

Towards 2029

Inspiring wonder in the natural world

Chair's welcome

The next 10 years will be a critical time for the natural world and now, more than ever, there is a clear need to grow public support for and understanding of nature. With NHSN set to reach its 200th birthday in 2029, it is vital that we do more to make this a reality and evolve, just like nature itself. *Towards 2029* has been an 18-month project benefitting from the essential engagement of members, supporters, partners, trustees, volunteers and staff. We also thank the National Lottery Heritage Fund for essential financial support and the helpful in-kind support from Newcastle University, Newcastle Racecourse and TWAM.

Looking outward

Nature is our passion, but it is deeply in trouble on a local to global scale and it is happening on our watch. Human activities have led to a climate emergency, along with significant biodiversity declines, continued wildlife persecution, unsustainable resource consumption, urbanisation, pollution and public disconnection with nature. There is hope due to an increasing public concern for the environment and an appetite for change. Since the 1970's there has been a growth in environmental organisations, commentators and information sources which has meant NHSN has used this project to focus on its position in this busy marketplace.

Looking inward

We have identified many improvements we can make. These include better use and care of our nature reserve, library and archive. We will get to know and support our members and supporters better. We will be more welcoming, inclusive, dynamic and retain our reputation for being a knowledgeable, trusted, reliable and professional local charity. We will revitalise our long tradition of nurturing regional naturalists through support for citizen science. We will address gaps in our knowledge and skills through new advisory groups, trustee succession and training. Volunteering will be better supported and developed. We will revitalise our support for young people to improve their connection with natural history. Our indoor and outdoor programme, together with our communications, has benefitted from extra capacity and pilots which we will continue. We are making improvements to how we plan and implement our work, grow and diversify our membership and improve how our organisation is managed.

"...the natural history society has from the very beginning held it to be its duty to spread a taste for natural history amongst all classes of society"

T.Russell Goddard (1929)

Looking forward

The strength and uniqueness of NHSN is that for almost 200 years we have been the only general natural history organisation that provides a forum for naturalists across the North East, from the Tees to the Tweed. We are home to enthusiasts, practitioners and scholars of natural history; a place where individuals and groups study and share their discoveries about nature to protect the natural world. Where once we popularised access to natural history through our Hancock Museum we now use our journal, talks, field trips, magazine and digital channels.

This plan provides NHSN with long-term aims for the next 10 years and shorter-term priorities for the next 3 years. Everyone can play a role in inspiring wonder in the natural world.

Jonathan Hewitt
NHSN Chair



"no one is too small to make a difference"

Greta Thunberg,
16-year old climate activist (2019)

Towards 2029 Summary

Inspiring wonder in the natural world

Our vision

Nature is protected, restored and celebrated through greater awareness, understanding and enjoyment by people in north east England.

Our purpose

Our fundamental purpose remains unchanged since 1829, to study and protect nature.

The history of NHSN contributes a significant legacy and contribution to UK natural history and as the nature conservation sector grows and evolves we must adapt our purpose to be relevant to the present day and the future

Providing a North East regional forum, community and home for naturalists we encourage more people to engage, discover, observe, learn, protect and enjoy the natural world and all aspects of the natural history of north east England and beyond.

Our offer

- Supporting naturalists regionally in their natural history initiatives and with biological surveying.
- Helping people understand and conserve the natural environment through experience of Gosforth Park Nature Reserve.
- Capturing and sharing the social, cultural and scientific aspects of natural history in the North East through our archive and library collection and conservation science.
- An inspiring indoor and outdoor programme of courses, events and volunteer citizen science led by some of the region's finest naturalists.
- Sharing North East Nature magazine, Northumbrian Naturalist journal and NHSN digital communications to raise awareness, understanding and action for natural history.

Our values

- Inspiring (imaginative, curious, outward and relevant)
- Welcoming (inclusive, collaborative, sociable and nurturing)
- Knowledgeable (scientific, robust and reputable)
- Professional (responsive, supportive and respectful)

Our team

Volunteers are the beating heart of our work as trustees, section leads, office support, activity organisers and reserve management. Together they support a small paid team to develop, plan and manage our busy work programme.

Our supporters

NHSN is entirely dependent on memberships and donations. In return, members receive exclusive benefits and NHSN can continue its founding principles to reach a wider audience and engage more people in natural history. Partnerships are critical in helping us achieve that.

We welcome people from all branches of natural history, beginners to experts, specialists and generalists; enthusiasts, practitioners and scholars.

