



OCEAN CONSERVATION AT ZSL

ZSL is a global charity focused on creating a world where wildlife thrives. We work in biodiverse regions to protect critical marine ecosystems, recover threatened species and habitats, and support the communities that depend on healthy seas. With over 100 scientists and conservationists working across marine ecosystems, our approach is to use rigorous science to inform on-the-ground action, designed in partnership with governments, communities and international institutions. Translating our science into action takes many forms – including changing policy, improving protection measures, restoring habitats and working with local communities to improve coexistence with wildlife.



OCEAN HIGHWAYS INITIATIVE

The Global Ocean



The high seas – the ocean beyond national borders – serve as core habitats and migration routes for many marine species. The Ocean Highways Initiative aims to use global datasets covering all aspects of marine biodiversity to map and prioritise the critical ocean highways that are essential for maintaining ocean health and resilience of marine species, as well as cultural connections, in the face of human pressures and climate change.



Image: Ariph Rasheed / Ocean Image Bank

The aim is to protect
30%
of the world's oceans by 2030

THE ONGOING VISION

The ultimate goal is to transform fragmented ocean spaces into an interconnected global network of MPAs.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Having created a feasibility model that maps and prioritises marine corridors between key regions of the Southern Atlantic, identifying gaps in conservation knowledge, the project is now ready to scale and:

- develop an adaptable framework that balances biological and socio-political data to design resilient protection networks across the world.
- develop a scientific approach to help nations implement the High Seas Treaty, a landmark global accord that aims to protect marine life.
- advance the global commitment to protect at least 30% of the world's oceans by 2030.

PARTNERS

Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

DELIVERY TIMELINE

December 2025-March 2026

Feasibility case study undertaken.

2026

Completion of pilot phase.

2027-2030

Transition to global scale, integrating diverse data sources, modelling future scenarios.

2030 and beyond

Inform marine spatial planning and national reporting on progress against international policy targets set out within the Convention on Biological Diversity and the High Seas Treaty.

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A FAIRER APPROACH TO MARINE CONSERVATION

Global – current projects: England, Scotland, Wales, Mozambique, the Philippines



Conservation's historical and colonial legacies have created long-lasting inequities, making moving from risk mitigation towards prioritising justice and inclusion crucial.

ZSL's FAIRER conservation framework is a commitment to conservation that's Fair, Accountable, Inclusive, Respectful, Ethical and Reflexive.



THE ONGOING VISION

We aim to deliver socially just marine conservation with human rights at its heart. This means:

- centring local voices, perspectives and knowledge.
- upholding communities' agency, dignity and rights.
- putting rights-holders at the centre of conservation processes.
- learning, adapting, and reflecting on our approaches and positionality

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

We have:

- developed training – 20 FAIRER staff workshops delivered.
- established safeguards – inclusive engagement plans and safe, accessible feedback and grievance mechanisms established across all projects to encourage local people's input.
- embedded local knowledge – 71 fishers engaged in co-designed research (Project SIARC, Wales).
- facilitated co-design – seabird bycatch monitoring trial developed alongside fishers (Clean Catch project, England and Scotland).
- centred local voices – rights-holders' input prioritised in the zoning process for a new marine protected area (MPA) (Philippines).
- monitored impact – equity indicators developed to track people's views on their inclusion.



50%
of FAIRER
engaged projects
now use equity-based
indicators

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2022

FAIRER launched

2023-2025

FAIRER integrated into:

- Project SIARC (Wales)
- Saint Helena Plastics Project
- Clean Catch's seabird bycatch monitoring trial (England and Scotland)
- Our Sea Our Life Project (Mozambique)
- Mangrove projects and large-scale MPA establishment (Philippines).

2026 and beyond

Training more FAIRER conservationists and establishing core safeguards and equity indicators across all marine projects.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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Equity, Rights and Social Safeguarding
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SUSSEX KELP RECOVERY PROJECT

West Sussex coast



Kelp forests are important habitats – a single kelp can be home to 80,000 organisms. Plus they bring benefits to people, for example protecting coastlines from waves, and aiding the fisheries industry by providing fish-breeding grounds. But the kelp habitat that once spanned 40km of West Sussex coastline has been lost.

The project aims to enable the recovery of kelp and other fish habitats, supporting a thriving marine ecosystem that benefits nature, fisheries and communities.



THE ONGOING VISION

Since the 2021 introduction of a bylaw prohibiting seabed trawling, Sussex Kelp Recovery Project has supported the habitat's regeneration by monitoring the impact of the trawling ban on wildlife, identifying barriers to recovery, and engaging with local communities.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Over the past five years, the project has:

- seen an increase in shallow-dwelling fish species such as Atlantic mackerel, sand eels and mullets.
- inspired 400 citizen scientists to map where kelp is recovering.
- supported four PhD students.
- run two 'kelp summits' with hundreds of attendees.
- been featured in the BBC documentary *Our Sea Forest*.

