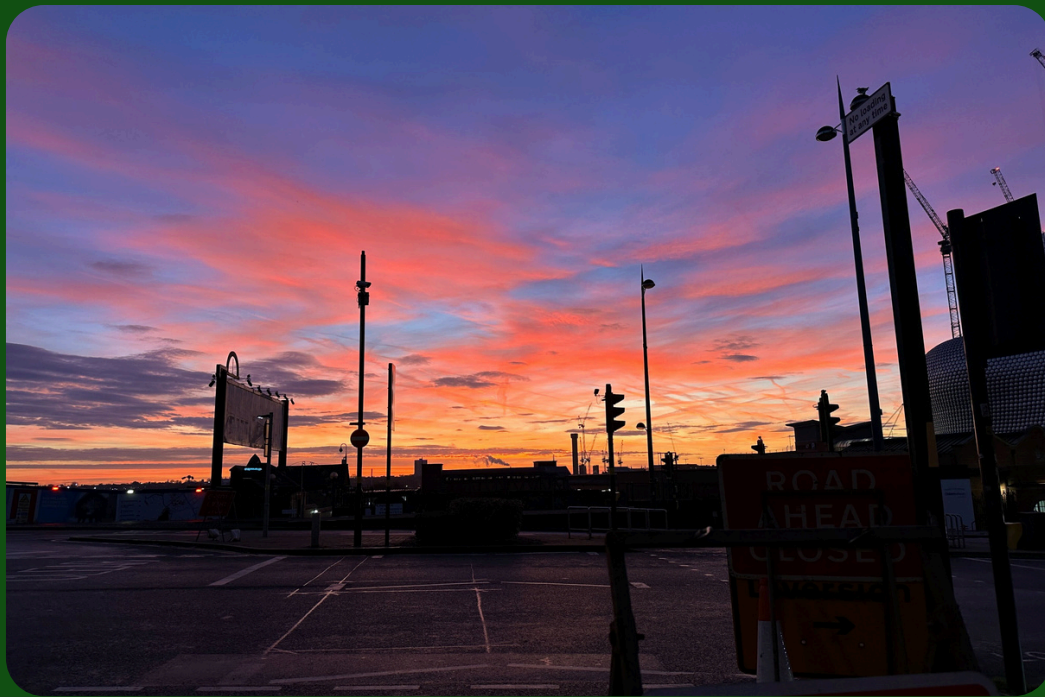


Photo taken by a participant as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.

Programme communications

This year we have developed specific communications objectives for the ELP2 programme. These include:

- **Programme awareness and impact including -**
 - showcasing programme's environmental and social outcomes through storytelling and data visualisation
 - sharing Year 1 impact throughout the year
 - incorporating Year 2 impact data from June 2025
- **Participant and alumni storytelling through -**
 - featuring alumni success stories, especially focusing on continued environmental advocacy
 - sharing participant testimonials
- **Stakeholder and partner engagement through -**
 - publicly acknowledge partners and supporters (including programme speakers, guests and venues that support our programme delivery)
 - maintaining strong relationships with external partners, local councils, and grassroots organisations
- **Being a platform for youth voice** through supporting participants to write blogs or create videos about their environmental work
- **Regional focus on the West Midlands through -**
 - further developing relationships with organisations and individuals across the West Midlands who share our vision
 - developing our online following in the West Midlands highlighting local environmental causes where relevant
 - spotlighting regional environmental issues and successes
 - highlighting relevant local services and activities
- **Proactively sharing our learning** through our Share, Learn, Improve insight piece which this year is focussed on 'diverse recruitment'

Social Media growth and engagement January 2025 data shows:

- 120 followers
- Top audience locations align with our West Midlands focus: Birmingham, Shrewsbury, London and Telford
- Age: Predominantly 18-24 (42.7%), followed by 25-34 (26.4%).
- Gender: 77.4% women, 22.5% men



Photo taken by a participant as part of their monthly Nature Connection activities.

Conclusion

At its mid-point, Year 2 of ELP2 marks significant progress for both our programme and ELP2’s organisational development. By striving to implement learnings from year 1, we have been able to strengthen core delivery elements such as the badge system, streamlining our digital platforms, and enhancing the nature connection framework. The programme’s growing regional impact is also demonstrated by increasing social media engagement across the West Midlands.

Term 1 engagement data supports the effectiveness of our refined approach, with consistent attendance rates averaging 40 participants per online session and strong digital platform engagement across both Slack (82 members) and Mighty Networks (74 active users). The successful implementation of catch-up systems and flexible attendance options has maintained engagement despite seasonal challenges and academic commitments. This robust engagement provides a strong foundation for continued programme development as we move into Term 2.

As the programme and team transition from being led by UpRising, to The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, we are well-positioned to build on these foundations while accessing wider environmental expertise and geographical reach. Looking ahead to 2025, we will continue focusing on recruitment diversity, data collection refinement, and campaign support development.



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