

# WILD ABOUT DEVON



**INCREASING BIODIVERSITY THROUGH  
COMMUNITY WILDLIFE FUNDING  
2024-25**

Devon Communities Together



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wild About Devon (WAD) 2024-25 grant programme has successfully supported 34 community-led environmental projects across Devon and Torbay, fostering biodiversity, community engagement, and environmental sustainability.

With a total grant allocation of £10,000, the programme enabled local groups to initiate or advance initiatives that improve local habitats, engage volunteers, and raise awareness of nature conservation.

The programme received applications from a diverse range of organisations, including wildlife and community groups, Parish and Town Councils, educational institutions, churches, and social enterprises. Due to high demand, the grant review panel had to make strategic funding decisions to ensure maximum environmental and community benefit. Throughout the grant period, projects delivered tangible results, including habitat restoration, species conservation, environmental education, and community-driven sustainability initiatives. 14 projects (42%) have been completed within the reporting period, with 18 projects still ongoing.

Beyond direct environmental benefits, the programme strengthened community networks, empowered volunteers, and enhanced public understanding of local ecosystems. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the programme's structure, the successes achieved, and recommendations for future funding opportunities.

This report outlines the programme's implementation, key outcomes, and lasting impact on communities and the environment.

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

**£10,000**

total grant  
funding  
distributed



**53**

applications  
received, with

**34** approved  
for funding

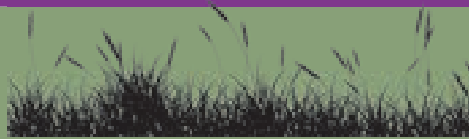


**13** new  
projects

**21**  
established  
projects  
enabled to  
grow

**7,831.5 M<sup>2</sup>**

of habitat created or restored across 11 projects



**150**

wildlife boxes  
installed, benefiting  
30 species

**22**

new plant species  
introduced



**722**

people directly  
engaged through workshops,  
environmental talks, and  
hands-on conservation  
activities



**268**

volunteer hours  
reported



## INTRODUCTION






Wild About Devon Community Wildlife Fund (WAD CWF) is a community-focused environmental grant scheme administered by Devon Communities Together (DCT). Now in its third year, the 2024-25 programme aimed to empower local organisations to take direct action for nature by providing small grants to support grassroots conservation efforts.

The need for such funding has grown significantly due to increasing environmental challenges, including habitat loss, biodiversity decline, and climate change impacts. Community-led initiatives play a crucial role in addressing these issues at a local level, fostering stewardship of natural spaces and equipping volunteers with the knowledge and tools necessary to make lasting changes.

## GRANT OVERVIEW

DCT opened the application process in June 2024, welcoming proposals from organisations working on biodiversity conservation, habitat restoration, community engagement in environmental issues, and sustainable land management. The application period closed in August 2024, by which time the demand for funding had significantly exceeded available resources.

The primary objectives of the programme included:

-  Supporting community-led environmental projects that promote biodiversity and sustainability.
-  Enhancing local habitats for wildlife through targeted conservation activities.
-  Encouraging volunteer engagement and environmental education within communities.
-  Facilitating knowledge-sharing between groups to strengthen collective environmental action.
-  Providing essential equipment and resources to enable long-term project sustainability.

This report details the delivery of the programme, outlines its impact, and highlights future opportunities for strengthening environmental action in Devon.

## GRANT DELIVERY

The application window ran from 5th June to 11th August 2024, with all available funding allocated and exhausted by the end of July. Due to the overwhelming interest in the scheme, applications were reviewed in three batches to ensure

a fair and structured selection process. The grant review panel assessed each submission based on predefined criteria, including environmental impact, community involvement, and feasibility.

The 53 applications were from the following groups:

- ✿ 29 wildlife/community groups
- ✿ 7 Parish/Town Councils
- ✿ 6 Churches/church groups
- ✿ 5 Community Interest Companies (CIC)/Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO)
- ✿ 5 educational establishments (including one college and one forest school)
- ✿ 1 museum and heritage centre

Of the 53 total applications, 33 of these were initially successful, leaving 9 unsuccessful applications - 11 applications were submitted after the grant fund was exhausted.

During the project, 2 applicants were no longer able to proceed with their projects, which led to these funds being redistributed to 3 of the applications that were submitted after the grant was initially exhausted, bringing total grant applications to 34.

