

Conservation Works...

for local economies in the UK

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Nature conservation supports employment and provides benefits to local economies in the UK. This is the latest in a series of RSPB reports investigating these linkages, and summarises the results of studies undertaken by the RSPB and others between 1997 and 2001.

2. Nature Conservation, Employment and Local Economies

Nature conservation benefits rural economies in a number of different ways:

- **Direct employment** in the natural environment sector in the UK is estimated to total 18,000 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs;
- **Expenditures by conservation organisations** provide revenues and employment for local suppliers and contractors;
- **Conservation schemes** (such as agri-environment and woodland management initiatives) fund work in the wider countryside, and have been shown to support incomes and employment;
- **The tourism sector** benefits from conservation activities, as wildlife, habitats and landscapes attract visitors to rural areas, who spend money on local goods and services. Most recent studies suggest that tourism spending of between £30,000 and £40,000 is required to support one FTE job in local economies in the UK.

3. Spending by Visitors to RSPB Reserves

RSPB nature reserves receive more than one million visits each year. Visitors to reserves are estimated to spend a total of £12 million in local economies each year as a result of visiting reserves. This spending is estimated to support more than 300 FTE jobs in local economies, while direct employment on reserves amounts to a further 200 FTE jobs.

4. Wildlife Tourism on Orkney

Tourism is an important sector of Orkney's economy, bringing estimated tourism revenues of £18 million to the islands in 2000. The RSPB estimates that £1.3 million of this spending can be attributed to Orkney's birds and wildlife, and this is estimated to support 36 FTE jobs on the islands. The other main attractions of Orkney to visitors are its history, archaeology, and the quality of the landscape. The future of the tourism industry depends on the protection and management of Orkney's outstanding natural and historic environment, including the conservation of the marine environment. Given the highly seasonal nature of tourism on Orkney, there may be opportunities to extend the tourism season by promoting wildlife tourism in the winter and "shoulder" months, by raising awareness of the value of the islands for migrant and wintering birds.

5. RSPB Forsinard Reserve - Attracting Visitors to the Flow Country

RSPB Forsinard Reserve comprises 7,000 hectares of blanket bog in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland. Management and expansion of the reserve have benefited from funding from the EU LIFE Nature programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The reserve is estimated to have brought extra visitor spending of £185,000 into the economies of Caithness and Sutherland in 1997, which we estimate supports at least 5 FTE jobs. The reserve provides direct employment amounting to 3 FTE jobs. New work to restore the peatlands is creating additional employment opportunities. Forsinard Reserve has the potential to attract many more visitors, and to increase its contribution to the local economy by encouraging them to spend more money locally. There is scope to promote sustainable tourism development by encouraging greater use of Forsinard railway station.

6. Red Kites and Tourism on the Black Isle

Red Kites have been re-introduced to the Black Isle in the Highland region of Scotland. In 1997, a red kite viewing facility was established at North Kessock Tourist Information Centre (TIC), using closed circuit television cameras to show visitors nesting birds. Large numbers of visitors are also attracted to the Moray Firth to watch dolphins. A visitor survey at the TIC in 2000 found that the wildlife of the Black Isle was a major attraction for many visitors, and estimated that red kites attract extra visitor spending totalling £116,000 per year to the local economy, supporting at least 3 FTE jobs. A survey of local tourism businesses found that two thirds of accommodation providers use wildlife in their promotional material. The survey concluded that, while the economic impact of dolphins is more significant, red kites form an important and growing component of the Black Isle's wildlife tourism experience.

7. Geese and Local Economies in Scotland

Growing populations of geese in Scotland damage agricultural crops, but benefit the tourism industry by attracting winter birdwatchers and goose shooters. A study by the RSPB and BASC for the National Goose Forum estimated that birdwatchers and goose shooters spend a total of £5.4 million in the local economies around goose sites each winter, of which £3.6 million can be attributed to the presence of geese themselves. This spending was estimated to support more than 100 FTE jobs in 1997/98. Goose watching was estimated to attract annual revenues of £1.5 million to these economies. These benefits are significant when compared to estimates of the damage caused by geese. The benefits that geese bring to the wider rural economy support the case for intervention to ensure that farmers are rewarded appropriately for managing their land in a way that supports healthy goose populations

8. Reedbeds – Opportunities for Rural Development in the UK

Re-creation and management of reedbeds benefits rural economies and wildlife in the UK. Conservation management of reedbeds supports up to 90 direct FTE jobs and further contract work to a value of up to £4m per year. Commercial harvesting of reeds provides further direct employment, and this helps to support the thatching industry. Major reedbed sites such as Titchwell, Minsmere and Leighton Moss RSPB reserves are also important for wildlife tourism. There is strong demand for quality UK produced thatching reed, and other fen products (such as biofuel and pet litter) can be viably produced in association with sensitive wildlife management. Reedbeds can also provide other indirect benefits, such as water management functions. Increasing the area of reedbed in the UK will benefit both biodiversity and rural

employment. However, careful management is required, both of reedbeds themselves, and of the way they are worked, to provide sustainable benefits to local communities and wildlife.

