

Now is the time



The Royal Zoological
Society of Scotland
2030 strategy





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Now is the time

With more than a million species at risk of extinction, our planet's life support system is in crisis.

Nature needs us all more than ever – and now is the time to act. Together.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) is a wildlife conservation charity with a bold vision: a world where nature is protected, valued and loved. But we cannot achieve this alone.

Our vision needs an inspired and empowered worldwide community to join together – and you have a role to play.

With your support, we can achieve our pledge to reverse the decline of at least 50 species by 2030, from pine hoverflies and wildcats in the Cairngorms National Park, to chimpanzees in Uganda, giant anteaters in Brazil and many more.

Making nature more accessible is fundamental because people protect and value what they love and understand.

Edinburgh Zoo and Highland Wildlife Park are our gateways to the natural world through which people can experience nature.

They can learn about the challenges facing wildlife and discover how we harness our expertise in conservation science and animal care to save species from extinction.

All of this is made possible through the unique strength of the RZSS family – our teams, supporters and partners.

Our zoos will therefore be the cornerstones of our pledge to create deeper connections with nature for more than a million people by 2030.

Stronger communities have a greater capacity to care for wildlife – and through our zoos and our global reach we can help people realise the mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits of being close to nature.

This is why we are pledging to enable more than 100 communities to better protect nature by 2030.

Now is the time to work more collaboratively than ever before, using the skills and experience of all who hold nature dear.

Now is the time to win hearts and minds, ensuring everyone recognises the true value of nature and its crucial role in our health, wellbeing, prosperity and happiness.

Now is the time to inspire and empower people and communities to love and protect nature for today, tomorrow and generations to come.

Now is the time.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland: Our story

Thomas Gillespie was the founder of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and a true visionary.

A lawyer with a passion for zoology, Thomas opened Edinburgh Zoo in 1913 with support from the city council, four years after RZSS was formed. We welcomed Highland Wildlife Park into our family in the 1980s.

Today, we work to protect chimpanzees in Uganda, giant armadillos in Brazil, the Pallas' cat in Central Asia, partula snails in Tahiti, Northern rockhopper penguins in the South Atlantic Ocean and many other species.

It is tempting to wonder whether even our founder could have imagined the impact RZSS would one day have in protecting wildlife in Scotland and around the world.

We also focus on native species here in Scotland. Our specialist teams led the reintroduction of beavers, which were hunted to extinction more than 400 years ago, and are at the forefront of efforts to reinforce Scotland's wildcat, pine hoverfly and pond mud snail populations through vital breed and release programmes.

Our work is supported by ground-breaking genetic and genomic scientific research at the RZSS WildGenes laboratory in Edinburgh Zoo. One of only three of its kind in Europe, the laboratory plays a crucial role in international species conservation.

As our planet's biodiversity declines at an alarming rate, modern-day zoos and wildlife conservation charities such as RZSS are more relevant than ever before. We are in a unique position to provide a safe haven for threatened species, protect animals in the wild, foster deep and lasting connections with nature and inspire the conservationists of the future.



Our vision

A world where nature is protected, valued and loved

Our mission

To save wildlife and empower people in Scotland and around the world to protect, value and love nature



Our pledges

By 2030, working in Scotland and across the world, RZSS will:

Conservation

Reverse the decline of at least 50 species

Engagement

Create stronger connections with nature for more than a million people

Community

Enable more than 100 communities to better protect nature

Our strategy in context

Nature recovery requires a long-term, holistic vision. With this in mind, the RZSS 2030 strategy will work in tandem with the delivery of numerous international, national and regional plans.



Scottish Government's National Performance Framework

In line with the UN Sustainability goals and the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, we will support the creation of a better world by contributing to key outcomes for the environment, education, community, economy and international partnerships.

Aligned with plans for the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, our 2030 strategy supports work to protect the three pillars of biodiversity: the diversity of species, ecosystems and genes.