The 34 successful projects represented a variety of organisations, demonstrating the widespread interest in community-driven environmental work:

- ✿ 21 wildlife/community groups
- ✿ 5 Parish/Town Councils
- ✿ 4 educational establishments
- ✿ 3 churches
- ✿ 1 museum and heritage centre

*Pictured: Prickles in a Pickle Hedgehog and Wildlife Sanctuary purchased heat pads for their prickly guests*





# CASE STUDY: DEER WOOD WOODLAND HORTICULTURE PROJECT

The Deer Wood Trust provides a safe and inclusive place for local communities, socially disadvantaged people and all visitors to experience wellbeing through woodland-based outdoor activities and therapies.

The team applied for grant funding of £500 for materials and labour costs to implement the infrastructure needed to increase the productive capacity of its native tree and woodland plant nursery. The work was also to enable them to start teaching courses in their unique systems of Woodland Horticulture to a wide range of people who work in the industry or wish to start or improve their own community nurseries.

Phase 1 of the project has been successfully completed and the first Woodland Horticulture course was held in September 2024. The course

covers the unique system of holistic and organic native tree and plant care. In sharing the system with others, they are supporting the implementation of new, richly biodiverse woodland biomes beyond the Deer Wood project. It goes beyond ordinary tree planting schemes; rather it is a whole new level of woodland and hedgerow planting understanding.

*“I found the workshop really valuable...I’m looking forward to implementing some of Marc’s advice around seed processing with Bokashi liquid and leaf mould compost in our CTN.”*

**Course attendee**

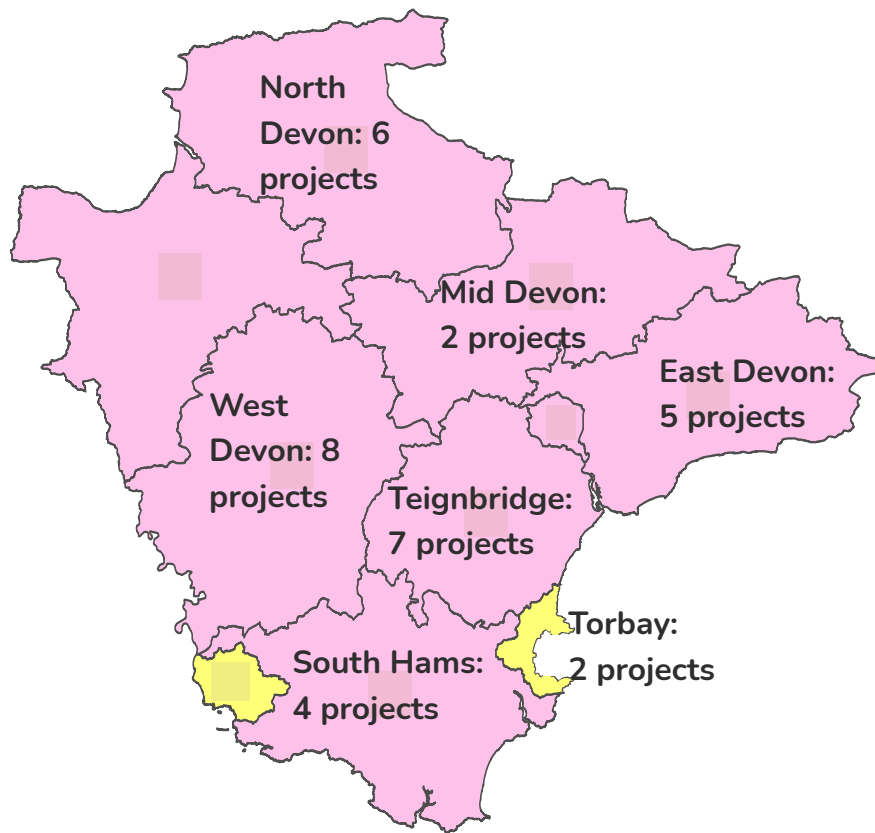
*“All the monies we have received that have gone towards the ultimate aim of sharing this holistic approach to tree care and cultivation have greatly assisted the effective progress and speed that we have been able to achieve these aims.*

*“We are very grateful to all who have supported this project and are excited to see how the outcomes will unfold not just locally but nationwide.”* Deer Wood Trust



Pictured: Woodland Horticulture Course

The geographical spread of successful applications ensured equitable support across Devon and Torbay:



Many projects successfully leveraged additional funding, with £13,825.90 raised in matched contributions. Several projects used their grant funding to acquire essential tools and equipment, including gazebos, trail cameras, and habitat monitoring tools, enabling them to sustain their conservation work beyond the initial grant period.