PARTNERS

Sussex Wildlife Trust, Blue Marine Foundation, Adur & Worthing Council, Queen Mary University, Sussex Underwater, University of Brighton, Sussex IFCA.

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2019

Seabed monitoring surveys and lobbying for a trawling ban begin.

2021

Trawling ban introduced, monitoring expanded.

2021-2026

Monitoring continues, PhD students supported, community engagement broadened.

2026 and beyond

Preparing evidence for bylaw review, evolving monitoring, expanding partnerships.

304 Km²
protected from
seabed trawling

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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TRACE – TOXICOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT IN CETACEANS

English waters



Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) regularly strand along UK coasts. The Cetacean Stranding Investigation Programme (CSIP) investigates these events, aiming to understand the threat that bycatch, pollutants and other pressures pose to marine life.

A priority is to discover the effect of chemicals such as PFAS and other Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CECs) on small cetaceans. To do so, TRACE will deliver the first national-scale assessment of exposure to these contaminants in harbour porpoises and common dolphins, linking chemical burdens to health outcomes. This will then guide regulation and mitigation to support species recovery.



500

cetaceans analysed
to reveal chemical
pollutants

THE ONGOING VISION

To build TRACE into a long-term monitoring programme for these emerging chemical pollutants in English waters, using stranded cetaceans to reveal risks, identify priority chemicals and hotspots, and drive targeted action that protects marine ecosystems.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

The project will produce:

- the first national PFAS and CEC dataset for UK small cetaceans.
- maps identifying contamination hotspots and analyses of temporal trends.
- evidence on whether pollutant burdens impact immune and reproductive health.
- a list of chemicals and regions that should be prioritised for mitigation.
- open-access datasets, peer-reviewed publications and policy briefings to support regulation.

PARTNERS

ZSL/CSIP (lead), Cefas, Natural England

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2026-27

Literature review, data compilation, Phase 1 chemical analysis.

2027-28

Phase 2 chemical analysis, full dataset assembly.

2028-29

Statistical modelling: hotspot maps, temporal trends and health-risk assessment, plus prioritisation of chemicals and regions to focus conservation action.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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Postdoctoral researcher

PROJECT SIARC

Wales



Project SIARC (Sharks Inspiring Action and Research with Communities) boosts conservation by centring local people. It focuses on:

- providing inclusive opportunities to participate in elasmobranch (shark, skate and ray) conservation, enabling engagement with local Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
- providing opportunities for those facing barriers – such as female fishers and under-25s – to develop elasmobranch conservation skills.
- improving understanding of elasmobranch reproduction and habitats to strengthen SAC management.
- knowledge exchange, collaboration and embedding equitable approaches to improve marine conservation in two SACs.



THE ONGOING VISION

We aim to increase participation in shark, skate and ray conservation, strengthen evidence for management, and support community-led stewardship of marine environments.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Project SIARC has engaged:

- 71 fishers in research
- over 23,000 people through citizen science and digital platforms
- 745 people in eggcase-hunt events
- 190 volunteers contributing over 8,600 hours to monitoring and outreach



PARTNERS

Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Bangor University, North Wales Wildlife Trust, The Shark Trust, Swansea University, plus over 40 affiliates and collaborators. Funders include National Lottery Heritage Fund, On the Edge Conservation, Welsh Government Nature Networks Funds, The Moondance Foundation, The Fishmongers' Company.

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2017 – 2021

Angel Shark Project: Wales – working with fishers and communities to address knowledge gaps around angelshark distribution, ecology and habitat use.

2021 – 2023

Project SIARC Phase 1 – collaboration between fishers, researchers, communities and government to safeguard elasmobranch species.

2023 – 2026

Project SIARC Phase 2 – work expanded across fisher relationships, data gaps and inclusion.

2026 and beyond

Project SIARC Phase 3 – work expanded across both SACs.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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TRANSFORMING THE THAMES

Greater Thames Estuary



Coastal habitats are vital ecosystems. They clean the water, store carbon, protect coastal communities from flooding, and provide homes for wildlife. But in the 250,000 hectares of the Greater Thames Estuary, these habitats have become smaller and more fragmented, and therefore less able to deliver these benefits. There is the potential for so much more.

By uniting stakeholders across the estuary, this project aims to achieve a shared vision of a recovered, connected and resilient estuary for both nature and communities.