9. Valuing Norfolk's Coast

A study of visitors to six sites on the Norfolk Coast in 1999 estimated that they spent £21 million per year in the local economy. Visitors attracted to these sites mainly by their birds and wildlife were estimated to have spent a total of £6 million in the area, supporting an estimated 135 FTE jobs. The Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Cley reserve and Titchwell RSPB reserve were estimated to bring extra visitor spending of £2.5 million and £1.8 million respectively into the Norfolk coastal economy in 1999. In addition, work by conservation organisations in managing sites in the Norfolk coast area supports 30 FTE jobs. The study identified a series of challenges for the management of Norfolk's coastal environment and the tourism that depends on it. These include maintaining the extent and quality of internationally important wildlife habitats in the face of sea level rise, reducing the environmental impact of traffic, ensuring that tourism benefits local communities, and managing the pressure of increasing visitor numbers.

10. Minsmere RSPB Reserve and the Local Economy

Minsmere RSPB reserve lies on the Suffolk coast between Felixstowe and Lowestoft. It has a variety of habitats, is rich in biodiversity, and receives almost 80,000 visitors per year. Based on a survey of visitors in 2000, we estimate that the reserve attracts tourism expenditures of £1.1 million per year into the local economy, supporting an estimated 27.5 FTE tourism jobs. Direct employment on the reserve totals 20 FTE jobs. A survey of local businesses revealed a general recognition of these benefits, but also some concern about the environmental impact of tourism locally. The study emphasised the need to manage the environmental impact of reserve visiting, and suggested that further efforts should be made to spread visits more evenly across the year.

11. Cirl Buntings and Countryside Stewardship in South Devon

The cirl bunting is now confined to low-intensity mixed farmland in South Devon, but its population has increased following the introduction of special Countryside Stewardship payments in 1992. To assess the economic and social impact of CS cirl bunting agreements, the RSPB undertook a face-to-face survey of participating farmers in 1999/2000. This revealed that the agreements support extra employment totalling more than 6 FTE jobs among local farmers, farm-workers and contractors, with 89% of farmers perceiving them to have increased the profitability of their enterprise. The study concluded that, as well as benefiting cirl buntings and other wildlife, the scheme has helped to enhance business viability and farmers' optimism about the future.

12. Spending by Visitors to Symond's Yat Rock Peregrine Project

Each year, the RSPB and Forestry Commission operate a peregrine falcon nest protection and viewing scheme at Symond's Yat Rock in the Forest of Dean, which attracts 50,000 visitors. A visitor survey estimated that Symond's Yat Rock Peregrine Project attracted extra visitor spending of £551,000 to the Forest of Dean area in 1999, supporting an estimated 18 FTE jobs. The study suggested that further efforts could be made to promote the wildlife interest of the Forest of Dean area to visitors. Promoting messages about the benefits of peregrines and other birds of prey to local economies could further help to enhance attitudes towards them.

13. Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve and the Local Economy

Leighton Moss RSPB Nature Reserve is situated 10 miles north of Lancaster. The reserve covers 110 hectares of open water, reedbeds, woodland, scrub and limestone grassland. It is one of the RSPB's most visited reserves, attracting over 90,000 visitors, including 4,000 schoolchildren, each year. Direct employment on the reserve amounts to 10 FTE jobs. A survey of visitors in 1999 estimated that the wildlife of Leighton Moss and neighbouring sites attracts visitor spending of at least £0.95 million per year in the local economy within 20 miles of the reserve, supporting at least 27 FTE jobs in tourism activities. A further 20 FTE jobs are supported by spending by visitors to Leighton Moss attracted to the area by its scenery. The wildlife and landscape of Leighton Moss and other sites in the Morecambe Bay area are attracting increasing numbers of visitors, and are recognised as important assets by the tourism industry.

14. Rathlin Island – Coastal Tourism in Northern Ireland

Rathlin Island lies off the north-east coast of Northern Ireland. Between 23,500 and 29,000 recreational visitors travel to Rathlin each year, with 6,000 visiting the RSPB reserve at the West Lighthouse. A visitor survey in August 2000 found that 78% of visitors watched birds and/or other wildlife during their visit. The study estimated total spending by recreational visitors on the island at £245,000 per year, supporting at least 7 FTE jobs locally. In addition, the island ferry employs 8 full time crew and 2 full time and one seasonal office staff. As at least two-thirds of the ferry's traffic is estimated to be recreational passengers, about 7 FTE jobs in the ferry operation can be attributed to the tourists attracted to Rathlin. Designation of Rathlin as a Marine Nature Reserve would help to protect its scenery and wildlife, which are a valuable resource to the local economy.

15. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Nature conservation supports employment and provides benefits to local economies in the UK. Interest in conservation is growing, and these benefits are increasing. The case studies in this report highlight some positive examples of projects and nature reserves that have achieved significant conservation benefits while contributing to wider rural development. However, the UK still faces huge conservation problems and challenges. Addressing these challenges is essential for the UK's biodiversity, but it will also create jobs and contribute to rural development.

This report concludes by proposing a series of policy measures that would benefit both wildlife and rural economies in the UK. These involve:

1. Restoring and re-creating wildlife habitats;
2. Supporting conservation-friendly rural produce;
3. Investing in conservation skills;
4. Reforming the CAP;
5. Promoting sustainable tourism;
6. Extending environmental tax reform;
7. Recognising the role of nature conservation in rural development.