SAVING WILDLIFE TOGETHER

Strategy to 2035
Our commitment to wildlife is centuries old and born out of a desire both to better understand life on our planet and to inspire people to engage with the fascination of nature. Today our mission is focussed on saving wildlife, not alone but together with all the people that we engage and inspire. Our vision is for wildlife to be a part of everyone’s lives and for people to want to, and be enabled to, protect wildlife now and for the future.

This Strategic Plan sets out our direction for the next 15 years, as we journey towards the bicentenary anniversary of Bristol Zoological Society in 2035. During this time the Society will become a more effective conservation charity that harnesses the benefits of conservation research and fieldwork, education and outreach, alongside the benefits of breeding and understanding the needs of animals, and public engagement with those animals. This period will achieve a fundamental shift to recognise the combined importance of these different aspects of the charity and a re-weighting of activity built on current and past conservation successes. Our ambitions are bold, as our challenges require a strength of vision that will ensure the long-term future of Bristol Zoological Society.
Zoo in Nature,
Nature in the Zoo
Success will depend fundamentally on the move of Bristol Zoo to the Wild Place Project site and the creation of a new world-class zoo for Bristol and the West of England. A unique opportunity exists to deliver an environmentally sustainable zoo that redefines what a zoo should be, connecting visitors with all that Bristol Zoological Society does as a modern conservation charity. As such, conservation research and fieldwork will connect with conservation breeding programmes, learning and medicine – combining to form an accessible education campus; whilst the visitor experience will be interwoven with the nature and wildlife of the landscape. Given its long history at the forefront of the development of zoos, Bristol Zoological Society is better placed than most to define what zoos should look like in the 21st Century.

Only from these foundations will we be able to grow and develop our already significant conservation and education programmes, both here in the UK and across the world, whilst influencing policy and decision-makers to ensure a sustainable future for wildlife and people. We must build on our existing partnerships and reach out to the diversity of audiences in our city and region and be prepared to work differently with new partners, supporters and funders who share our commitment to saving wildlife together.
Our objectives

We have identified five objectives that together will support our vision for wildlife to be a part of everyone’s lives and deliver our mission of saving wildlife together:

1. Saving wildlife
2. Engaging our public
3. Creating conservationists
4. Sustaining our environment
5. Sustaining our future

By 2035 we will:

- Grow the proportion of species at our zoo with targeted conservation action to more than 90%.
- Engage and connect with more than 800,000 visitors and members per annum.
- Engage and inspire over 90,000 schoolchildren and students per annum – the conservationists of the future.
- Become a carbon-neutral organisation.
- Develop the new Bristol Zoo through a major programme of capital investment.
Bristol Zoological Society was founded in 1835 and Bristol Zoo Gardens opened to the public in 1836. It is the fifth-oldest zoo in the world, the oldest outside a capital city, and the first one recorded to be called a ‘zoo’. Bristol Zoo Gardens conceived and built the world’s first nocturnal house in 1953, was the first zoo in the UK to breed chimpanzees, gorillas and Sumatran orangutans, and built the UK’s first underwater tunnel in its Aquarium. In 2013 we opened our sister-site, Wild Place in South Gloucestershire, with a vision for it to be a national centre for wildlife and conservation.

We have a long and impressive history on which our new Strategic Plan will build, to ensure the continued success of this extraordinary Society.

Our species

Bristol Zoological Society cares for more than 350 species of animal, of which many are threatened in the wild. The species are diverse and include animals from a variety of taxonomic groups including mammals, fish, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians and birds. We are recognised as a leader in understanding and improving animal welfare among UK zoos. The species at our zoos exist within a rich and diverse landscape of plants and trees, which define the character and personality of both Bristol Zoo Gardens and Wild Place.

Bristol Zoological Society was a founder member of one of the first formalised collaborative conservation breeding programmes, started in the late 1960s with the formation of the Okapi Consortium. Today, we participate in 84 European
Association of Zoos and Aquaria conservation breeding programmes, of which 15 are coordinated by Bristol Zoological Society staff.

We are actively growing the number of breeding programmes that use animals born or reared in captivity for restocking and re-establishing wild populations. These have included white-clawed crayfish and barberry carpet moths in the UK; Partula snails in French Polynesia; and African penguins in South Africa (using hand-reared wild birds). Other restocking projects that we are working on include pink pigeons in Mauritius and Desertas wolf spiders on Desertas Grande, a small island off Madeira.

