

# The Rights of Nature: Placing Nature's Interests at the Heart of Decision-Making

Report from the Rights of Nature Symposium





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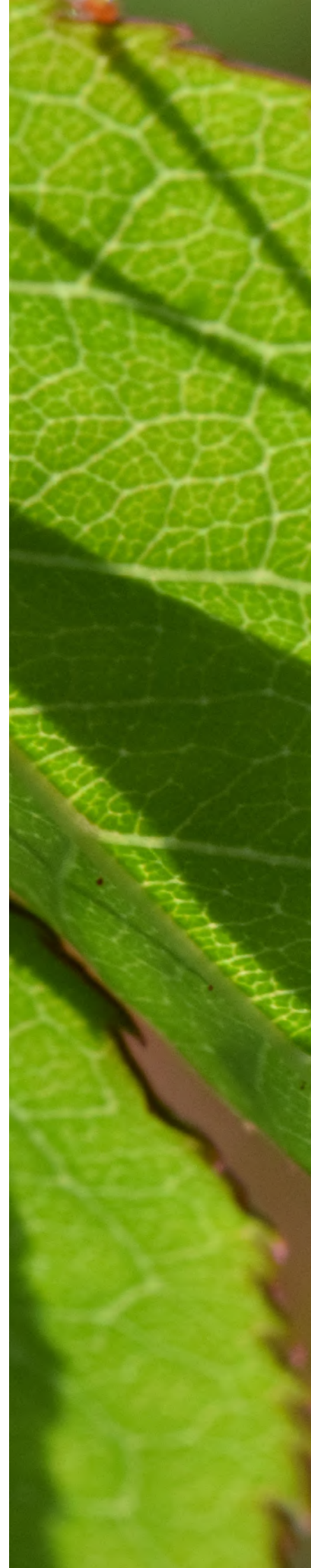
## Foreword

As CEO of Achill Legal, which leads four of the UK's legal sustainability networks, I have always seen the potential of Rights of Nature to support a thriving economy and a healthy society. Protecting nature and biodiversity is not only key to tackling climate change – it is fundamental to the resilience and prosperity of our economy. This is why Achill Legal co-hosted the inaugural Rights of Nature Symposium during London Climate Action Week, in partnership with the Environmental Law Foundation and Fleet Street Quarter.

A flourishing natural world underpins a stable climate, enabling us to develop effective nature-based solutions - such as natural flood management or the restoration and preservation of natural carbon sinks - to counter the accelerating impacts of global warming. It is not enough to protect nature in an anthropocentric way, merely preserving natural assets for human use; we must shift our thinking so that nature becomes central to our decision-making. This means more than giving nature a seat at the boardroom table; it requires lawyers to consider nature as a client in all transactions, to assess and address environmental impacts across supply chains, and to respect nature's rights when deciding where, what, and when to build.

The Rights of Nature Symposium brought together diverse voices and perspectives that must collaborate to ensure nature remains at the core of business, law, policy, and practice. This report continues that essential work. Please feel free to contact me if you can contribute to the growing Rights of Nature Coalition. The needs of nature are urgent, and we must respond to its call.

**Amanda Carpenter**





## Opening words

"Our system of law in the United Kingdom is not aligned with the Rights of Nature. This year, however, we've had breakthroughs in the field of riparian rights. In March, Lewes District Council passed a motion to deliver a river charter for the River Ouse that enshrined eight rights including the "right to be free from pollution" and the "right to native biodiversity"<sup>1</sup>. In July, councillors in Hampshire voted unanimously to grant the famous chalk stream river, The River Test, "the right to flow – unimpeded, seasonal, and natural" and "the right to perform essential functions within the ecosystem", amongst other rights<sup>2</sup>. So, what we are seeing is the beginnings of a river-lution in this country: a conscious "constitutionalisation" of the Rights of Nature is taking place, driven by grassroots community action.

As well as advising on motions-related nature's rights, lawyers have an important role to play in assisting and framing the debate in the wider corporate world. They can influence their clients to consider the impact of strategic decisions on nature and adopt the "nature as a client" perspective as part of any transaction."

### **Monica Feria-Tinta, author of 'A Barrister for the Earth'**

Extracted from the opening address,  
Rights of Nature Symposium.