## PROMOTING THE GRANT SCHEME

DCT established a [dedicated website page](#) for the project (pictured, right). The page received 1,975 views, with an average of 20 seconds spent on page. It was the 6th most visited page on the DCT website overall over 12 months.

DCT issued a 'light touch' social media campaign to launch the project, having entered the third successive year of administering WAD CWF funding. Popularity for the scheme was clearly established during the first two delivery phases,



Website page for WAD



Example social post for WAD

as demonstrated by the WAD Facebook Group [Wild About Devon - Supporting Community Action for Nature](#) which has 611 members as of 14th February 2025.

In the event that there was an insufficient number of grant applications, DCT had a plan of action to address this via a media relations and email campaign, but this was not needed due to the strong level of interest.

Social media outreach to promote Wild About Devon grant scheme achieved a reach of 15,382, demonstrating strong public interest in environmental action. A full summary of social media interaction can be found below.

| Channel       | Number of posts | Number of accounts reached | Number of reactions |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Instagram     | 8               | 1,441                      | 116                 |
| Facebook      | 8               | 13,733                     | 240                 |
| X             | 4               | (behind paywall)           | (behind paywall)    |
| LinkedIn      | 2               | 208                        | 4                   |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>22</b>       | <b>15,382</b>              | <b>360</b>          |

Based on the number of accounts reached and number of reactions, Facebook was the most successful social media for engagement with the grant programme, as was the case with the second tranche of WAD CWF (Years 2023-24), demonstrated by reaching 13,733 accounts – an 853% increase on the next highest number of accounts reached by social media, which was 1,441 accounts reached on Instagram. Facebook experienced 106% more reactions to social media posts, at 240, than the next highest number of reactions to social media posts, which was 116 reactions on Instagram.

## GRANT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The programme resulted in significant environmental and social benefits, which have been quantified wherever possible.



Across the 34 projects, 93 individual outputs were reported, averaging at 2.74 outputs per applicant.

## Funding

- ✿ 34 applicants collectively applied for a total of £10,432.75.
- ✿ Average: £306.85 applied for per applicant.
- ✿ Cumulative cost of 34 projects totalled £34,572.47.
- ✿ Average grant application proportion of 64.99% of total cost.
- ✿ Average total project cost: £1,016.84 per applicant.
- ✿ 13 projects were able to attract £13,825.90 of matched funding in total.

## Biodiversity and habitat enhancement

- ✿ 7,831.5m<sup>2</sup> of habitat created or restored across 11 projects, improving local ecosystems.
- ✿ 150 wildlife boxes installed, benefiting 30 species, including birds, bats, and hedgehogs.
- ✿ Introduction of 22 new plant species to enhance local biodiversity and provide essential food sources for pollinators.
- ✿ Hedgerow planting, woodland restoration, and wetland conservation were key focus areas for many projects.



*Pictured: Cranbrook Town Council purchased tools for volunteers to use in the Country Park, including for tree planting*



*Pictured:  
Horrabridge  
Parish  
Council  
made and  
installed  
bat and bird  
boxes and  
hedgehog  
houses*

## **Community engagement**

- ✿ 722 people directly engaged through workshops, environmental talks, and hands-on conservation activities.
- ✿ Average of 130.4 people engaged per project.
- ✿ 11 projects were delivered using 260 volunteers.
- ✿ Average: 21.67 volunteers per project.
- ✿ 4 of the 11 projects reported cumulative total of 268 volunteer hours.

## **Sustainable infrastructure and procurement of equipment**

- ✿ 41% of projects invested in essential tools and infrastructure, ensuring long-term environmental management.
- ✿ Projects procured items such as trail cameras, bat detectors and specialist conservation tools, strengthening their capacity for habitat monitoring and protection.

It is important to note that 14 of the 34 applicants, representing 41% of total applicants, used grant funds to procure tools and equipment to enable further progression of their respective wildlife/community groups – one such group using funds to procure a gazebo, and another trail cameras. Many respondents felt that they were unable to share the key statistics that DCT requested such as m2 habitat created/restored, or tonnes of plastic removed from the environment, as a result.