**Our field conservation and science**

The Society established a research department in 2006, and this has grown significantly to become our Field Conservation & Science Department. We conduct evidence-based conservation and research across 14 projects in 10 countries on four continents, partnering with 31 local organisations to achieve shared outcomes. Our greatest focus is on sub-Saharan Africa and the Western Indian Ocean, as well as native species in southwest England.

Our scientific work is broad in scope and covers field conservation biology and ecology as well as many aspects of zoo biology, veterinary medicine and social science. We regularly host national and international conferences and between 2007 and 2017, we published 136 peer-reviewed papers in scientific journals and books, averaging 12.4 papers per annum. This puts us into the top 10 zoos in Europe for peer-reviewed publications.
Our reach

The Society has engaged many millions of visitors since opening, and across our two sites we remain one of the most popular zoos in the UK, attracting over 800,000 visits in 2019. Our visitors are our greatest potential source of conservation action, and in recent years we have joined forces with other organisations to lead targeted campaigns to change consumer perspectives on materials and food ingredients such as palm oil, charcoal, and fish.

Importantly, we also work proactively to create opportunities for those who are disadvantaged in some way to visit Bristol Zoo Gardens and Wild Place. Our Access to Nature bursary scheme is designed to provide community groups with an out-of-classroom learning experience and our Wellbeing programme is working with four Bristol charities to engage children and young adults who have mental health issues. We also seek to reach out and engage people beyond our two zoos. For example, our volunteers and staff deliver programmes to more than 50 community groups in Bristol each year.

The Society’s two zoos are often held up as exemplars of education in zoos, and we have won numerous awards for our education sessions. In 1999 the purpose-built Conservation Education Centre was opened to support the delivery of programmes for schoolchildren, and our Institute of Conservation Science and Learning opened in 2015 to enable the delivery of higher education programmes. Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic we engaged more than 35,000 schoolchildren each year in our education sessions at Bristol Zoo Gardens and 6,000 at Wild Place, over 3,000 schoolchildren off site, and more than 300 university students across six higher education degree
courses in collaboration with the University of the West of England, Bristol, University of Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College, and the University of Gloucestershire.

Our vets also provide exotic animal clinical and didactic teaching, electives and assessment to University of Bristol undergraduate veterinary students. In addition to teaching, our Field Conservation & Science staff also supervise a large number of undergraduate and post-graduate research projects, including PhDs.

Our places

At both Bristol Zoo Gardens and Wild Place, we are the fortunate custodians of much-valued built assets and historic landscapes, full of rich biodiversity that we must continue to cherish. We take this responsibility seriously and will ensure that the future of both sites safeguards this heritage and biodiversity, including the planned development of Bristol Zoo Gardens.

Our people

The success of the Society has only been possible due to our people. The Society is governed by 12 Trustees who freely give their time to ensure that we deliver our charitable objects. Each Trustee serves for up to nine years and as a result the Society has been overseen by several hundred people during its history.
Our Board of Trustees is supported by a number of sub-committees with Independent Members who provide a broader range of perspectives and experience to the Society. In particular our Conservation, Ethics and Sustainability Committee ensures our animal welfare, research and conservation work is carried out to the highest ethical standards.

Further to this, the support of our Royal Patron, The Earl of Wessex, ambassadors and shareholders, is invaluable in realising our mission.

The Society also has many volunteers, some of whom have supported us for more than 25 years and now number in excess of 350 in total. Our volunteers work with us in all areas of activity to enhance our programmes and in particular support our education, public engagement and outreach work.

As a complex organisation delivering a wide range of activities, we employ more than 200 staff. We work across two sites in the UK as well as 10 countries in the world. Our people are our greatest resource, and our future success depends on our investment in them.
Above all else we must, through this Strategic Plan, ensure a financially sustainable future for Bristol Zoological Society. As a result, we must recognise the changing needs and expectations of visitors, staff, colleagues, stakeholders and supporters, whilst delivering a long-term vision for the new Bristol Zoo.

Conservation challenges

The planet has lost 1.3 million km² of forests alone since 1990; this is more than five times the size of the UK. Other habitat types, including grasslands, wetlands and marine ecosystems are also being impacted by human activity. There are no longer any safe havens for species outside of protected areas. Recent studies have shown that even minimal deforestation substantially increases a species’ extinction risk.