320 Ha
of coastal habitats
restored by 2030

THE ONGOING VISION

The estuary's recovery journey – a programme of restoration, pressure reduction and engagement activities – may take decades. But that journey has already begun with the planting of seagrass.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

By 2030:

- more than 320 hectares of coastal habitat will be restored
- current water quality will be more fully understood
- more than 100 volunteers will take part in restoration
- a practitioner network will encourage peer-to-peer learning
- the plan for phase 2 will be developed and consulted on with local communities



PARTNERS

We have 20 partners including landowners, eNGOs, regulators, academia, coastal partnerships and local councils.

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2022

Partnership established and planning phase begins.

2025

Transforming the Thames five-year plan launched.

2025-30

Phase 1 delivery including restoration, pressures reduction, stakeholder engagement, community volunteering opportunities.

2030 and beyond

Phase 2 delivery ensuring long-term, large-scale restoration across the Thames seascape.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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RESTORING OCEAN ATOLL ECOSYSTEMS

Chagos Archipelago
Marine Protected Area



Offshore islands host a disproportionate share of the planet's biodiversity making them critical for global conservation. However, they are vulnerable to the impacts of invasive and introduced species, which cause catastrophic diversity loss.

In the Chagos Islands, black rats have suppressed seabird reproduction and disrupted nutrient flows that support both island and reef habitats.

Removing rats and restoring native vegetation is key to the recovery of these coral atolls. This project aims to eradicate rats from four islands in northeast Peros Banhos, producing the longest chain of Indian Ocean islands (13 in total) free from invasive predators.



THE ONGOING VISION

Eventually, rats (as well as old coconut plantations) will be removed from over 30 further islands. This will aid the recovery of native vegetation, rebuild habitats, restore ecosystem function, and improve reef resilience.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

In 2025, four islands were baited using drones and baseline biodiversity data collected. Good biosecurity preventing reinvasion will:

- increase seabird breeding populations
- restore invertebrate communities
- allow recovery of native seedlings from the seedbank
- benefit reef health



4

islands de-ratted in
under five days

PARTNERS

Funded by Darwin Plus and led by Chagos Conservation Trust with ZSL and RBG Kew as delivery partners for biodiversity monitoring.

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2025

Islands baited.

2027 and 2028

Follow-up monitoring to confirm absence of rats and recovery of seabirds, invertebrates and plants.

2028

Final follow-up monitoring.

2029

Further funding sought to continue work on other islands.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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PROJECT SEAHORSE

The global ocean



Achieving healthy, well-managed marine ecosystems means reconciling conservation and human dependency on the ocean. To achieve this, Project Seahorse – active in six continents – focuses on these intriguing fish, notable for their odd shapes, male pregnancy and faithful pairings. That’s because tackling the threats to seahorses – for example from bottom trawling, habitat destruction, and the global seahorse trade – will help save the seas on which seahorses, and all life depends.



THE ONGOING VISION

Through research, management, and collaboration, Project Seahorse uses the focus on seahorses to develop and implement marine conservation solutions that safeguard the seas.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Project Seahorse has:

- undertaken conservation assessments, documenting threats to seahorses and completing IUCN Red List assessments for all species.
- implemented 35 marine protected areas.
- achieved global trade regulation under CITES, a first for marine fishes.
- established the first breeding programmes for seahorses in aquariums.
- engaged the world’s citizens in seahorse conservation, launching the iSeahorse website (www.iseahorse.org) and app for citizen science reporting.

PARTNERS

University of British Columbia.



Engaging citizen scientists has advanced our knowledge on

35
SPECIES



DELIVERY TIMELINE

1996

Project Seahorse established as a partnership between ZSL and Dr Amanda Vincent (now at University of British Columbia).

1996-2026

Diverse achievements (in addition to outcomes listed above) include founding the IUCN SSC Seahorse, Pipefish and Seadragon Specialist Group, and developing an award-winning alliance of 1,000 fishing families giving fishers the capacity to plan conservation and management.

2024-2030 and beyond

Addressing seahorse conservation and trade through the Philippines Seahorse Programme ‘Saving Mr Mom’; a new project to identify pipefish species in the Indian Ocean; tackling bottom trawling.

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE

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BUILDING THE BLUE BIODIVERSITY ECONOMY

Northern Mozambique



Northern Mozambique's coastline – an interconnected system of mangroves, seagrass, tidal flats and reef nurseries – is of huge ecological importance, underpinning biodiversity, shoreline protection, carbon storage, and coastal communities' food and income. Yet it is rapidly degrading.

Fish provides half the population's animal protein intake, yet unregulated extraction is destroying nursery habitats and depleting key species.

Without alternatives, households stay locked in extractive practices. This initiative breaks the cycle across four strands – oyster aquaculture, seaweed diversification, blue carbon, and the governance to sustain them.

