



This week Manx Wildlife Trust is celebrating wins for wildlife to share good news about our 'Make Space for Nature' campaign which was launched in January. Samir Whitaker, Biodiversity Lead Specialist at Ørsted, explains why the leading renewable energy company is supporting our initiative, and how campaigns like this can be wins for wildlife both locally and globally.



Make a difference to your community by making space for nature - Samir Whitaker

The Isle of Man's status as a UNESCO Biosphere reserve reflects the unique qualities of its natural environment and commitment to sustainable development, ensuring that people and nature both continue to thrive.

Like any community around the world, the Island has many challenges when it comes to balancing the need to maintain a modern way of life while mitigating the impact that human activity has on nature.

Addressing these issues requires co-ordinated international action by governments and NGOs at a global level, but smaller local initiatives are central to driving change too. This is why Ørsted is proud to support the Manx Wildlife Trust's Make Space for Nature initiative, and similar projects around the world where we work with other communities and nature conservation organisations.

Ask any academic, private or public sector professional today working in biodiversity, sustainability or renewable energy roles, and many will tell you they were inspired by local people or projects where they grew up. While Make Space for Nature aims to inspire people of all ages, I'm sure it will capture the imagination of many children who will go on to have a lifelong commitment to nature conservation.



In this sense the initiative resonates with me both professionally, and personally. My parents have been involved in community conservation in India for several decades. From the mid-1970s onwards they set up and enabled several self-governed co-operatives (which are still running to this day) focussed on harnessing traditional ecological knowledge to protect and restore nature. I've also drawn inspiration from the Bishnois community in Northern India where protection of nature is one of 29 life principles they live by.

“I've also drawn inspiration from the Bishnois community in Northern India where protection of nature is one of 29 life principles they live by.”

Wherever someone's inspiration stems from, nature conservation is always intrinsically linked to 'place'. Species and habitats are interdependent, but also rely on particular microclimates, soil types, and so on. Many species even have exceedingly small habitat ranges or depend on very specific interactions, so negative changes even to very small areas can be catastrophic for them.

On the other hand, positive changes at even these small scales can be hugely beneficial. Writing this paragraph reminded me of the story of the Large Blue butterfly which became extinct in Britain in 1979. This species has now been reintroduced and the key to this success was realising that their larvae feed on the grubs of a particular ant species, which itself had declined due to habitat loss. Bringing back the Large Blue could not be done without first bringing establishing colonies of the ants on which their larvae depend.

At the opposite end of the scale, initiatives around forest protection in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, are targeting deforestation at close to 10 million hectares of land and aiming to bring economic opportunities to two million people. The Coral Triangle Initiative is working to protect coral reefs across six south-east Asian and Pacific nations through community fishery management. The Great Green Wall, Africa's programme to combat desertification, works through communities to plant a 'wall' of trees stretching from Senegal to Djibouti.

What do these far-off projects have to do with nature conservation in the Isle of Man? For one thing, they highlight the importance of understanding, respecting and protecting nature – and that's something which connects communities around the world. An understanding of the need to live in harmony with the world around us was common to all pre-industrial human civilizations – and it's only in the modern era that there has been a gradual, global, disconnection with nature.

This is why a central part, perhaps THE central part, of community conservation is rebuilding that connection, understanding what nature means to us, and what we can all do to conserve it in the places we love. There are few places that are as loved by its community as the Isle of Man is. That's why I'm excited to see the results of the Make Space for Nature initiative. It's a great way to channel the Island's passion for nature conservation into making a real difference to wildlife habitats.