Our charity has a strong track record in the return of species to the wild and we use species conservation as a driver for wider ecosystem recovery. Through the RZSS WildGenes laboratory, we are world leaders in the conservation management of genetic diversity.

RZSS conservation work also supports the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. We will continue our charity's long history of partnering on conservation work on the Tristan da Cunha archipelago, with Northern rockhopper penguins at Edinburgh Zoo acting as ambassadors.

With our learning expertise, we will support the four key aims within the **Scottish Government's STEM Education and Training Strategy** by building on the Curriculum for Excellence and inspiring more people to explore STEM choices in their futures.

We will support the **Scottish Climate Change Plan** through ongoing commitment to the decarbonisation of our business operations and inspiring people to move towards low carbon living.

The **Scottish Economic Strategy** will be supported through investment in our zoos, infrastructure and communities, by strengthening Edinburgh Zoo and Highland Wildlife Park as world-class visitor attractions and through green technologies in our operations.

Our teams will support the **Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan** by working to protect priority species for the national park and improving the condition of habitats at Highland Wildlife Park, alongside providing jobs and responsible nature engagement as a key local employer and tourist attraction.

We will continue to work as part of global networks of modern-day zoos, making nature more accessible and using our unique strengths and expertise to protect wildlife around the world. This includes integrated species conservation planning between in-situ (wild) and ex-situ (captive) conservation, often called the '**One Plan approach**'.

RZSS is also committing to reverse the current negative trends in the IUCN's Red List status of species in line with the **#ReverseTheRed movement**. We plan for conservation in partnership, working on action plans for many different species, and we use science to achieve the best outcomes for nature.

A new way of thinking

"We need to change how we think, act and measure success"

The ground-breaking 2021 **DasGupta Review** on the Economics of Biodiversity argues that the species extinction crisis is undermining the productivity, resilience and adaptability of nature. This has put our economies, livelihoods and wellbeing at serious risk.

In response we must:

- Ensure that our demands on nature do not exceed its supply and that we increase nature's supply relative to its current level
- Change our measures of economic success to guide us on a more sustainable path
- Transform our institutions and systems – in particular, our finance and education systems – to enable these changes and sustain them for future generations

To achieve these goals, the DasGupta Review suggests various options for change, many of which are directly allied to the RZSS approach:

- Conserve and restore natural assets
- Improve efficiency of extraction from nature and produce less waste
- Reform education and economics to reflect the role of nature
- Empower citizens and communities to make informed choices and enact change
- Create effective institutions involving all levels of society – from local to global
- Drive fair and sustainable consumption and production supply chains

Key conservation and science objectives

Impact area:

Saving wild species

Objective 1:

Restore species

We will reverse the decline of threatened species, working in partnership to ensure biodiversity recovery is a driver for wider environmental restoration.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Reverse the decline of species native to Scotland by establishing a restoration centre at Highland Wildlife Park
- b Reverse the decline of flagship species through in-situ action, which will also act as a driver for wider ecosystem recovery and positive human-wildlife coexistence

Protection of habitats and mitigating threats in the environment is an essential part of successful species recovery and RZSS expertise will be balanced with that of our partners.

Our work with beavers, pine hoverflies and wildcats is just the beginning for native wildlife. Many other species, such as choughs or the dark bordered beauty moths, could also be supported by our restoration centre.

In global terms, our longstanding collaboration with the Budongo Conservation Field Station in Uganda and the Wild Animal Conservation Institute in Brazil are prime examples and we seek further projects that deliver such ambitious objectives.

Our pledge and impact measure: RZSS will reverse the decline of at least 50 species

Objective 2:

Support conservation breeding in our zoos

Our zoos will increase their impact by maintaining animal populations in support of conservation breeding for release programmes linked to our wildlife restoration work and other internationally recognised conservation action plans. We also seek to drive increased funding to RZSS conservation activities in the wild.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Increase the number of species in our zoos that are part of recognised conservation action plans
- b Year on year, increase our overall financial contribution to conservation in line with our growing spend on mission

Simply caring for and breeding endangered species in our zoos is not in itself conservation, but there is an increasing number of species where these actions are identified as crucial to their long-term survival – these will be our focus.