## Background to this report

The inaugural Rights of Nature Symposium was held at Edenica in The City of London on 24th June 2025 as part of the Fleet Street Quarter Climate Festival during London Climate Action Week. On the day, 120 delegates – representatives from law firms and the professional services, NGOs and conservation groups, local government, finance, business, academia, and the arts – participated in the roundtable discussions.

The session opened with an address from the leading international voice in the field of nature's rights, Monica Feria-Tinta, a British-Peruvian Barrister at Twenty Essex and author of 'A Barrister for The Earth'.

Following that inspiring introduction, delegates were invited to join one of twelve round tables for a workshop, during which they explored three aspects of Rights of Nature: 1) the challenges and barriers to implementing this

approach; 2) the potential benefits of adopting Rights of Nature, including legal, economic, and societal impacts; and 3) suggested strategies and pathways for action. A legal scribe on each table took notes.

The delegates' views were then summarised and are quoted throughout this report. Due to the Chatham House rule on the day, all opinions are reported anonymously.

The objective of this report is to coalesce those diverse views into a coherent, central argument to share with a wider audience from business and civic society. 'The Rights of Nature: Placing Nature's Interests at the Heart of Decision-Making' is structured in three parts – The Challenges, The Benefits and Implementation Strategies – and concludes with a plan of action for forwarding The Rights of Nature.

## Executive Summary

A global movement is coalescing around the Rights of Nature that seeks to transform legal, governance and economic frameworks by recognising natural entities – rivers, forests, oceans, ecosystems – as rights-bearing subjects. This paradigm shift in thinking challenges the predominant, anthropocentric worldview that regards nature as a resource to be exploited and puts it at the centre of decision-making.

The challenges to embedding the Rights of Nature in UK law and society are deeply rooted in the existing legal system (designed to protect human interests), political biases, economic and financial models, and cultural narratives. Overcoming them requires not only legislative reform but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes – shifting to “an eco-centric mindset”.

While laws preventing environmental harm do exist, as do tangential frameworks for preventing pollution and reporting on corporate nature impacts, they do not go far enough to protect what is left of our shrinking natural resources. Tensions exist between nature’s rights and established rights of ownership and use, as well as political priorities. Delegates agreed that this agenda could be impeded by “short-termist thinking”, economic growth narratives and lobbying by vested interests.

Meanwhile, the financial system struggles to account for nature’s true value, and the private sector still regards nature-positive policies as a “nice to have” (an additional cost burden) rather than an imperative for ensuring the sustainability of the economy. At best, biodiversity loss is assessed as a material risk.

Moreover, there are inherent challenges in communicating the benefits of a Rights of Nature approach to wider society including issues of equitable access to wild places and its relevance to everyday life.

On the upside, the benefits of adopting a Rights of Nature approach are manifold and interlocking. An overarching framework would not only strengthen environmental protection – by improving the implementation of existing laws and creating new accountability mechanisms – but it could strengthen long-term economic resilience by shifting the private sector towards biocentric governance. It would support community empowerment and Indigenous rights, drive sustainable development, and foster investment in the emerging Nature Capital markets.

Not least, by aligning nature’s rights with human rights – specifically, the right to a healthy life – we can improve human prosperity for future generations and bring our relationship with nature back into balance. After all, nature is our greatest ally in combating the climate crisis, which is a direct threat to most species on Earth.

Delegates put forward a range of suggestions for bringing Rights of Nature to the mainstream and embedding it in public life and consciousness. They encompassed legal reforms, constitutional amendments, changes to corporate governance and to academic curricula, community empowerment, and citizen action.

This report invites us to reimagine our relationship with the natural world – not as dominators but as caretakers.