Healthy habitats and healthy animal populations are inextricably linked, and we must continue to integrate wildlife monitoring with habitat restoration in the wild places where we work. The COVID-19 global pandemic is no better illustration of the cause and effect of this. But, out of adversity comes opportunity. Zoos are ideally placed to play a significant part in the struggle to promote a more symbiotic relationship with nature and specifically the fight to prevent species extinctions. But we need to do more, and quickly.
Social challenges

Historically the environment has not featured amongst the top issues that concern the UK public and more often than not, concerns about the environment solely focus on the impact of our changing climate.

However, a younger generation are increasingly passionate about the environment, but, they do not associate zoos with its protection. We must ensure that our public and stakeholders clearly understand our relevance to society today, in particular our mission as a conservation charity, and that our focus on the environment is evident in everything that we do.

We must play a leading role in raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity, foster a sense of responsibility for the species that inhabit the world in which we live, and enable positive behaviours that support the conservation of wildlife.

The benefits for human health and wellbeing of connecting with nature are also becoming better understood and this must come to be an increasingly important part of our thinking, as the way in which we live our daily lives continues to change at a rapid pace.
The population of Bristol has become increasingly diverse and some local communities have changed significantly. There are now at least 45 religions, at least 180 countries of birth and at least 91 main languages spoken. Bristol also has 42 areas in the most deprived 10% in England, including six in the most deprived 1%. This situation is replicated in other major cities within our catchment such as Cardiff and Newport. We must respond to this rapidly changing landscape across our region and be open to different forms of engagement if we are to maintain and increase our reach.

**Consumer challenges**

Audience expectations are high in an increasingly competitive tourism and leisure market and we must ensure that we live and exhibit our brand and our values.

Families are increasingly keen to experience more time together, away from screens, creating time to connect and escape everyday life. This is particularly the case following the COVID-19 pandemic and a desire for safe outdoor activities. The Society must respond to this through a compelling, fun and universally accessible experience that makes the most of our passionate colleagues and the inherently wild setting of the new Bristol Zoo.

In particular, transportation to our sites must be seen as an enabler, not a blocker, to a decision to visit. The car will continue to provide a popular mode of transport for a family audience; however, we must continue to offer greater travel alternatives which must be affordable and reliable to the point at which they are genuine alternatives to the car.
Financial challenges

The Society has made an operating loss in four of the last six years and has persistently struggled to raise sufficient capital income for investment in its two zoos. This combined with the challenges inherent with the small size of Bristol Zoo Gardens and the financial impact of the Coronavirus pandemic led the Trustees and Shareholders to decide in 2020 to sell the Bristol Zoo Gardens site. This will result in much-needed capital investment to develop the new Bristol Zoo and greater capacity for investment in conservation and education activities for the long-term.
1 Saving wildlife

Conservation breeding and reintroduction

We will continue to develop and lead conservation breeding programmes, particularly those that aim to bolster wild populations of target species through reintroduction and other conservation translocations, such as the white-clawed crayfish in southwest England and Partula snails in French Polynesia. The development of the new Bristol Zoo presents a unique opportunity to take a completely fresh look at our species plan and ex-situ conservation activity. We will develop the Society’s species plan to increase its direct contribution to ex-situ conservation, to at least 90% of the species that we keep. We will work with International Union for Conservation of Nature Specialist Groups and other stakeholders to assess the need for captive assurance populations, bring about mandates and make space available for such programmes.

Conservation genetics

We will develop the Bristol Zoological Society Conservation Genetics Laboratory as part of our Institute of Conservation Science and Learning and, through this, enhance the population viability analyses for our target species with genetic information. We will use our in-house laboratory to determine the taxonomic status of animals of unknown origin, thus enabling their inclusion into European Association of Zoos and Aquaria studbooks.
**Conservation medicine**

We will establish a world-class Conservation Medicine Centre at the new Bristol Zoo, including the capacity for European residencies. We will integrate conservation medicine into our existing field conservation projects as appropriate, and continue to supervise post-graduate students in conservation medicine projects. We will lead on the development of a standard methodology to assess animal welfare, replicable across all zoos, and ensure that the species in our zoo continue to receive the highest standards of animal husbandry and welfare.

**Field conservation and science**

We will actively monitor the status of species we aim to conserve in each field project, and aim to improve their conservation assessment on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List of Threatened Species.

We will identify causes of habitat loss in our key project sites, and work with other stakeholders to implement habitat restoration activities. We will maximise the value of the new Bristol Zoo site for the conservation of native species through integrated ecological site management, and develop a native species strategy.

