

# Five ways to help stop biodiversity loss

December 23 2022, by Kate Hiseman

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life found on Earth and underpins the natural systems which grow our food, cleanse our air and water and regulate our climate. Human life cannot exist without it. But around [one million](#) animal and plant species are now threatened by extinction.

At the recent UN biodiversity conference (COP15) in Montreal, parties [agreed](#) on a set of targets for reversing global biodiversity loss by 2030.

This includes protecting 30% of the Earth's surface and reforming subsidies for farming and fishing. Meeting these targets will require coordination between governments and businesses.

Yet the pace at which legislation and policies take effect is exceeded by the global [rate](#) of biodiversity loss. Here are some of the most effective actions you can take to help reverse biodiversity loss and restore nature now.

## 1. Donate

The total area of protected land and sea in the U.K. [increased](#) from 27.6 million hectares in 2017 to 40.6 million hectares in 2022. Much of this area is managed by charities, legal bodies and [local authorities](#).

These organizations, such as the RSPB and the Wildlife Trust, restore biodiversity by creating new habitats, improving existing ones and ensuring that wild areas are connected with forested corridors and reserves to allow species to roam. For example, the Wildlife Trust has [reintroduced beavers](#) to fenland in Kent, where wet grassland habitats are now thriving as a result.

But the funds available for nature conservation in the U.K. are often [insufficient](#). [Individuals](#) and [businesses](#) can [donate](#) money to support the work of these organizations.

## 2. Volunteer

Many charitable organizations are dependent on volunteers to undertake administration and marketing, site management or to spread the message about the biodiversity crisis. With new digital ways of working, people could volunteer from their own home at suitable times. Experience is not

necessary in most cases and volunteers often benefit from on the job training.

Volunteering can also have other benefits. [Research](#) has revealed spending just two hours in nature each week can benefit health and well-being.

### **3. Change what you eat**

No one likes being lectured about their diet. But unsustainable farming methods, the expansion of agricultural land and our meat-based western diets all threaten biodiversity.

Converting natural habitats to agricultural land has resulted in [one-quarter](#) of all remaining mammal species being threatened with extinction. [Research](#) has also shown that agricultural intensification now means that more than half of European bird species are threatened or in decline.

To reverse biodiversity loss, [we must change](#) both what we eat and how much we consume.



Credit: PICHA Stock from Pexels

The U.K.'s [National Food Strategy](#) and the Food and Land Use Coalition's "[Better Futures Report](#)" recommend a diet that is less reliant on meat. The Food and Land Use Commission, for example, suggest that, from 2030, a sustainable adult male diet should consist of 14g of red meat per day, 29g of chicken and other poultry, 250g of dairy products, 500g of fruits and vegetables, 50g of nuts and 75g of soya bean and other legumes.

#### **4. Nature-friendly gardens**

Urbanization is increasingly fragmenting [natural habitats](#) and, as such,

species decline is [highest in cities](#). As cities continue to grow it will become more important to have multiple approaches for biodiversity conservation.

Our gardens, although typically not spacious enough to maintain species diversity, can be important habitats in urban environments. Working with our neighbors, we can [scale up](#) our gardens by growing networks of flowers to help insects feed and planting trees for birds to nest in. This will increase biodiversity by creating a patchwork of habitats across a whole neighborhood. Wildlife-friendly gardens can create corridors for a wide range of species and improve connectivity, provide shelter or nesting sites, maintain genetic diversity and increase the abundance of native plants even in the smallest spaces.

A [study](#) in 2009 found that there were up to 28.7 million trees, 3.5 million ponds and at least 4.7 million bird nesting boxes in U.K. gardens. Nesting bird numbers can be increased if we know where trees can be planted for maximum effect. Networks of pollinating flowers across gardens could also help insects and butterflies feed.

## **5. Indoor cats and responsible dog owners**

Cats are natural predators and allowing your pet to roam freely around the neighborhood means it—and all the other free-roaming pet cats out there—could be responsible for the deaths of millions of animals each year. [Research](#) in Australia revealed that by allowing cats to freely roam, predation on local prey per square kilometer in residential areas is 28–52 times larger than predation rates by [feral cats](#) in natural environments. Cats have caused such devastating impacts to Australian wildlife that cat predation is listed as a key threat to native wildlife within [national legislation](#).

In the U.K., cat ownership has increased by 13% on average each year

over the past 40 years so that roughly 90% of the U.K.'s cats are now pets. This has correspondingly increased the threat to our native wildlife.

There are several ways we can reduce the impact of pet cats on biodiversity. Keeping a cat well fed reduces their need to hunt. Another option is to keep them indoors for parts of the day, during the night or entirely. The impact of pet cats on Australian wildlife has grown so severe that local authorities have introduced [bylaws](#) and curfews to contain cat predation.

Cats predominantly threaten [biodiversity](#) in urban areas. Yet the interaction between dogs and wildlife occurs more frequently in rural situations.

The issue here arises primarily as a result of predation and [disease transmission](#). But [dog feces and urine](#) fertilize soils with nutrients and can change the type of plants that grow in an area. This carries knock-on effects on a habitat's structure. By picking up dog feces and correctly disposing of it, dog owners can reduce the input of nitrogen to the soil by 57% and phosphorus by 97%.

The best antidote to despair about the state of the natural world is to immerse yourself in it. Give these steps a try and you should hopefully discover more ways to not only lessen your footprint, but enjoy a more vibrant local environment.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Five ways to help stop biodiversity loss (2022, December 23) retrieved 24 May 2024



from <https://phys.org/news/2022-12-ways-biodiversity-loss.html>

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