# Chapter 1

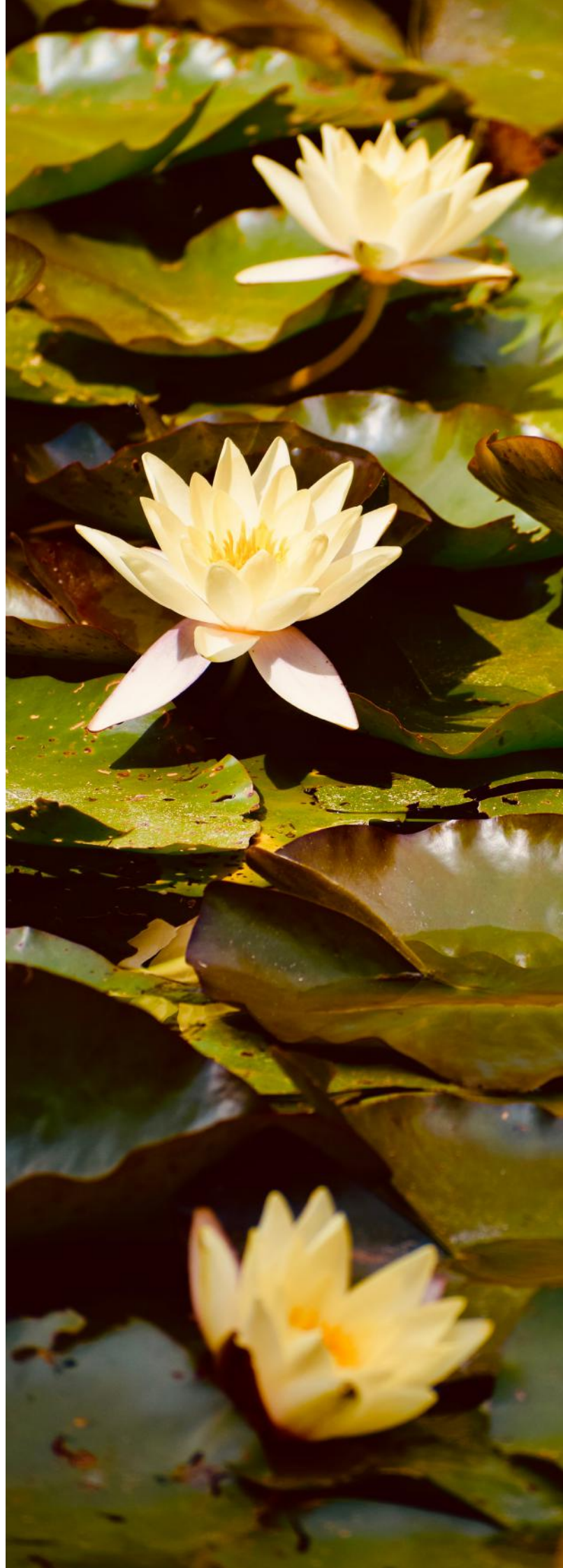
## The Challenge: How Have We Got Here?

### Overview:

Our inherited legal frameworks are fundamentally anthropocentric – designed to protect property, business interests and human health and rights. Environmental law predominantly protects the environment only as far as it serves human interests, not the intrinsic interests of other species or habitats. Where laws do exist, they are limited in scope, or permit harm within limits, and are not enforced often enough. What is needed is systems-change thinking to shift our worldview from nature as a resource to be exploited, to a living system that we are part of (and dependent upon) for our survival.

This chapter summarises the challenges proposed by delegates to the adoption of a Rights of Nature approach. It considers the limits of the Western legal system, political and economic resistance, barriers to adoption in the financial system and private sector, as well as communication issues.

“**The foundations of our laws in the UK are flawed – nature is property we have dominion over.**”



### The Problem of Perception: Nature as Commodity

The most profound barrier to recognising the Rights of Nature is the prevailing worldview in industrially developed nations that treats nature as a resource to be extracted, owned, and managed for human benefit. This perspective, deeply embedded in Western legal and cultural traditions, positions humans as having dominion over, and being apart from, the natural world. Our laws reflect this view: nature is property – its value is measured by its utility to people.

Britain's history as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution has left a legacy of environmental degradation. Even today, our “metabolic approach” to nature persists and existing laws are insufficient in protecting ecosystems (such as rivers), often permitting harm (within limits) rather than preventing it. Too often protecting nature is framed as an impediment to development.

“**A river is not merely a resource; it is a living system whose existence has merit.**”

The “anthropocentric mindset” is by no means universal. Many Indigenous cultures maintain a reciprocal relationship with their environments, recognising rivers, forests, and mountains as living entities with inherent dignity. In contrast, in the UK, U.S., and much of Europe, the idea that a river or forest could have legal personhood remains alien – an “artificial construct” – yet it is a powerful mechanism for evolving our worldview.

Recognising the limitations of the “Western, industrialised worldview” is the first step towards realigning our relationship with the natural world. As one senior lawyer put it, the Rights of Nature discussion should be framed as: “There is a right”, not “We think there should be a right.”