Sustainable and long-term financing is a vital lifeline to field conservation programmes and, through our zoos, RZSS can drive increasing funding to wild conservation. Our commitments to the Giraffe Conservation Foundation and Free the Bears exemplify this.

There is a need and urgency to direct our expertise to additional species and this commitment will drive our charity towards dedicating more and more resources to conservation and our wider mission. Popular and effective zoos are key to generating those resources.

Pine hoverfly

Following a record-breaking breeding season at Highland Wildlife Park in 2021, RZSS and the Rare Invertebrates in the Cairngorms project carried out the biggest ever releases of critically endangered pine hoverflies into the wild to boost Britain's population of this species.

Objective 3:

Advance species recovery science

We will increase our capacity, application and sharing of expertise in species recovery science.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Empower our RZSS WildGenes team to generate the genetic data needed to inform and optimise the conservation of biological diversity
- b Deliver plans for species recovery by generating the knowledge base and planning framework to inform conservation decision making
- c Develop species recovery medicine and care by continuing to advance the scientific knowledge base around veterinary and husbandry techniques

Successful conservation relies on sound data and analysis, innovative and meticulous planning, and the practical implementation of a range of husbandry and veterinary techniques – competencies and expertise that stretch across RZSS. We will seek to apply and contribute our specialist technical expertise to additional species recovery programmes across the globe.

RZSS WildGenes is an advanced and innovative research unit delivering crucial information to a wide range of conservation programmes, including critically endangered arid land antelopes. We will seek to expand its work and facilities to deliver greater impact.

The knowledge gained within our zoos in animal care, veterinary medicine and the management of small populations has increasing significance in field applications. RZSS seeks to expand our veterinary conservation resources and activities.

Objective 4:

Care for biodiversity at our sites: our wilding responsibility

We will strengthen the natural biodiversity of all our sites.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Ensure Highland Wildlife Park is a sound stepping stone habitat for Cairngorms National Park priority species
- b Manage Edinburgh Zoo as an exemplar for biodiversity and sustainability in an urban setting
- c Encourage RZSS members to act for biodiversity in green spaces

Where we work or can have influence, RZSS can show leadership in how everyone can improve their own habitats, big and small.

Implementing the Highland Wildlife Park Biodiversity Action Plan, through restoring the species and habitat on site, is fundamental. It will also be a priority to undertake and establish a Biodiversity Action Plan for Edinburgh Zoo that supports the urban biodiversity of Corstorphine alongside the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan.

The growing membership of RZSS provides a remarkable opportunity for us all to act as one in promoting and preserving our own green spaces. All of this space combined could be large enough to be its own 'RZSS Members' National Park'.



RZSS WildGenes

Based at Edinburgh Zoo, RZSS WildGenes is the only zoo-based conservation genetics lab in Britain. Our expert team translates genetic data into practical conservation action for threatened species across the globe.

One species already benefitting from this vital research is the critically endangered Siamese crocodile, which has been pushed to the brink of extinction due to extensive poaching for the leather industry.

Since 2016, we have been working with partners to develop the first conservation genetics laboratory in Cambodia where captive crocodiles may hold the key to the future survival of the species.

Crocodile farms usually keep many different species of crocodile together and purposefully hybridise them to 'improve' leather quality. The only way to determine which individuals are actually Siamese crocodiles is through genetic testing.

Our RZSS WildGenes team developed a test to do just that in Edinburgh and trained the team in the Cambodian lab at the Royal University of Phnom Penh to test farmed crocodiles and identify which individuals can be released into the wild.

By working together and sharing valuable genetic tools, we aim to provide long-term capacity for future conservation management.