We will work in constructive partnerships with other organisations in our field conservation and science projects, including universities, other conservation organisations, governments and other stakeholders, to undertake conservation action on the ground to target the threats facing wildlife at our project sites. We will make our conservation work easily accessible to colleagues, visitors and the wider community and develop a Bristol Zoological Society Conservation Index that easily conveys how our conservation activities are performing.
The new Bristol Zoo

There is a unique opportunity to re-frame the new Bristol Zoo, located on the northern fringe of Bristol, within our reimagined conservation charity. In starting with an almost blank piece of paper there is an opportunity to embed conservation research and fieldwork (in situ) with conservation breeding programmes (ex situ), engagement, education and outreach in the design and operation of the zoo and to use this opportunity to inspire and enable positive actions for wildlife in our visitors – a truly integrated and extended ‘one plan approach’ to wildlife conservation.

There is an opportunity to create a zoo with net zero carbon emissions and no negative impact on nature. Every aspect of the visitor experience will reinforce our conservation charity brand including the retail and catering. We will lead by example and connect all within the charity whilst creating a platform for new collaborations and partnerships.

The new Bristol Zoo will be ideally located for the next 185 years. Easily accessible, it will be a local, regional and national destination. It will be a destination for Bristol to match the ambition of the City and sit alongside other unique destinations such as Bristol Aerospace, The Wave and the YTL Arena Bristol.

The landscape of the Hollywood Tower Estate is characterised by a mosaic of habitats. It is inherently wild. It readily offers an opportunity to explore the interconnectedness of species, including humans. It is a space where ecology stories can be told rather than only zoology stories. The visitor will be immersed in this landscape as will the animals. Visitors will need to find the animals; they will need to explore and discover. They will experience the thrill of a chance encounter. They will experience wildlife without barriers in a range of wild places.
Phase 1
Animals will have the space and facilities to thrive. By developing a detailed species plan, they will all be chosen for our potential to achieve conservation impact. They will include current favourites at Bristol Zoo Gardens and old favourites may return.

**Changing behaviours**

Engaging the greatest number and breadth of visitors is our best opportunity to save wildlife, and we must empower them to do it together with us. As the great Sir David Attenborough said, “No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced”. But we will go beyond that; by developing and applying our understanding of social science, we will encourage positive action for wildlife by understanding the motivations and barriers to act in our various audiences, leading to the outcome of ‘people choose to benefit wildlife’.

The need to sustain our environment and address the climate and ecological emergencies will be embedded throughout the visitor experience at the new Bristol Zoo. We will engage our visitors with the wider pressures on wildlife and importantly provide them with the tools to change their behaviours and work with us to reduce these pressures. As importantly we will lead by example and demonstrate to visitors through the development and operation of the new Bristol Zoo that we are willing to change our own behaviours and make the choices that are necessary to save wildlife together.
In addition, we will establish a new Conservation Hub in Clifton that will provide a permanent base for the education and conservation programmes of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project – continuing to reach audiences in Clifton and beyond. If the model is successful, we will work with other communities in Bristol to explore the establishment of further conservation hubs.

Visitor experience

Visitors will be at the heart of how we think and what we do. The personal interaction with our staff and volunteers will be second to none and our visitors will become our ambassadors. We must ensure a high-quality experience pre-, during, and post-visit at the new Bristol Zoo.

The experience at the new Bristol Zoo will drive repeat visitation, membership and visitor donations, as well as day visitors. Importantly, the catering offer will adapt to meet these needs, with a focus on improved customer service and a proposition that is consistent with the values of the Society. There will be greater investment to improve visitor facilities, in particular to develop an improved arrival and exit experience and a new restaurant, to meet the needs of day visitors who may have travelled from afar.
Harnessing digital media

Digital and social media represent an extraordinary opportunity to be part of a much bigger conversation. We will increase the use of social and digital media to communicate our relevance and stimulate debate, and we will renew our website with a mobile-first approach that supports access from anywhere. As a result, we will grow the number of social media followers and digital media visits.
Diverse and disadvantaged communities

We want to reach audiences from a broad range of backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the West of England population, and ensure that we are accessible to all. We will deliver socially-inclusive programmes, engaging disadvantaged communities that may not have had the chance to visit one of our sites before.

We will expand our Access to Nature bursary scheme to at least 15 groups per year. We will double the number of Zoo to You community outreach visits to more than 100 a year. We will continue to engage children and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds with our Wellbeing programme.

Primary and secondary pupils and students

Bristol Zoological Society will be a centre of excellence for science learning, particularly in the natural sciences. We will develop, deliver and evaluate new innovative programmes, including outdoor learning, that provide a unique learning experience that complements science learning in school.