“**Our laws permit harm – pollution permits and cap-and-trade schemes allow continued exploitation under the guise of regulation.**”

### Legal and Governance Barriers

Translating Rights of Nature into an enforceable governance structure is a substantial (though not insurmountable) challenge. Existing environmental frameworks – notably the landmark [Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) that was adopted by 195 countries in 2022 – provide clear guidance for halting and reversing the global decline of nature and biodiversity. However, enforcement of nature rights through existing laws is inconsistent and often undermined by loopholes and vested interests.

### Key barriers in the UK include:

- **Defining ‘Nature’s rights’:** How do we ascribe rights to ecosystems, species or even nature as a whole (outside of Indigenous lore)? Any right must be enforceable, yet our legal system struggles to conceptualise rights beyond human or property interests
- **Conflicting rights:** The potential for the Rights of Nature to clash with established land, property and even human rights is significant. This tension fuels the narrative that environmental protection is a barrier to economic growth
- **Limitations of existing laws and governance structures:** Environmental laws and precedents do exist but are limited in scope (e.g., designed either to protect specific habitats, or to protect humans from pollution), rather than acknowledging nature’s inherent rights. ‘Pollution permits’ actually perpetuate harm (e.g., ‘cap-and-trade’ schemes allow firms to buy permits that authorise them to pollute up to a certain level)

“**How do we give general rights to nature? Do we go even more granular and give rights to each fish, or to algae? Any right needs to be enforceable.**

- **Vested interests:** Some frameworks have proved to be “not fit for purpose”. For example, river basin management plans have struggled to prevent pollution because they were designed in partnership with organisations that have a direct stake in the status quo, creating conflicts of interest that undermine effective protection.
- **Access to justice:** High costs and limited legal aid make it difficult for communities to challenge environmental harm or seek redress for “crimes against nature.”

### **Political and Economic Resistance: Short-Termism and Vested Interests**

A “lack of political will” at a national and local level was frequently cited as one of the major barriers to better protection for nature. Political agendas are often short-sighted, prioritising immediate needs – such as housing, affordable energy, economic growth and competitiveness – over long-term ecological protection and health.

“**The problem is that there is zero long-term planning because people adopt the approach that ‘it’s not in my term.’**

Government departments – and local councils in particular – tend to be risk-averse and wary of legal challenges. Local councils often lack the statutory powers to grant rights to nature in their jurisdiction. However, local politicians have an important role to play in highlighting the benefits of adopting a Rights of Nature approach and getting MPs to engage with the issues.

A further challenge is that regulatory bodies, such as Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), The Forestry Committee and the Marine Management Organisation, are fragmented in their approaches for protecting ecosystems where they cross over. The result is a system where nature’s interests are consistently sidelined.

“**(The) Rights of Nature agenda is seen as a hindrance to development, causing investment to go elsewhere.**  
(Local councillor)

### **Private Sector Alignment: The False Dichotomy**

A persistent challenge is the perceived tension – or even incompatibility – between economic growth and natural ecosystem protection. The financial costs associated with implementing nature-positive policies and transition roadmaps – which will mean reevaluating supply chains, shifting revenue streams and entire business models – continue to be a significant barrier to change within corporate culture.

Added to that is the concern that a Rights of Nature framework will compound the Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) reporting burden, with the spectre of further penalties for corporations.

While nature governance frameworks such as the Taskforce for Nature-Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) exist, they remain voluntary currently in the UK. The EU’s mandatory Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) mirrors many of the nature protection measures of the TNFD through a ‘double materiality assessment’ and disclosure of

“**Nature is an unpriced externality – until we value it, it will remain expendable.**

risks related to biodiversity and ecosystems. However, it has been criticised by experts as ‘a tick-box exercise’ that perpetuates a superficial understanding of ‘nature-related risk’ and does not require monitoring of the changing state of nature, as it is impacted by climate change and human development.

Until nature-related disclosures are enforced – and nature-risk fully integrated into balance sheets and corporate transition planning – progress will be limited.

