

Research Prospectus 2025-26



100
YEARS



Foreword

Norfolk Wildlife Trust is delighted to introduce its first research prospectus, which highlights the importance of continually identifying and implementing research that directs, supports and evaluates our decision making in creating a wilder Norfolk for all.

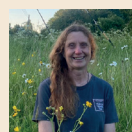
Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) was established 100 years ago and is a member of the Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts. A key objective for the Wildlife Trusts movement is to be 'evidence-led and solution focused', a goal we are meeting with our national Evidence Emergency initiative. This brings Wildlife Trusts from across the UK together to share research, evidence and learning and to work towards a stronger scientific basis for our work.

NWT's research prospectus helps us to achieve this goal and follows the publication of the NWT Research & Evidence Strategy in 2026.

We know that the natural world is facing complex challenges with ongoing biodiversity and bio-abundance losses, as well as the impact of climate change. We also know that the restoration of biodiversity through a range of nature-based solutions is required to achieve targets such as 30% of land protected and managed for nature by 2030. Robust research and evidence are essential to guide our work in halting and reversing these trends, informing the actions we take and measuring our impact.

Our strategic direction acknowledges that collaboration with a wide range of partners is essential, not only to implement but also to evaluate the interventions we make. Relationships with academic partners and other specialist groups are vital for this and we hope that this prospectus will encourage even more of these mutually beneficial collaborations.

We look forward to working with you.



Helen Baczkowska
Conservation Research & Evidence Manager

Introduction

Norfolk Wildlife Trust, is committed to identifying the long-term solutions to the ongoing biodiversity and climate crises that nature so desperately needs in our county. We are also passionate about connecting people and nature, and science is at the heart of our decision-making, and we strive to use sound evidence to inform both our actions. Building this evidence-base is a continually iterative process, ever growing with advancements in applied science and conservation.

As part of the Wildlife Trust's Evidence Emergency initiative, we are committed to working with other Trusts and our partners to further our collective understanding of the natural world, as well as people's engagement with it. Our hope is that this work, and the collaborative relationships that develop through this research prospectus moves us closer towards bridging the gap between academia and both societal connections with nature and practical biodiversity conservation on the ground. This strategy aims to produce the most effective and greatest impact for nature.

For more information, please read the NWT Research and Evidence Strategy.

Research and evidence | Norfolk Wildlife Trust



Researching with Norfolk Wildlife Trust

Norfolk Wildlife Trust works with academic researchers at all levels – from undergraduate degrees to PhDs and post-doctoral research.

All student researchers undertaking an NWT research project will continue to be guided primarily by their academic supervisor. Supervisors will help shape and formalise the research questions and provide academic or other support as needed.

During your project, NWT will be available to meet with you and, if helpful, with your supervisor. We will be able to help with access to sites, background information or historical records, signposting to other resources and with helping researchers understand how their work will support Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

We value the crucial role of science communication and are seeking researchers eager to share and disseminate the findings of their work via blogs, social media content, articles etc., and/or to help run workshops and guided walks connected to it. We offer the opportunity to publish research on our website and on the national Evidence Emergency Centre platforms.

We are also able to facilitate research requests on NWT land holdings, or to link up researchers with staff for surveys, interviews etc. We have a limited capacity to support novel project ideas generated by students but are certainly open to discussions where proposals fit with our research themes (see next section).

If you would like more information, or to work on a research project with us, please contact us via the student portal on our website, [Student portal | Norfolk Wildlife Trust](#)



On the Moove project 2025-26;

two undergraduates studied the impacts of cattle grazing on NWT's Sweetbriar Marshes nature reserve. Areas grazed by cattle had been tracked using electronic collars that map the animals' movements on GIS. The maps were used to study insect assemblages on grazed areas and the results will inform the strategy for future grazing on the reserve.



Norfolk Wildlife Trust's research themes and projects 2026-27

Our priority themes and topics for research are set out below. Individual projects have already been identified for some topics but for those without we are open to discussion of your interests and ideas where these proposals fit with our priorities.

THEME 1:

BIODIVERSITY, SPECIES & HABITATS

Topic 1. Biodiversity & bio-abundance

Understanding the pressures and drivers of decline on the biodiversity and bio-abundance of Norfolk's wildlife, on both land and in the marine environment.

Topic 2. Habitats

Evaluating and improving existing habitat management standards, as well as developing novel methods to conserve, recover, enhance, create and connect quality habitat in Norfolk's landscapes.

Topic 3. Species

Investigate the trends and drivers of decline in priority species in Norfolk, including both marine and terrestrial species. This includes advancement of autecological knowledge and refinement of species recovery approaches. Other work will utilise flagship or umbrella species in landscape-scale projects and/or those with considerable public engagement or of a citizen science focus.

Project 1.1

Investigating the drifts and lokes of South Norfolk

The South Norfolk Claylands

South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands - National Character Area Profiles is a historic landscape whose wildlife value is often overshadowed by areas like the Norfolk Broads and the North Norfolk coast. This project would seek to collect and analyse biodiversity data for some of the 'green lanes' that cross the area, and which may act as important wildlife corridors. These unsurfaced tracks are public rights of way and are known locally as 'drifts and lokes'; their biodiversity interest is currently largely unrecorded.