An overhead view of the wildcat breeding for release centre at Highland Wildlife Park



Saving Wildcats

RZSS leads the Saving Wildcats European partnership project, which is based at Highland Wildlife Park.

A sad history of habitat loss, persecution and, more recently, breeding with domestic cats, has forced the 'Highland Tiger' to a point where the wild population needs our help to survive.

Working in collaboration with NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Nordens Ark and Junta de Andalucía, we aim to prevent the extinction of wildcats in Scotland by breeding and releasing them into the wild.

Jamie Sneddon, part of the Saving Wildcats team, conducting field work



**Saving
Wildcats**
#SWAforLIFE

Key engagement objectives

Impact area:

Wild connections

Our pledge and impact measurement: By 2030, working in Scotland and across the world, RZSS will create stronger connections with nature for more than a million people

To achieve our desired impact, RZSS must first create greater opportunities for more people to access our zoos and our work, and have an experience with personal resonance. As a result, individuals will be more open to further learning and understanding. RZSS can empower people with the knowledge they need to understand and protect the environment, and perhaps seek to influence others.

Objective 1:

Create wild opportunities for more people

We will provide opportunities for more people from diverse backgrounds to positively experience nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a** Increase the number of people from both traditional and non-traditional zoo audiences visiting our zoos and engaging with RZSS through experiences, activities and events
- b** Increase accessibility, inclusion and diversity among zoo audiences by identifying and reducing barriers to visiting our zoos, engaging online and providing access to outreach activities

We will develop our understanding of who visits our zoos, who does not and why. It is critical to understand what prevents people from engaging with our work or visiting our zoos and find solutions to these challenges.

Objective 2:

Increase emotional connections with nature

We will increase connections to the wild by enabling people to form stronger bonds with nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a** Enhance connections with nature through interpretation, activities and animals by creating an innovative, accessible and effective visitor journey across our zoos
- b** Enhance connections with nature through outreach activities

This is fundamentally about ensuring a high quality zoo experience – from visitor services to the exhibits themselves. Any part of the visitor journey that falls below expectations will affect an individual's willingness and ability to engage with wildlife conservation.

Going beyond our gates and embedding RZSS across communities in Scotland is also key to our engagement. Our aim is to significantly increase the access schools and community groups have to our zoos and our online educational materials.

Edinburgh Zoo and Highland Wildlife Park welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors each year – and every visit is an opportunity to create stronger bonds between people and nature.



Schools

During the Covid-19 lockdown, our discovery and learning team continued to connect people with nature by livestreaming from our zoos.

The impact of our programme was demonstrated by an email we received which read:

“ This morning my class attended a virtual Polar Explorers Tour with the polar bears and penguins. I just wanted to say thank you for hosting the tour. The children had a wonderful time and learned so much about the animals. It was so fantastic to see them live in the zoo.

I had children this morning who have not submitted any work in lockdown and it shows how animals and nature get them to engage. And I have others who are really struggling and it was lovely to see them asking questions and joining in. ”



Objective 3:

Empower through learning

We will increase knowledge and understanding of the natural world to enable people to support and protect nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Increase the knowledge, understanding and desire of young people to protect nature through an effective curriculum-based schools and formal learning programme
- b Increase the knowledge, understanding and desire of all generations to protect nature through lifelong learning and continued professional development
- c Engage traditional and non-traditional zoo audiences, as well as people unable to visit our parks, with nature and our work through virtual and outreach activities
- d With our zoo field station partners, further develop our work in primate behaviour to support research into evolutionary psychology animal behaviour and harness this to improve our knowledge and understanding of care for species in the wild and in zoos
- e Provide opportunities for non-traditional zoo audiences to connect with nature and learn about conservation through events, experiences and workshops
- f Increase capacity building and training, including apprenticeships and paid internships

Once people are emotionally engaged, they are open to learning and deeper understanding. This objective encompasses all of our formal learning programmes across all groups of society. We need to expand and increase our delivery in response to the growing desire to understand our natural world and the challenge to protect it.