Northern Mozambique has **OVER 300** reef-building coral species

THE ONGOING VISION

By establishing a scalable, community-led blue economy with livelihoods and enterprise tied to habitat recovery, extractive harvesting can be replaced by sustainable aquaculture, blue carbon finance and protected fish nurseries.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

The programme will:

- create a community-owned oyster enterprise ready to scale with investment.
- strengthen protection for 50-100 hectares of high-risk habitat, establishing the basis for expansion.
- create recognised no-take and nursery zones aligned with aquaculture areas, financed through a conservation levy.
- achieve increases in marine species abundance.
- reduce fishing pressure among households.

PARTNERS

AMA, WCS, Rare. Funded by UK OCEAN.



DELIVERY TIMELINE

Oysters

August 2025-March 2026

Pilot production established.

April-December 2026

Market validation and buyer engagement.

From April 2027

First commercial harvesting.

From 2028

Scaling across three more sites.

Blue carbon

August 2025-January 2026

Mangrove restoration and blue carbon scoping.

February 2026-August 2026

Blue carbon feasibility study – Angoche district mangrove fields.

September 2026-December 2026

Angoche social feasibility study.

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RESTORING MANGROVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Philippines



Mangroves absorb and store up to five times more carbon – known as blue carbon – than terrestrial forests. They also protect coastlines, support fisheries and livelihoods, and provide marine and terrestrial wildlife habitat.

But mangroves are under pressure. In the Philippines, half of the country's mangroves have been cleared for aquaculture and subsequent settlements, and what remains is mostly fragmented and degraded. In a country vulnerable to typhoons, sea-level rise and flooding, and where millions of people depend on healthy coastal ecosystems, this matters.

Central to successful mangrove restoration and conservation are science- and community-based initiatives, spearheaded by ZSL.

THE ONGOING VISION

ZSL aims to:

- support mangrove rehabilitation and coastal greenbelt development.
- train mangrove conservationists in science-based restoration/management.
- co-develop interventions to enable large-scale restoration.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Working with communities and partners, ZSL has:

- restored over 10,000 hectares of mangroves.
- co-developed solutions and trained over 13,600 natural resource managers.
- improved financial literacy in 3,300 households, reducing pressure on ecosystems.
- coordinated the National Blue Carbon Action Partnership.
- developed methods to identify mangrove loss and restoration opportunities, and track intervention outcomes.



5,000

mangrove conservationists will have been trained by 2035

PARTNERS

Global Mangrove Alliance Philippine Chapter; Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources; Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources; municipal and provincial governments; academic institutions.

Recent funders: UK Government, Bestseller Foundation, DP World Foundation, GIZ.

DELIVERY TIMELINE

By 2030

Global Mangrove Alliance aims to have 23,000 hectares of lost mangroves under restoration. ZSL will support:

- rehabilitating 885 hectares.
- forming 50 new community-managed savings and credit associations (CoMSCA).
- establishing three community-based Fisheries Management Plans.
- developing and implementing national policies.

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PHILIPPINE RISE OCEAN CONSERVATION AREA

Western Pacific,
250km east of Luzon,
Philippines



The Philippine Rise is an underwater volcanic ridgeline located at the origin of the Kuroshio Current. Identified as a global Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA), it hosts abundant biodiversity and is likely to be home to many currently undiscovered marine species. It also lies on the Pacific bluefin tuna migration superhighway from Southeast Asia to the Americas. So far remoteness has protected it, but as coastal fisheries are depleted, it faces growing pressure from commercial and illegal fishing.



Image: Gregory Piper / Ocean Image Bank

In 2025
85%
of coral reefs were exposed to lethal temperatures

THE ONGOING VISION

To secure a refuge for coral and fisheries, and support biodiversity and coastal communities, the project will establish the Philippines' first large-scale (150,000km²) offshore marine protected area (LMPA) and improve management of 10,000km² of existing MPAs.

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

The project will provide:

- the first LMPA in Southeast Asia.
- long-term protection for mesophotic coral reefs and biodiversity.
- improvement in livelihood resilience and food security for thousands of fishers.
- a replicable model for offshore MPA designation across Southeast Asia.



Image: Dani Escayola / Ocean Image Bank

PARTNERS

Philippine Government (national, provincial, local), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Philippines Fishery Management Area (FMA) 1 Management Board, partner NGOs. Funder: Blue Nature Alliance.

DELIVERY TIMELINE

2026

Socio-economic surveys undertaken, stakeholders engaged, BFAR team trained, management framework developed, monitoring protocols developed.

September 2027

Legal designation and launch.

Post-launch

- Adaptive Management Plan developed and implemented
- Ongoing surveillance, research, management
- Government funding unlocked
- Model shared regionally

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Philippine Rise Ocean Conservation Area

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We're ZSL, a science-driven conservation charity, working to restore wildlife in the UK and around the world.

ZSL is a charity registered in England and Wales no: 208728