Interested in this project? We can work to develop a specific project proposal with you and your supervisor/student.

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Key references:

Croxton, P.J., Carvell, C., Mountford, J.O. and Sparks, T.H., 2002. A comparison of green lanes and field margins as bumblebee habitat in an arable landscape. *Biological Conservation*, 107(3), pp.365-374.

Croxton, P.J., Hann, J.P., Greatorex-Davies, J.N. and Sparks, T.H., 2005. Linear hotspots? The floral and butterfly diversity of green lanes. *Biological conservation*, 121(4), pp.579-584.

Walker, M.P., Dover, J.W., Sparks, T.H. et al. Hedges and Green Lanes: Vegetation Composition and Structure. *Biodivers Conserv* 15, 2595-2610 (2006). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-005-4879-x>

Walker, M.P., Dover, J.W., Hinsley, S.A. and Sparks, T.H., 2005. Birds and green lanes: Breeding season bird abundance, territories and species richness. *Biological conservation*, 126(4), pp.540-547.

Project 1.2

The biology of meadow soils in the Claylands

Lowland hay meadows are one of Norfolk's rarest habitats, with an estimated loss of over 95% since 1945. Over the past twelve years, Norfolk Wildlife Trust has been creating new meadows in the area, utilising seed collected from old ones. This project would look below the ground surface at the biology of the soils (microbiology/ mycology/ soil fauna) in both old and new meadows; there are questions about the influence of historic agricultural improvement, spray drift and if older meadows in the area are more biologically complex.

Interested in this project? We can work to develop a specific project proposal with you and your supervisor/student.

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Key references:

Mencel, J., Mocek-Plóćiniak, A. and Kryszak, A., 2022. Soil microbial community and enzymatic activity of grasslands under different use practices: A review. *Agronomy*, 12(5), p.1136.

Sengl, P., Magnes, M., Weitenthaler, K., Wagner, V., Erdős, L. and Berg, C., 2017. Restoration of lowland meadows in Austria: A comparison of five techniques. *Basic and Applied Ecology*, 24, pp.19-29.

Smith, R.S., Shiel, R.S., Bardgett, R.D., Millward, D., Corkhill, P., Rolph, G., Hobbs, P.J. and Peacock, S., 2003. Soil microbial community, fertility, vegetation and diversity as targets in the restoration management of a meadow grassland. *Journal of applied ecology*, 40(1), pp.51-64.

THEME 2:

CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS & ECONOMICS

Topic 4. Climate change & Nature-based Solutions (NBS)

Understanding and evaluating the local impacts of climate change on nature and people in Norfolk, as well as the development of novel mitigation techniques as a matter of urgency, aiming ultimately to give nature the best possible chance to adapt in time to the existing and incoming challenges. NBS are activities which address societal challenges by restoring and managing habitats and ecosystems in a sustainable way to the simultaneous benefit of both people and nature, which this topic also aims to investigate and analyse.

Topic 5. Economies of Nature

Understanding the economic value of nature and its contribution to economic growth, whether that be through provision (e.g. food production), regulation (e.g. clean air and water) or its cultural value. This topic explores nature's 'assets' (Natural Capital), ecosystem services and sustainable finance and business in Norfolk, and then looks at how these economies can be used to exert real influence on local policy and decision makers for the benefit of Norfolk's wildlife.

Project 2.1

The economies of managing meadows

Historically lowland hay meadows were crucial to the agricultural economy of Norfolk, providing fodder to keep livestock alive over winter. Since the 1940s, hay has been replaced by silage and cereal or fodder beet feeds and hay meadows have lost their economic value. Managing hay meadows today faces several barriers, including costs and a lack of end-use for the harvested material.

This project would investigate options for making hay meadows economically viable again, including the costs, carbon-footprint and profits from novel uses for the hay.

Interested in this project? We can work to develop a specific project proposal with you and your supervisor/student.

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Key references:

Nábrádi, A., 2007. *The economic value of grassland products.*

Rey, R., 2014. 'Mountain Product', of High-biological Quality. Meadows' Poliflora, Organic Fertilizer and a Sustainable Mountain Economy. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 8, pp.622–631.

Rothero, E., Lake, S. and Gowing, D., 2016. *Floodplain meadows: Beauty and utility-A technical handbook.* Floodplain Meadows Partnership, The Open University.

