London Wetland Centre bucks European Nature Declines

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London Wetland Centre is providing a rare glimmer of hope for European wildlife, following a continent-wide report on the state and health of the continent's nature including the UK.

The European Commission report found that nearly half (48%) of all bird species are declining or depleted, and that the status of nearly two thirds (60%) of all types of wildlife is unfavourable. It says "the conservation status of and trends for habitats are worse than for species", with three quarters (77%) described as unfavourable. Wetlands are picked out as being particularly hard hit because of the impact of drainage and of agriculture. Europe has lost more than two thirds of its wetlands, they now cover only about 2% of the continent.

But wetlands are among the world's most wildlife-rich habitat and the report highlights that conservation work in wetlands can make a really noticeable difference. The UK has a prime example in the shape of the WWT London Wetland Centre in Barnes, where the number of species is actually increasing.

WWT's Head of Campaigns Peter Morris said:

"The report underlines that wetlands are among the most damaged of our landscapes, but unlike other less dynamic habitats like ancient forests they are also among the most repairable.

"London is a prime example. It was once mainly wetlands, almost all of which have now disappeared and the wildlife with it. But London Wetland Centre demonstrates that it is possible to rebuild healthy wetlands and attract regionally rare species like the bittern back to the capital.

"While half of Europe's wildlife is declining or depleted, at London Wetland Centre the number of plant species has rocketed from 192 to 440.

"WWT has repaired and rebuilt similar habitats at its wetland centres in Arundel, Llanelli, Martin Mere, Slimbridge and Welney. These are recreated wild wetland habitats where you can once again see wild bittern feeding and roosting among the reeds."

While WWT's wetlands are the product of the hard work and backing of WWT's supporters, including 700 volunteers and 200,000 members, anyone can help Europe's wildlife right now by registering their support for Europe's wildlife laws. The reason the European Commission has published this report is because it is required to under two laws that underpin all wildlife protections – the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive. But, at the same time, both these laws are being reviewed. So WWT has joined with 100 other organisations to let Brussels know how important wildlife is to people in the UK. Find our more here.

More details on WWT London Wetland Centre:

The 42 acre site has 30 habitats including wet grassland, grazing marsh, immature woodland and shingle islands. The habitats' water levels are managed independently to maintain them in optimum condition for different wildlife. Friendly hides with large windows, sofas and good disabled access are placed at the best vantage points, for example opposite a reed bed that is maintained specifically to attract bittern. As well as up to six bittern, the site attracts more than 600 butterfly species, eight bat species and more than 200 shoveler and 150 gadwall which have contributed to its SSSI status. The number of plant species has increased from 192 to more than 440 since the reservoirs were converted. Introduced water vole are now starting to distribute out from the Centre.

The Wetland Centre provides a wildlife experience just four miles from Westminster for nearly 200,000 visitors per year. Many partners made it possible including Thames Water, and Berkeley Homes who's adjoining housing development largely paid for the site. The London Wetland Centre now supports house prices in the area. It is also a central community focus for around 100 volunteers, 50 staff and schools across London who take advantage of the Learning facilities on offer – with special emphasis on the water cycle in urban areas like London.

For more information, speak to Peter Morris, WWT Press Office, peter.morris@wwt.org.uk / 01453 891179 / 07920 151022

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