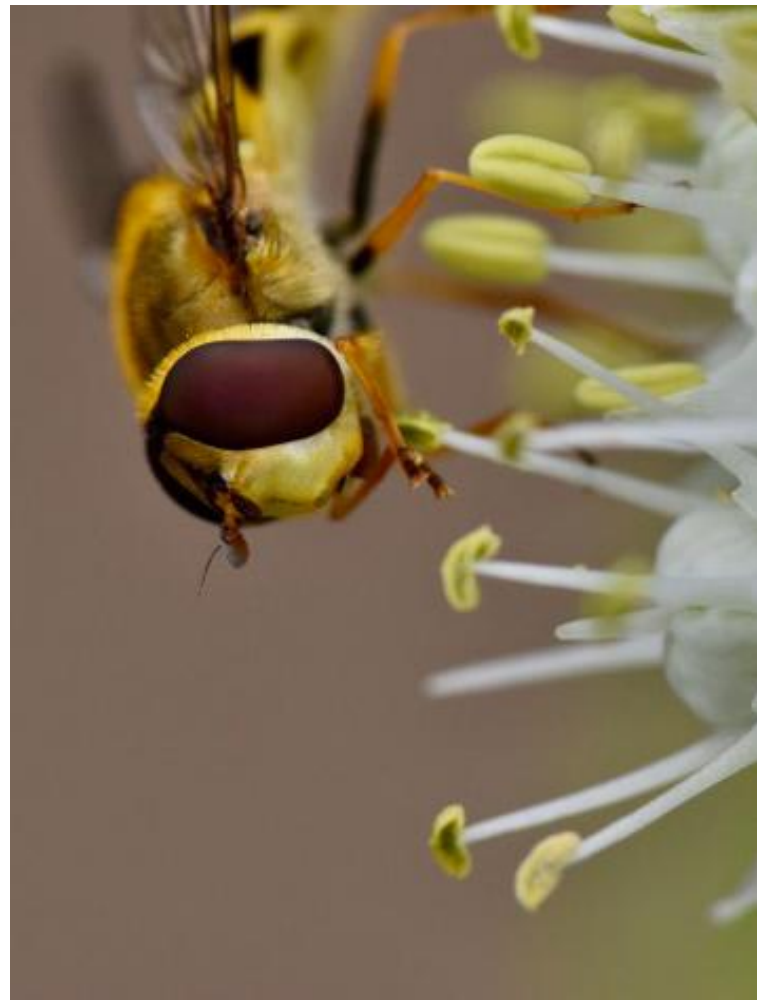
Furthermore, political lobbying by vested interests – particularly those representing extractive and fossil fuel industries, large-scale intensive agriculture and property development – further entrenches the bias towards “growth”.

### **Financial Challenges: Putting a Value on the Invaluable**

Our financial systems are ill-equipped to account for the true value of nature. In recent years, a new market has emerged based on a value creation system for biodiversity protection and nature-based climate solutions – but its growth has been hindered by a lack of standardisation, policy and regulatory clarity, and the uncertain legal status of credits and credit ownership/liability.

“**We are good at measuring carbon, but it is very difficult to measure nature.**

The gap between the economic value experts have ascribed to biodiversity and ‘natural ecosystem services’ (recent estimates range between US\$150–179 trillion per year, or around twice global GDP<sup>3</sup>) and the valuation of Nature Capital markets (currently about S\$10 trillion<sup>4</sup>, or 11% global GDP) is vast.



“**But the true, substantial cost of nature collapse is not adequately articulated or accounted for within existing economic systems.**

Nature is systematically undervalued or treated as an ‘externality’ – in other words, its benefits and losses are not adequately captured in financial models, and its destruction (ecosystem collapse) is rarely reflected in the cost of doing business. This makes it harder to justify expenditure on protection and restoration, let alone the intrinsic right to life.

Moreover, the costs of defending nature – through litigation, restoration or sustainable management – are often borne by communities and not-for-profits.

Without a framework for legal enforcement, alongside robust metrics for measuring nature risk scenarios, alongside mandatory reporting, the financial sector will continue to undervalue and under-protect the natural world. Therefore, the “business case for nature” must be made.



“**How do we unlock the poverty barriers that prevent many from engaging with nature?**

### **Cultural Challenges: Making Nature's Rights Meaningful and Engaging**

Beyond structural barriers, there remain significant challenges in communicating the Rights of Nature agenda. The concept risks being perceived as too abstract, esoteric, or even “a new form of colonialism”. Extending from that is the challenge of ensuring that nature's voice is meaningfully represented in decision-making, beyond token gestures.

Equitable access to nature is bound up with the concern that Rights of Nature might be seen as an “elitist” agenda – many people lack opportunities to connect with the natural world, making biocentric legislation seem too remote from everyday life.

