



Introduction

Hope in Our Wild World

All around planet Earth live incredible wild wonders – from the treetops to mountaintops, in woodlands and forests, along beaches and out in open seas, in gardens and ponds, even in cities alongside busy streets and tall, concrete buildings. Wild animals, plants and other living things are all over the place, making up what many people simply call nature. But nature is in trouble.

Sometimes it feels like there's nothing but bad news about nature and how it's tipping out of balance. Many animals and plants are rarer and harder to find than they used to be. The sky and seas are filling up with pollution. Ecosystems, the living places made of mixes of wild creatures, are being broken apart.

Even so, there is still room for hope. More people than ever are realising how important it is to look after our living planet and all the other species we share it with. A healthy wild world keeps us humans happy and safe, while also protecting our planet's future. The good news is that a lot of nature just needs a helping hand to bounce back and thrive.

Magnificent animals that were fading away are returning to their former glory. Plants are growing back. Butterflies are flapping their wings in places people thought they might never see them again. Birds are calling where there had been silence. All around the world, thousands of people and groups are making this happen. And you too can be a part of this global movement. A good place to start is reading these twenty stories from the wild world. Along the way, we'll visit beautiful and surprising places, meet brave and hardworking people, find breathtaking and secret species, and we'll see what's possible and how we can bring nature back.





Whales Thriving in Freezing Seas

Out in the cold waters of the Southern Ocean, far from anywhere else, there's an island that's home to lots of animals. Fur seals and elephant seals lounge on the beaches. King penguins waddle about in huge colonies. But until not so long ago, in the seas around this island called South Georgia, something huge was missing.

Up to a hundred years ago people came to South Georgia to hunt for blue whales. These are the biggest known animals on the planet. They can stretch for thirty metres from their heads to the flukes of their tails, the same as six giraffes or twenty royal pythons laid end to end. People hunted and killed them using harpoons with exploding tips, then boiled down their giant bodies for oil to burn in lamps and make into margarine, glue and lipstick. The hunting around South Georgia carried on until there were no more blue whales to be found.

Since 1986, money-making hunting for whales has been banned everywhere. Some indigenous people, such as the Iñupiat of Alaska, continue their traditional hunts. Even though blue whales are now protected, they didn't return to South Georgia for many years. Scientists searched for decades and saw only a few. Then in 2020, an international team led by UK scientists sailed around the island for three weeks and spotted 58 blue whales – more than they could ever have hoped for. Elsewhere, some other whale species are slowly recovering and the ocean is once again filling up with giants, from humpback whales in Antarctica to bowhead whales in Alaska. Whales still face problems of climate change, plastic pollution, getting tangled in fishing lines and nets, underwater noise and being hit by ships. But their recovery from overhunting shows what's possible when people leave wildlife alone.



Rare Orchids in a Rooftop Garden

High above the streets of London, surrounded by the shining glass and steel of office blocks, there's a green oasis of life. At the top of an eleven-storey building, in amongst the solar panels, grows a beautiful garden surveyed by Mark Patterson, an ecologist. Every month, Mark inspects the garden to see what's growing and one day he saw something he wasn't expecting.

Orchids with pointed purple flowers had sprouted up. They weren't big or showy but small and special. Mark realised they were a species called the small-flowered tongue orchid which had only been seen once before in England. That was more than thirty years ago on the coast of Cornwall but those ones were all destroyed when the land they were growing on was dug up.

It was an amazing stroke of luck that the orchids arrived in London and made themselves at home. Tiny seeds probably blew in the wind from plants in mainland Europe, maybe from as far away as the Mediterranean. When they landed on the building's roof, there was no guarantee the orchid seeds would grow. They are very choosy plants. Orchids need to find a particular type of fungus which gives them energy to start growing. By chance, the soil in the rooftop garden had the right fungus and the orchids bloomed.

As the climate continues to warm, more species like these orchids will move and find new homes. Some plants will be unwelcome and people will worry about the problems they might bring, like growing so fast they take up too much space and turn into pests. Others will be celebrated by people like Mark who make space for wildlife to thrive in all its forms, even in unlikely places.





The Secret Rescue of the Large Blue Butterfly

Beautiful large blue butterflies disappeared from the English countryside in 1979. They became extinct because too many people wanted a perfect specimen for their butterfly collections. It was only after years of study that one keen-eyed scientist discovered a strange and magical secret that would eventually help bring the large blues back.

For their first few weeks of life, caterpillars of large blue butterflies eat the wild thyme flower heads on which the female butterflies lay their eggs. Then they fall to the ground and produce a sweet liquid that makes them smell like ant grubs – they even mimic ant noises to complete their disguise. This tricks the ants into carrying the caterpillars into their underground nests. The caterpillars feast on real ant grubs and ten months later they come out of the ground as adult butterflies. It was butterfly expert, Jeremy Thomas, who first realised there's only one species of red ant that large blue caterpillars can fool. This was the key to saving them.

Jeremy's team collected eggs from large blues in Sweden and released them in a top-secret location in England where they restored the large blue's old habitat. Now, large blues are doing well in a few places across the country.

Other butterfly species are fluttering around England thanks to hard working conservationists. Duke of Burgundy butterflies never completely vanished but became rare. To give them a helping hand, conservationists have been restoring sunny glades in woodlands where primroses and cowslips bloom. This means their caterpillars have the right habitat and the right plants to eat and the Duke of Burgundies are slowly coming back.