The unique strengths of our Living Links and Budongo Trail research centres are embedded in this strategy and are crucial to our engagement impact. More citizen science and citizen conservation opportunities can be provided alongside promoting natural history.

RZSS already has a wide portfolio of formal training, from vets to summer schools. This will be expanded to include training and capacity building across the multiple disciplines within our diverse organisation.

Objective 4:

Influence to support nature

We will influence communities, groups, individuals, organisations and public policy to take positive actions for the environment and nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Act as a convenor to increase knowledge and understanding of the challenges facing nature
- b Inform and influence policy in support of nature and conservation
- c Hold key positions of influence in support of nature and conservation
- d Be a recognised and authoritative voice for nature and conservation

Through the knowledge we impart, the people we inspire and the actions we take, RZSS will drive positive change to protect and improve biodiversity and the environment. Our charity must be a force for change.

Building on the history, reputation and standing of RZSS, our zoos can be a neutral place bringing together advocates for diverse opinion.

Working independently and in partnership with key umbrella organisations such as the IUCN, BIAZA and Scottish Environment LINK, we can apply RZSS expertise in species recovery science and conservation in a wider field.

RZSS expertise also provides unique insight in groups such as the Scottish Beaver Forum, National Reintroduction Forum and IUCN Species Survival Commission specialist groups.

Key community objectives

Impact area:

Wilder communities

Our pledge and impact measurement: By 2030, working in Scotland and across the world, RZSS will enable more than 100 communities to better protect nature

Objective 1:

Improve wellbeing through nature

We will improve the wellbeing of communities, groups and individuals through access to nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Improve accessibility, inclusion and diversity by developing our sites and activities to address key challenges affecting communities, groups and individuals
- b Broaden access to nature by increasing links within communities
- c Ensure the wellbeing of our RZSS people

RZSS interacts with a broad range of communities and, by building on shared values of place and purpose, we can unite these groups through working for nature. The unique resources of our zoos, and our ability to build stronger connections between animals and people, can drive improved individual wellbeing and strengthen communities.

There are proven links to greater wellbeing through increased access to nature, but not everybody can access nature equally. We can help make nature more equitable through inclusive barrier removal and improvements to our zoos, activities and events, including the provision of Changing Places and quiet areas.



Senior animal keeper Gareth Bennett with pond mud snails

We will create targeted programmes that address key challenges in our local communities, for example loneliness, and foster direct links with social and community groups so we can develop multi-layered and long-term partnerships.

Increasing accessibility, inclusion and diversity will be fundamental to the delivery of Scotland's Wildlife Discovery Centre at Highland Wildlife Park and associated outreach activities. This transformational project, supported by a wide-range of partners, will play a pivotal role by inspiring more people to protect, value and love nature through immersive, memorable and impactful experiences which influence behaviour change.

Our own teams are also a key community we must deliver for and develop to achieve our many goals.

Wildlife Wombles

The Wildlife Wombles are a group of volunteers with additional needs from the local community of Kingussie and surrounding areas. In partnership with Caberfeidh Horizons, this initiative provides real life work skills and experience for people who need this support.

Since 2014, the Wildlife Wombles have been helping at Highland Wildlife Park and assisting a wide range of RZSS teams, including clearing animal enclosures with our keepers and litter picking with visitor services. They also collaborate with our discovery and learning team on enrichment projects for the animals, for example making food balls for our red pandas and papier mâché eggs for our Japanese macaques.

Other activities have included tree planting, making big bug hotels, carrying out pictorial flora and fauna surveys, tidying up brash hedges and other boundaries, as well as maintaining the squirrel and bird feeding areas.

In 2019, the Wildlife Wombles were nominated for the Scottish Commission for Learning Disability Awards and were awarded Certificates of Achievement in acknowledgement of their hard work. They have also received a Silver Award from the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aqaria (BIAZA) in recognition of this novel project.