At the root of this is the lack of equitable access to wild places where nature thrives. Only 8% of England's land is designated as “Open Access”, while a third of English households don't have natural space within a 15-minute walk.<sup>5</sup>

“**There's a risk of over exposing people to the 'world is on fire' narrative - this may push people in the opposite direction.**

Furthermore, there is a danger of public disengagement due to information overload. The scientific data on global biodiversity loss are bleak (e.g. WWF's 2024 Living Planet report showed wildlife species have declined globally by a staggering 73% since 1970)<sup>6</sup>; and “nature crisis” narratives can quickly lead to feelings of despair and disempowerment, resulting in disconnection (the ‘Ostrich effect’).

## The Western worldview V Indigenous cultures

The topic of Earth jurisprudence – or the question of whether a river, forest or ocean should have legal personhood as humans do – would seem absurd to many Indigenous Peoples living today, just as it might to an English lawyer living a century ago.

As the leading advocate for nature's rights, Monica Feria-Tinta illustrates in 'A Barrister for the Earth' (which details her work in South and Middle America and the remote islands in the South Pacific), many First Nation communities hold the belief that their ancestral land, rivers and seas are alive. They have an unmediated and reciprocal relationship with the natural world. Nor have they forgotten that we are part of it – all life is entangled.

In her opening speech at the Symposium, Feria-Tinta explained this paradigm: "For my ancestors in Peru, mountains are sacred. They are the home of the Apus, which are the spirits of the mountain (the Hualca Hualca). In the Inca cosmic vision, the earth (Kay pacha), the heavens (Hanan pacha), and the underground (Ukhu pacha) are all connected – there is a constant communication between them."

She was once involved in a case that asked the important question of whether the soil was alive and who owned the soil. She recalls: "For the Massewal, an Indigenous group in the highlands of Puebla, Mexico, the Earth is a living entity. The stones, they believe, are like bones. They also speak to the Earth, and when they work the earth, they avoid chemicals because they consider that chemicals poison the earth. They believe we humans are part of the soil and should treat the soil with respect. I have learned through my work that just as we humans have dignity – the Earth must have dignity."

In Ecuador, for example, half the country is covered in rainforest, and a substantial portion of the population are either Indigenous or identify as "Mestizo" (partly Indigenous and partly European), therefore the Rights of Nature are embedded in the constitution.

By contrast, the lawyers attending the Symposium repeatedly underlined the shortcomings of the Western legal system in recognising nature's rights: "In Netherlands, where I'm from, the concepts of Rights of Nature do not exist. These concepts don't exist in Europe, which makes it difficult for a judge to claim that nature inherently has rights."

# Chapter 2

## The Benefits: Why the Rights of Nature Matter

### Overview:

A Rights of Nature legal and governance framework – that moves beyond protecting individual species or habitats to entrenching a higher level of protection for the natural environment as a whole – would provide a raft of positive outcomes. These include better legal accountability, climate change mitigation, economic resilience and human prosperity. To be effective, this framework should be implemented alongside communications campaigns that highlight the intergenerational benefits of rebalancing our relationship with nature.

This chapter synthesises delegates' views on the multiple benefits of adopting a Rights of Nature approach from a formal legal framework to financial and corporate strategy, through to advantages for human stability and planetary health.

“

**The cost of not acting for nature is far greater than the cost of protecting it.**



## Legal and Governance Advantages: from Fragmentation to Systemic Protection

If the challenges to embedding the Rights of Nature in UK law (and other Western jurisdictions) are formidable, the benefits of doing so are equally compelling. Recognising ecosystems as rights-bearing entities would provide a foundation for a governance framework that protects and restores our remaining natural resources. Such a framework would improve the implementation of existing (and future) laws and ensure better environmental outcomes by embedding Nature's interests at the centre of decision-making.

“**A river is not a resource; it is a living system whose existence has merit.**”

The precedent set by Ecuador's Constitutional Court<sup>7</sup> in the landmark 2021 Bosque Protector Los Cedros case<sup>8</sup> (which Monica FERIA-TINTA acted in), illustrates the transformative potential of adopting a Rights of Nature approach. By affirming that activities leading to species extinction violated the rights of “Pachamama” (the Indigenous word for Mother Nature), the court established a principle that resonates far beyond Latin America. Similar cases in New Zealand<sup>9</sup>, Colombia<sup>10</sup> and, more recently, in the UK<sup>11</sup> show that legal personhood for rivers and forests is not a utopian dream but a practical tool for safeguarding ecosystems.