Learning will be embedded throughout the visitor experience with an increased capacity for participatory learning provided through the development of new exhibits. We will explore the role that technology can play in education programmes, alongside physical interaction, in more detail.
We will grow the number of pupils and students visiting the new Bristol Zoo to more than 90,000 a year, representing approximately 70% of those in the West of England Combined Authority, with an ambition that everyone in the West of England will visit the new Bristol Zoo at least once whilst at school.

**Further and Higher education**

We will develop a new Conservation Learning Centre at the new Bristol Zoo and, combined with the new Conservation Medicine Centre, review our plans for additional further and higher education provision whilst increasing student numbers on existing courses where appropriate and feasible.
Environmental leadership

We will lead the national and international zoo community, to more actively consider and deliver improved environmental sustainability across our industry, and help others to apply this to their organisations. In particular, we will support colleagues to be environmental ambassadors providing the tools and skills to influence others as they share best practice with colleagues in other zoos and conservation organisations. We will use our convening power to ensure local, national and international discussion and debate on the climate and ecological emergencies. In particular we will reclaim our leadership position locally as one of the pillars of the city and region engaging with wildlife-related environmental issues and stimulating greater thought and consideration of these.

Our environment

Caring for and sustaining the environment is central to our mission and this philosophy will flow through everything that we do. By 2035 we will be a carbon-neutral organisation. Specifically, we will aim for all procurement to be sourced sustainably, in particular our food and packaging materials. We will reduce the environmental impact of our operation, focussing on our energy and water consumption, both at our zoo and in our field conservation projects, and on our waste production. We will showcase our achievements in environmental sustainability to our visitors, through enhanced public engagement, and instil in our visitors an appreciation of the importance and benefits of sustainable living.
Influencing the future

We will work together with the international zoo and conservation communities, in particular the International Union for Conservation of Nature, to develop new ideas and approaches to biodiversity and wildlife conservation. We will influence national government policy on issues concerning the environment such as the illegal wildlife trade. We will play a much more active role in discussions about the future priorities for Bristol and the region, in particular the relationship between humans and wildlife. We will lead the wider zoo community in a discussion about the zoo of the 21st century and beyond, as a result of our own focus on the development of the new Bristol Zoo.
Our people

We will increase employee engagement and satisfaction to create champions for our brand. Specifically, we will ensure that colleagues are treated with respect and fairness and that we focus on improving the wellbeing of our employees.

There will be a greater emphasis on the continued development of our colleagues, in particular managers, with an increased focus on succession planning, the development of colleagues and improved resilience throughout our organisation. Underpinned by the development of a central Staff Hub at the new Bristol Zoo we will promote and achieve a ‘One Society’ culture.

Our fundraising

Sufficient funding to sustain our future will be fundamental. This will be achieved through bank funding and the sale of property assets. However, donors are critical to our future success, and we will not achieve this Strategic Plan without them. In recent years the Society has grown its donor base and in 2019 funded and completed the new £3.9m Bear Wood exhibit at Wild Place Project entirely through philanthropic fundraising.

In support of our vision and masterplan for the new Bristol Zoo we will develop a case for support and campaign plan to significantly grow our capital fundraising. We will raise £10m by 2028 and a further £10m by 2035. In particular, we will use
our fundraising campaigns to develop new relationships, generate new insights, and help ensure that the activities that our fundraising enables are innovative and forward-thinking.

In parallel, we will steward the financial assets realised through the sale of our property assets to ensure a long-term sustainable financial future for the Society and an increased commitment to conservation and education.

Our places

The masterplan for the new Bristol Zoo will not only provide for a more compelling visitor experience but also ensure that we deliver an expansion and growth of the infrastructure and facilities to support colleagues, the species at the zoo and an increased number of visitors. We will develop high-quality spaces that are sensitive and sympathetic to the landscape and provide innovative ways to reduce our carbon footprint and the environmental impact of what we do.

We will also ensure a legacy at Bristol Zoo Gardens that we can all be proud of. The Zoo Gardens will live on. They will be a desirable address to live at. Set in beautiful gardens and surrounded by a rich heritage with stories to tell.

The iconic main entrance building will become a conservation hub for Clifton, with a permanent base for the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, serving the local community. Visitors to the centre will be able to buy refreshments and explore the
history of Bristol Zoo Gardens and learn more about the local wildlife and habitats. This could also be a jumping off point for a visit to the Downs.

In this way the heritage is not lost but retold whilst the new Bristol Zoo reinforces Bristol’s status as innovator, activist and champion of nature.