# CASE STUDY: BULB PLANTING AT SOUTH DEVON COLLEGE

South Devon College applied for funding to purchase a variety of British-native bulbs and wildflower seeds for planting around the College campuses.

At White Rock campus they planned to have two big wildflower beds with a rich variety of plants with high nectar to attract bees and other pollinators.

In the conservation areas at White Rock Sports Centre, they planned to plant bulbs around the newly planted trees. These early-flowering wildflowers will bring colour into the grounds from as early as January and provide early-spring pollen and nectar.

At the Vantage Point site they planned banks of wildflowers to inspire the students and create quiet reflection spaces.

The project contributes to College's sustainability goals and ongoing conservation efforts.

Bulb and wildflower planting events took place in October and November 2024 and January 2025. They also have plans in spring 2025 for students to plant seedlings into flower beds in front of the High Tech and Digital Centre. This site has been selected because it is safe and accessible for students to participate in the planting. The flowers will be visible to people walking on the footpath and from the buses.

*Pictured: an area of South Devon College soon to be filled with wildflowers from seed*

The results so far include:

- ✿ Planting area of over 1,300 sqm
- ✿ Over 40 species planted
- ✿ 31 volunteers engaged
- ✿ Opportunity for staff and students to get out in the fresh air and do gardening on college grounds
- ✿ Collaboration across college departments to work on environmental sustainability projects on campus
- ✿ Will provide food for bees and insects in the locality, particularly the bee hive located nearby at the college Sports Centre

***It's great to bring native species back to an industrial area"*** Wayne Fox Grimley, Caretaker, Handyperson




Learning Opportunities students shared their views on how planting the bulbs would be beneficial:

***"[the plants] will help the environment, for more oxygen"*** Aaron, student



## PROJECT DELIVERY CHALLENGES

13 applicants (39% of total) had no obstacles in project delivery, while 5 applicants (15% of total) struggled with the adverse weather conditions, 4 applicants (12% of total) struggled with lack of staff/volunteer capacity, 11 applicants (33% of total) struggled due to other variables, such as:

-  Tools breaking
-  Amount of funding required had increased, mitigated by successful grant application
-  Volunteers being citizen scientists and lacking expert knowledge regarding moss, lichen, fungi, and insects

It is also important to note that 3 applicants were required to administer funds, complete project delivery, and report back to DCT in just 2.5 weeks due to the redistribution of funds. These 3 projects are highlighted for their prompt communication with DCT, swift project delivery, and their detailed reporting:

1. Green Paths CIC
2. Kettle Cooperative
3. Sourton Parish Council

## VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

The below quotes and feedback from participants and volunteers on the projects demonstrate a greater appreciation of the natural world, encouraging positive change, and helping to preserve, protect, and regenerate the natural world.



*Planting the bulbs was a great opportunity to get into the fresh air and village to hopefully improve the environment for both wildlife and the local community”* Volunteer on Kenton Churchyard project

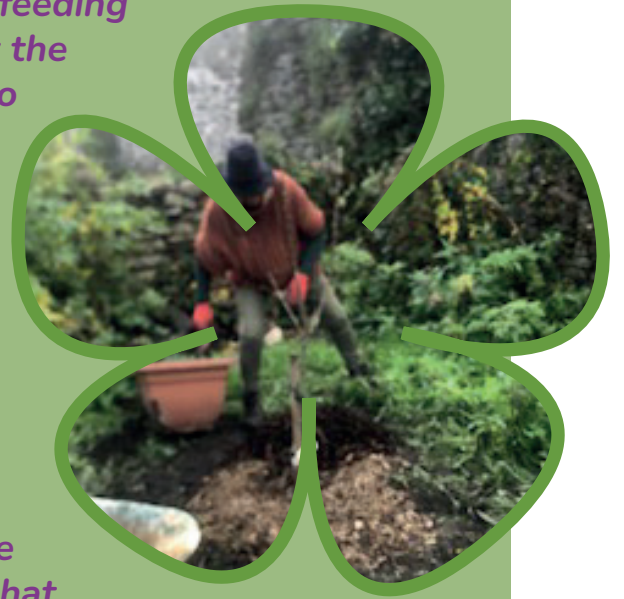


*The impact of the funding Orchard Forest School received has endless benefits, for example it helps us maintain the land and the eco system by being able to buy tools, bulbs, and PPE, as well as necessary items to help us look after the biodiversity of the orchard.”* Orchard Forest School CIC project





