# High Fen Wildland pioneers peatland restoration funded by biodiversity credits



In the heart of the Fens, High Fen Wildland, a 292-hectare site in Methwold, Norfolk, has embarked on a transformative journey toward ecological restoration since its acquisition by the nature restoration company Nattergal in December 2022. Once a commercially unviable agricultural expanse, the land, characterised by its unique sandy peat soils, struggled to sustain arable crops and seasonal daffodil cultivation. As farming became increasingly difficult in this naturally wet landscape, the region transitioned into a seasonally flooded grassland, maintained through an agri-environment scheme.

Nattergal's ambitious project aims to rejuvenate this ecologically significant area by creating a diverse mosaic of wetland habitats, including reed beds and willow carr, while implementing essential rewetting initiatives. This strategic rewetting not only aims to bolster biodiversity but is also crucial for mitigating carbon emissions, as waterlogged peatlands serve as vital carbon sinks. Matthew Hay, Nattergal's natural capital manager, articulated the vision, stating, “Our idea is simple – rewet as much peatland as we can, and then allow the wetland habitats to recolonise.”

The funding for this extensive restoration effort is fundamentally tied to innovative financial models. The company plans to sell "key ecosystem services," particularly through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) initiatives and peatland carbon credits. BNG frameworks mandate developers to offset habitat loss from construction projects and require at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity. This creates a market where companies can invest in the restoration of natural habitats, thereby addressing their environmental footprint while contributing to ecological restoration.

Hay reflected on the historical context of the Fens, noting that prior to the widespread drainage efforts in the 1700s, the region thrived as a biodiverse wetland ecosystem, home to myriad species. The conversion of these lands into one of Britain's most fertile agricultural areas came at the cost of significant ecological degradation, with greenhouse gases now emitting from the drained peatlands – a stark reminder of the critical balance between agricultural productivity and ecological health.

The unique hydrological characteristics of High Fen provide an advantageous backdrop for Nattergal's restoration goals. Surrounded by three watercourses – the River Wissey, Methwold Lode, and a strategically situated cut-off channel – the site offers “hydrological control.” Hay explained that this configuration enables the team to raise the water table without adversely affecting neighbouring lands, thus preserving significant carbon storage within the peat.

A robust network of water monitoring stations has been implemented to analyse the site's hydrology, guiding targeted rewetting efforts. Site manager Frank Street described the technical approach: “Most of the water moves underground… We can build this subterranean wall to stop the water from moving,” thereby maintaining the necessary water levels for effective peatland restoration.

The endeavour’s long-term prospects are promising, with Nattergal already registering 548 BNG units for the site, of which a small portion has been sold. Chief commercial officer Claire Traynor expressed enthusiasm over the healthy demand for these units, having observed significant local development that will drive continued interest in biodiversity credits linked to this unique restoration project.

Furthermore, rewilding initiatives like this are part of a broader movement across Europe that recognises the invaluable ecological services provided by peatlands. Restoration not only contributes to climate change mitigation by reducing carbon emissions but also enhances habitats for wildlife, potentially increasing opportunities for eco-tourism and community engagement.