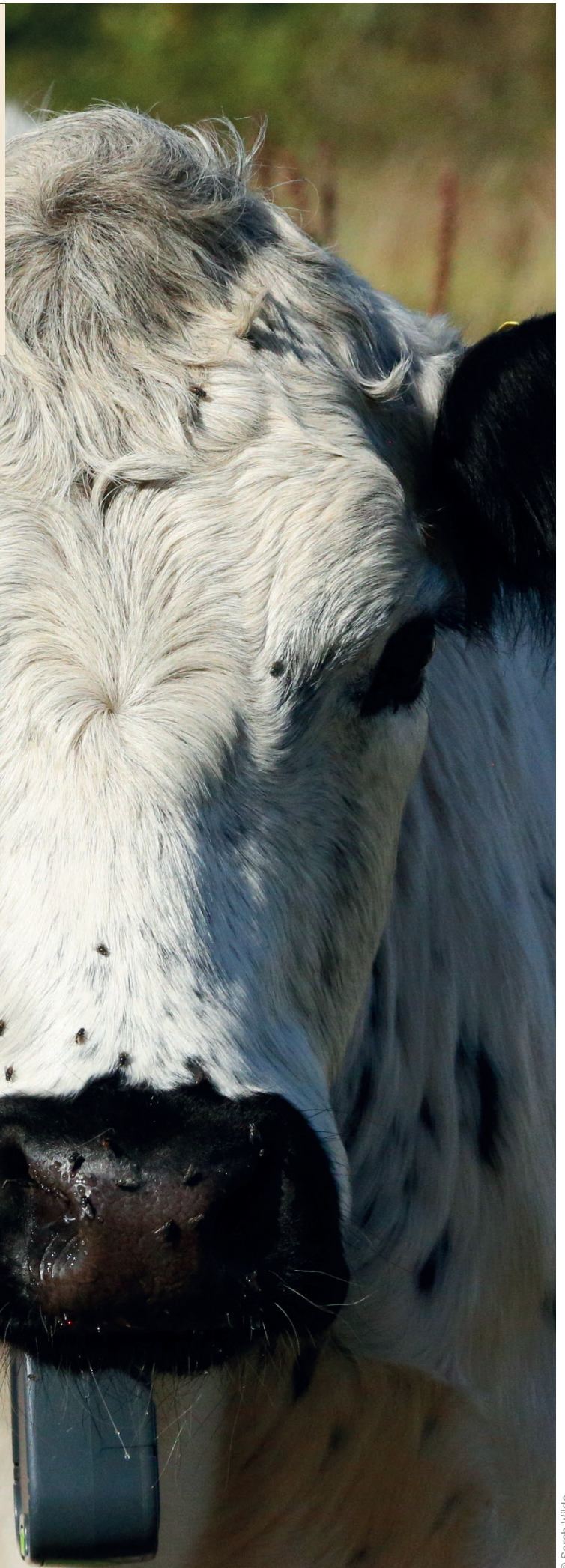
Sucholas, J., Molnár, Z., Łuczaj, Ł. and Poschlod, P., 2022. Local traditional ecological knowledge about hay management practices in wetlands of the Biebrza Valley, Poland. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 18(1), p.9.

THEME 3:

TECHNOLOGY FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

Topic 6. Technology for biodiversity conservation

Utilising new and emerging technology to aid and increase the efficiency, accuracy and power of our work, for example investigating monitoring via remote sensing and making the most of applications like GIS to analyse and share spatial data for quantitative analysis of our efforts, as well as enhanced collaboration with partners.



THEME 4: PEOPLE & NATURE

Topic 7. People & Nature

Measuring the benefits and social value of nature for people in Norfolk, looking at health, wellbeing, education and understanding the impacts of public engagement. Arts based research can influence how we communicate nature, for example, whilst well-designed citizen science programmes can encourage meaningful action for nature, valuable data collection and engagement.



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Project 4.1

Measuring the impact of urban nature engagement on mental wellbeing and community cohesion in Norwich

Wilder Norwich is a three-year project funded by the National Lottery; it is led by NWT in partnership with Norfolk and Waveney Mind and Norfolk County Council. This research project will evaluate how participation in Wilder Norwich's nature connection activities influences mental wellbeing, sense of belonging, and community cohesion among residents in areas surrounding NWT Sweet Briar Marshes, Mousehold Heath, and Whitlingham Country Park. Research questions to consider include:

- 1. How does engagement with local green spaces through Wilder Norwich activities affect participants' mental health and resilience?**
- 2. Does participation in community-led nature projects in Norwich increase a sense of belonging and civic pride among residents?**
- 3. Are there observable differences in wellbeing and social cohesion outcomes across different demographics or levels of prior engagement with nature?**

NWT is interested in how insights from these outcomes inform the design of future urban nature initiatives for maximum community and ecological impact.

Key references:

Wilder Norwich | Norfolk Wildlife Trust

Evidence - National Academy for Social Prescribing | NASP

Hassen, N., Mohamed, A., Rajeswaran, K., Reibeling, W., Hashie, C., Talreja, A., Yuyitung, L., Slonimerov, E., Golam, M.S., Sammy, J. and Brown, N., 2025. Evaluating The Role of Community-Led Urban Greenspace Programming in Advancing Belonging, Social Connection, and Health Equity: A Mixed Methods Study of [Redacted] Toronto Program. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, p.129258.

Jennings, V. and Bamkole, O., 2019. The relationship between social cohesion and urban green space: An avenue for health promotion. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(3), p.452.