In summary, a Rights of Nature legal framework would:

- Improve enforcement of existing environmental laws and regulations by creating mechanisms to hold governments and corporations accountable for harm to natural ecosystems, habitats and species
- Close the gaps left by existing environmental frameworks and support their implementation. For example, in the UK it would support more effective use of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)<sup>12</sup> and help address the failures of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP)<sup>13</sup>
- Provide clarity for corporations and legal advisors, replacing uncertainty with enforceable standards
- Empower communities, Indigenous Peoples, non-profits and advocacy groups to take action against violations, by laying the groundwork for action against destructive practices including ecosystem conversion, industrial pollution or regulatory failure
- Align nature's rights with human rights, reinforcing the principle that human survival depends on ecological health
- Challenge existing systems that prioritise short-term gain over long-term ecological health
- Support a reimagining of legal systems and corporate governance structures that are eco-centric, supporting truly nature-positive outcomes

“**A company might have moral will to do the right thing, but what lawyers like is certainty, quantification and ability to value, which makes the decision to do the right thing the right thing.**”

## La Guajira: Aligning Nature's Rights with Human Rights in Colombia

There can be no human rights without nature's rights: this is a recurring theme of Monica Feria-Tinta's memoir 'A Barrister for the Earth'. Nowhere is this paradigm better illuminated than the La Guajira case (the opening story of her memoir), that she fought on behalf of the women of the native Wayúu people of El Provincial, Colombia, against the British/Swiss/Australian owners of the Carbones del Cerrejón mine. In that case, the poisoning of their ancestral lands and river by open pit coal mining activities directly resulted in a sharp decline in health, wellbeing and economic resilience of the people dependent upon the river and their sacred Cerrejón mountain, as well as an erosion of their identity. Ultimately, Colombia's Constitutional Court recognised the severity of the environmental and human rights violations, ordering the suspension of harmful river diversions and affirming both the rights of the Wayúu people and the Rights of Nature.

“There can be no human rights without nature's rights.

### Economic and Financial Advantages: Rewriting the Bottom Line

The cost of not acting to safeguard nature is far greater than the cost of acting to do so. Biodiversity collapse and ecosystems failure are not abstract or external risks; they are serious and imminent material threats to food security, economic and financial stability and public health. A Rights of Nature framework would help dismantle the binary narrative that nature protection conflicts with economic progress by demonstrating that healthy ecosystems underpin sustainable prosperity.

Recent reports such as the [Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity](#) in 2021<sup>14</sup> and WWF's [Living Planet Report](#) in 2024<sup>15</sup> make this case persuasively: nature underpins every aspect of economic life. For example, when rivers dry up and soils degrade, supply chains falter, crops fail, credit ratings fall and communities suffer. Ghana's experience with the collapse of its cocoa exports (see Box 3) is a stark example of how ecological harm can result in economic crisis.

A Rights of Nature framework would provide a scaffold for financial institutions to integrate nature into financial systems and decision-making. It would bolster sustainable taxonomies and ensure capital flows into activities that 'Do No Significant Harm' (DNSH) and support nature to bounce back. Codifying nature's rights would accelerate the development and maturity of nature capital markets by adding legitimacy to emerging credit categories such as biodiversity, soil health, natural flood management, afforestation, pollination and 'blue carbon' (ocean) credits.

“Putting nature on the balance sheet is not radical – it is rational.

### In short, a Rights of Nature approach would:

- Support long-term, sustainable growth:
  - (i) Drive capital flows to nature-positive businesses and business practices and divert funds away from projects that violate nature's rights;
  - (ii) Foster "intergenerational thinking" amongst investors – anticipating lower financial returns in the short-term for greater environmental returns over a long-time span
- Bolster nature capital markets: Nature-based climate solutions (NCS) offer new markets for sustainable investment through a range of nature credits and high integrity carbon credits. A framework would accelerate their growth and legitimacy



**The big problem we have is the perceived cost of defending nature. But ultimately the cost of nature collapse is huge. That isn't articulated enough.**

## Learning from Nature Shocks: Ghana's Cocoa Crisis

In its 2025 report, 'Nature as a Shock Absorber'<sup>16</sup>, the charity Nature Finance carried out comprehensive 'Financial Materiality Assessment of Forestry-linked Sovereign Indicators in Ghana'. It is a stark example of how the twin crises of climate change and nature loss have undermined Ghana's revenue from cocoa exports to such an extent that the country's creditworthiness has been downgraded, constraining borrowing, limiting investment into environmental protection, sustainable development and worsening social impacts. The charity is advocating for Sustainability-Linked Sovereign Financing as a pathway out of this downward spiral. Fundamentally, it proposes that countries are offered credit based on achieving certain nature protections.