As the restoration of High Fen Wildland progresses, it serves as a beacon of hope and a model for future projects. By blending pioneering financial frameworks with a commitment to ecological restoration, this initiative embodies the possibility of a more harmonious coexistence between human activity and the natural world, striving to bring back a rich biological tapestry to an area once celebrated for its diverse wildlife.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-projects/high-fen-wildland)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.climateimpact.com/news-insights/insights/peatland-restoration-a-climate-solution-with-high-biodiversity-impact/)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://nbshub.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/casestudy/nattergal-recovery-of-natural-ecosystem-processes-financed-through-natural-capital-investments/)
* Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-projects/high-fen-wildland), [[7]](https://impact-investor.com/rewilding-europes-peatlands-by-selling-nature-based-carbon-credits/)
* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/news/wales-first-carbon-funded-peatland-restoration-project-complete)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://nbshub.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/casestudy/nattergal-recovery-of-natural-ecosystem-processes-financed-through-natural-capital-investments/), [[4]](https://www.climateimpact.com/news-insights/insights/peatland-restoration-a-climate-solution-with-high-biodiversity-impact/)
* Paragraph 7: [[2]](https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-projects/high-fen-wildland), [[3]](https://nbshub.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/casestudy/nattergal-recovery-of-natural-ecosystem-processes-financed-through-natural-capital-investments/)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/biodiversity-crediting-woodlands-and-peatlands)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25144301.high-fen-wildland-using-private-money-restore-nature/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-projects/high-fen-wildland> - High Fen Wildland, located in Methwold, Norfolk, is a 292-hectare site purchased by Nattergal in December 2022. Previously used for arable farming and daffodil cultivation, the land became unproductive due to its wet conditions. Nattergal plans to restore the area by rewetting peatlands to prevent carbon emissions and create a diverse mosaic of wetland habitats, including reed beds and willow carr. The project aims to enhance biodiversity and offers opportunities for eco-tourism, education, and research. Restoration efforts are supported by the sale of natural capital products like peatland carbon credits and biodiversity net gain units.
3. <https://nbshub.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/casestudy/nattergal-recovery-of-natural-ecosystem-processes-financed-through-natural-capital-investments/> - Nattergal, established in 2021, focuses on purchasing and restoring degraded land to improve biodiversity, carbon storage, water quality, and soil health. Their first site, Boothby Wildland in Lincolnshire, was acquired in December 2021. The High Fen Wildland in Norfolk, a 292-hectare site, was purchased in December 2022. Restoration plans include rewetting peatlands to enhance carbon sequestration and developing a diverse habitat mosaic. Financial returns are generated through the sale of biodiversity net gain units and other natural capital investments, aiming to deliver environmental and community benefits.
4. <https://www.climateimpact.com/news-insights/insights/peatland-restoration-a-climate-solution-with-high-biodiversity-impact/> - Peatland restoration is a critical climate solution that prevents the release of stored carbon by rewetting drained peatlands and re-establishing native vegetation. This process not only enhances carbon sequestration but also supports biodiversity by creating habitats for various species. Carbon finance, through the sale of carbon credits, provides necessary funding for these restoration projects. The Peatland Code, a voluntary certification standard for UK peatland projects, ensures that the climate benefits sold are real, quantifiable, additional, and permanent, facilitating the financing of peatland restoration efforts.
5. <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/news/wales-first-carbon-funded-peatland-restoration-project-complete> - Wales' first carbon-funded peatland restoration project at Bwlch y Groes, near Snowdonia National Park, was completed with funding from the Welsh Peatlands Sustainable Management Scheme and private carbon credit sales. The 66-hectare project aims to halt the loss of 2,335 tons of carbon emissions over the next 35 years. Restoration efforts include re-profiling and blocking extensive hagg and gully complexes. The project is expected to improve water quality, increase biodiversity, and enhance habitat conditions for freshwater invertebrates and birds, contributing to the Berwyn and South Clwyd Mountains' ecological health.
6. <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/biodiversity-crediting-woodlands-and-peatlands> - The Biodiversity Credit Development Project explores how biodiversity uplift can be measured, validated, and monetized within the UK's evolving nature markets. Supported by NatureScot and the Scottish Government, the project utilizes the Operation Wallacea Methodology, which assesses biodiversity changes across various taxa and structural aspects of ecosystems. A biodiversity credit is defined as a 1% increase in the median value of combined metrics per hectare, providing a standardized yet flexible unit for biodiversity assessment. This approach aims to integrate biodiversity crediting within existing carbon standards, promoting effective restoration and conservation efforts.
7. <https://impact-investor.com/rewilding-europes-peatlands-by-selling-nature-based-carbon-credits/> - Rewilding Europe is focusing on making peatland rewilding initiatives commercially attractive by selling nature-based carbon credits to private investors. The organization aims to enhance the commercial viability of rewilding projects, enabling them to unlock more funding. By selling carbon credits, Rewilding Europe seeks to scale up peatland restoration efforts, which are crucial for biodiversity and climate change mitigation. This approach aligns with the organization's goal to make Europe a wilder place and to provide positive environmental impacts through nature restoration.