Our aims till 2029

- Identifying, conserving and sharing the region's natural, social and cultural heritage of natural history.
- Reaching and engaging more people to grow support for, and understanding of, natural history.

- Widening engagement and supporting more people in developing skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for all aspects of natural history.
- Strengthening our organisation through greater collaboration, effectiveness, impact and supporter focus.

Our new activity for 2019 to 2022

- New partnerships to increase the number of naturalists and reduce gaps in biological data in the region.
- Gosforth Park Nature Reserve will gain a new welcome hut, teaching classroom, viewing hides and staff support. Our influence will extend beyond the current boundary into the neighbouring wildlife corridor.
- Continue our pilots of 1829 talks, Tuesdays at the Hancock, having a regular presence in the Great North Museum: Hancock and delivering the Young Naturalist Lantern Fund.
- A new plan for the NHSN archive and library collection based on an assessment of significance, its potential and digital opportunities.
- New activity to capture and share the North East's social and cultural heritage about natural history.
- Two new advisory groups: one focused on nature conservation and the other on social and cultural heritage of natural history.
- Plans for improvements to governance, volunteering and inclusion.

Our plans for 2019 to 2022

Nature Conservation and Citizen Science

Regional Nature Conservation

Reinforcing our regional role in nature conservation through:

- Strengthening the role of NHSN Sections in planning and undertaking activities
- Regional initiatives in partnership with other wildlife conservation organisations focusing on filling gaps in species and habitat monitoring by volunteers.
- New regional conference to bring together the natural history community.
- Establish a new non-executive advisory group of independent experts to guide our work.



Badger © Kaleel Zibe



Ridley Hide, GPNR © Jill Tate

Gosforth Park Nature Reserve

Our focus will be to:

- Update the welcome, learning and viewing facilities by providing more modern experiences and facilities.
- Seek to extend our nature conservation management and advice to the areas neighbouring our current reserve boundary.
- Focus activity as a field station where people can learn and engage in more urban wildlife research and citizen science and increase its use as part of NHSN courses.
- Replace roadside boundary fencing.
- Update the reserve management plan to ensure we are maximising the potential for wildlife and people.

NHSN Natural History Archive and Library Collection

Social and Cultural Natural History

- Capturing and sharing more of the North East's social and cultural heritage of natural history through biographies of naturalists, wildlife art, exhibitions and more.
- Expert assessment of the significance and potential of our own natural history archive and collection and production of a heritage management plan.
- Continue part time staffing of the archive.
- Establish a new non-executive advisory group of independent experts to guide our work.



Great Auk by Thomas Bewick © NHSN

Our plans for 2019 to 2022

Indoor and Outdoor Programme and Communications

Engagement and Communications

- Widen access to activities and facilities to diversify and reach more people to grow support for natural history from across the region, disciplines and organisations.
- Continue the pilot of twenty 1829 talks by early career natural scientists.
- Continue temporary part-time staffing in Communications and Member support.
- New NHSN volunteer presence in the Great North Museum: Hancock.
- Continue improving North East Nature magazine and Northumbrian Naturalist Journal ensuring both are regionally focused.
- Grow engagement through digital and social media and refresh the website.
- Improving the frequency and scale of Tuesdays at the Hancock.
- Broaden the topics and availability of education courses.

- Establish Café Natural for visiting naturalists to meet our community of naturalists and as a forum for discussion.
- A business plan to develop our education courses.
- Continue the Young Naturalists Lantern Fund.
- Pilot a reintroduction of the Hancock Essay competition.
- Focus campaigns on protecting GPNR, natural history education and public understanding of science.
- Listen and engage more with routine participant feedback and an annual member survey including better evaluation of the impact of our work.



Governance, Leadership & Capacity

Increasing our organisational resilience through:

- Adopting *Towards 2029* and a new financial plan.
- Adopting specific plans for the nature reserve, archive and library collection.
- Adopting and implementing a Governance Improvement Plan.
- Adopting and implementing a Volunteer Development Plan.
- Adopting a new Equality Diversity Plan.
- Improving fundraising through adherence to the code of practice, registration with the Fundraising Regulator and focused appeals for GPNR and the Young Naturalists Lantern Fund.

Towards 2029 sets the framework for NHSN's work over the next ten years. There is scope for continued engagement and ideas from members, supporters, volunteers and partners. If you would like to get involved in the delivery of specific plans, please contact Director Clare Freeman at

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