Volunteers

Our volunteers play an incredibly important role in engaging visitors with our zoos, our animals and connecting them with nature. The programme helps to support volunteers through different points in their lives, enhancing life skills and employability skills as well as health and wellbeing.



Objective 2:

Volunteer for nature

We will enable communities, groups and individuals to enhance life skills, opportunities and wellbeing through volunteering.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Promote volunteering to enhance wellbeing in communities
- b Promote volunteering to develop training and employment skills
- c Promote volunteering as a means of transition into later life

Volunteering allows people to connect to their community and help make it an even better place. We truly value our volunteers and seek to advance and widen the RZSS volunteering programme to help more people realise the wide-ranging benefits volunteering can bring.

Objective 3:

Develop our zoos as a community resource

Our zoos will be a resource to support local initiatives and strengthen communities, harnessing the unique convening power of nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Promote our zoos as community hubs
- b Investigate and develop free access to areas of our zoos
- c Promote nature through the arts, recognising the cultural and historical value of our zoos
- d Promote community values and cohesion, recognising the social value of our zoos

This consolidates our wider role in the community and in particular the social and cultural value of our zoos.

Objective 4:

Develop our zoos as a scientific resource

Our zoos will be widely accessed scientific resources that deepen our connection with the natural world through increased knowledge and understanding.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Increase research and training placements
- b Increase undergraduate projects undertaken through RZSS
- c Increase biobank deposits
- d Develop a social science programme

RZSS can facilitate a broad range of scientific endeavours across many levels which supports a wide community, including the work at our Budongo Trail and Living Links field stations at Edinburgh Zoo, and across our specialist teams.

Welfare audits and research can be undertaken to focus and improve support for training and the potential value to RZSS. The RZSS WildGenes biobank holds precious biological samples, to help preserve genetic material for conservation research and population management. Increasing biobank deposits will be a significant contribution to science that requires commitment in terms of advancing our profile, use and funding.

From human-wildlife conflict surveys to engagement and community strategies, social science is key to providing evidence and measuring outcomes.



Objective 5:

Achieve (net) zero carbon zoos and sustainability

We will reduce our carbon footprint by 60% by 2030 and develop a strategy to be net zero by 2040.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Deliver activities to reduce our carbon footprint by 60% by 2030
- b Develop a net-zero strategy for 2040
- c Develop and demonstrate innovative best practice in sustainability across all our operations

Achieving net zero carbon is one of the most significant commitments and benefits that we can pledge to our communities and we will seek to influence other organisations to do the same.

Creating a solar meadow at Edinburgh Zoo is the first major step in this programme, alongside assessing and supporting an appropriate carbon offsetting programme which is linked to positive biodiversity objectives.

Objective 6:

Grow the RZSS family

We will create an RZSS community in Scotland and across the world in support of nature.

To achieve this objective, RZSS will:

- a Grow our charity's membership
- b Grow our charity's supporter base

Throughout this strategy we have outlined plans to engage and interact with an increasing number of individuals at varying levels, and they all have the potential to become an RZSS supporter, advocate and funder.

This can involve a broad range of initiatives including support for every generation, an alumni of all those who have worked, trained or been educated through RZSS, and the global Scottish community.

Budongo

RZSS has partnered with the Budongo Conservation Field Station in Uganda since 2005. Together we carry out research, conservation and training to protect the Budongo Forest and more than 600 chimpanzees who call it home.

The Budongo Trail chimpanzee enclosure at Edinburgh Zoo is a base for collaborative research with the University of St Andrews, which enhances our knowledge of chimpanzees and how they interact with the world around them.

These conservation and science-based partnerships are examples of the broad and international nature of the RZSS family and the communities in which we work.

BUDONGO
CONSERVATION FIELD STATION





The RZSS family

Everything we achieve is due to the unique strength of the RZSS family – our teams, supporters and partners.

Thank you for all that you do for wildlife and nature!





rzss.org.uk

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