*The garden has been planted with orchard fruit trees, providing shelter for birds and invertebrates, nectar in spring and fruit in autumn (for insects and other animals.) Maturing apple trees also support lichens which are largely in decline. The wide variety of herbs come into flower at different points in the year, attracting bees, butterflies and hoverflies. There are also large areas of nectar-rich wildflowers and grasses which provide a food source for many invertebrates and a shelter for crickets and grasshoppers. The garden's proximity to Buckfastleigh Hill and the adjoining River Mardle mean the rare and declining Horseshoe Bats use the garden as a feeding ground in the evening as they follow the river as a flight path. The garden also adjoins the allotment fields on the opposite side of the Mardle. This area is already rich in wildlife...birds of prey regularly soar overhead. By extending that green space across the river into the centre of town, the Valiant garden brings wildlife... closer to the scattered gardens of the town, helping to create a better corridor through the urban landscape and increasing public experience of that wildlife."* Environmentalist, gardener, and volunteer on the Valiant Soldier Museum and Heritage Centre project



*This grant has enabled us to expand our woodworking sessions and create a positive impact for Devon's wildlife. The support has been invaluable in empowering our participants and showing them how their work contributes to the environment."* Staff member at Made-Well



**[[** *[The benefits of planting bulbs are that] bugs and other species get energy from eating them and this will bring more nature back. It used to be fields here and now it's buildings ...Roads are the scabs of the earth"* Student volunteer from the NEST programme at South Devon College, a stepping stone to mainstream education for individuals who have previously found educational environments challenging

**[[** *We have so much green space to fill with native plants. It's good for students to learn why this is important for sustainability."* Staff member at South Devon College

**[[** *Without additional funding less areas would be adopted and wouldn't have the impact felt necessary. When the flowers bloom in spring they will provide colour, pride and joy to all those involved. Many insects will feed from the pollen they provide. It will make the area look and feel better."* Volunteer at Bishops Tawton Parish Council

**[[** *Receiving this grant has been truly transformative for our project and our community. It has provided us with the resources needed to enhance biodiversity, support local wildlife, and offer meaningful outdoor experiences to those who need them most. This funding has allowed us to engage more volunteers, provide better educational opportunities, and create a space where people can reconnect with nature, improving their mental well-being and resilience."* Volunteer at Kettle Cooperative



The strong engagement with this project suggests that protecting the environment is important to the grant applicants.



*It's a haven for nature, a sunny space, close to the river, with wild flowers, essential for our declining pollinators, stone wall for invertebrates to thrive, and also - looking to the future - it could be a place for people to just sit and enjoy all the benefits that being surrounded by nature can give to our mental health. In my few visits to the garden I have seen for myself some plants and insects that I haven't seen for years, so the benefits of the work so far have already become a reality.* Volunteer on the Valiant Soldier Museum and Heritage Centre project



*"For many of our participants, this project has been life-changing. It has given individuals -especially those from military families and socially isolated backgrounds - a sense of purpose, belonging and connection. The grant has empowered us to expand our reach and build a stronger, more environmentally conscious community. We are incredibly grateful for this support, and it has reaffirmed our belief in the power of nature to heal, educate, and inspire."* Volunteer at Kettle Cooperative



## CONCLUSION

The Wild About Devon 2024-25 grant programme has demonstrated the power of grassroots environmental action. By enabling local communities to take the lead in conservation efforts, the initiative has strengthened community resilience, fostered environmental stewardship, and contributed to the long-term protection of Devon's natural heritage.

Our key recommendations for similar programmes in future are as follows:



- ✿ Increased funding capacity: given the high demand for funding, securing additional funding could allow more projects to be supported.
- ✿ Longer project timelines: providing extended implementation periods may enhance project sustainability.
- ✿ Enhanced data collection: encouraging projects to quantify their impact more consistently will provide richer insights.
- ✿ Greater knowledge-sharing: facilitating more networking opportunities between funded projects can amplify collective learning.

DCT remains committed to supporting community-led environmental initiatives and looks forward to future opportunities to expand and enhance the impact of the WAD grant programme.

DCT would like to take this opportunity extend our gratitude to all participating groups, volunteers, and partners who contributed to this year's success.

*Pictured: Bridstowe Volunteer Group planted wildflowers in their community*