At the symposium, a delegate who was involved with the Ghana case suggested a Rights of Nature framework might have helped the country react faster to the crisis: "Ghana has lost a lot of money from declining cocoa exports. These are systemic issues that they care about – protecting nature is in the interest of their financial system. Having the Rights of Nature embodied would codify that."

## Corporate Governance: The Benefits of 'Eco-Centric Thinking'

For businesses, recognising nature's rights in decision-making is not just an ethical imperative; it is a strategic one. Many companies directly depend on ecosystem services – including a reliable natural water source, pollination, fertile soil, a stable climate – for their operations and supply chains. Retailers depend on economic stability to find a market for their products. And employers depend upon a healthy, well-nourished workforce. Ignoring these economic dependencies is a recipe for long-term vulnerability, instability and further crisis scenarios.

This mindset shift would have a positive influence on the way companies are operated from the expansion of directors' duties to nature-related financial disclosures and risk assessment (these possibilities are explored further in Chapter 3).

“**For companies, the Rights of Nature can improve long-term profitability by encouraging a transition away from risk-based structures that harm nature and can lead to responsible business practices linked to science and policy.**

In summary, a Rights of Nature approach would support better corporate governance by:

- **Helping companies understand how their future profitability is dependent upon nature:** Supporting its integration into financial assessments, corporate planning and due diligence
- **Supporting risk mitigation:** Integrating nature-risk (especially in supply chains) into financial and operational models reduces exposure to

nature shocks – such as crop failures, extreme weather events or flooding – that destabilise economies

- **Supporting long-term profitability alongside planetary health:** Aside from macroeconomic stability, businesses that assess nature risk and embed nature-positive practices build resilience and competitive advantage
- **Driving uptake and implementation of sustainability disclosure frameworks** such as the TNFD (which is being integrated into the ISSB, mandatory from 2026) and CSRD in the EU

“**Ecosystems need to survive for the business dependencies on their services.**

## Human Health and Community Cohesion: Nature as Healer

The benefits of a Rights of Nature approach extend far beyond economics and governance into the realm of human health and wellbeing. Polluted air, contaminated water, degraded soils, extreme weather and flooding are threats to physical health. So much so that the World Health Organization views the climate and nature crisis as one indivisible “global health emergency”. A better understanding of nature's role as a planetary healer would lead to a healthier future for all species.

The psychological benefits of deeper connection with nature – that include reduced stress, improved mood, enhanced cognitive function – are well documented. In an era of escalating climate anxiety and social fragmentation, these benefits (an extension of ‘ecosystem services’ perhaps) are increasingly important.

However, access to wild, biodiverse places is not equitably distributed.<sup>17</sup> While the equitable access to wild, biodiverse places remains a challenge (as discussed in Chapter 1), a Rights

“ **Embedding Rights of Nature into policy would support the UN’s recognition of the human right to a clean and healthy environment and align with global health strategies.** ”

of Nature framework, coupled with policies to democratise access to wild places, could help reverse this trend, fostering a deeper, more reciprocal relationship between people and the natural world.

Greater community cohesion could be another ‘halo effect’ of engaging citizens in the Rights of Nature movement. Collaborative activities such as river clean-up operations, conservation groups, community garden and tree planting initiatives have been shown to have a range of positive effects on volunteers. They “empower” people to protect their local environment (“My little corner of the world”), combat a sense of hopelessness in the face of the enormity of the climate crisis, and they have a net benefit for the local authorities.

In Chapter 1, we touched on some delegates’ concerns that the legal concept of Rights of Nature might be too abstract, or even too “elitist”, to resonate with a wider audience. But the opposite might also be true. With skilful storytelling, the idea that nature has intrinsic rights could help bring about a deeper, emotional connection with the natural world and “a foundational shift that re-establishes humanity’s reciprocal relationship with the natural world.”

“ **We should be focusing on how nature delivers improved outcomes for people’s everyday lives, improved wellbeing, the opportunity to re-connect people with their community.** ”



“ **The experience of nature is key to wanting to protect nature and ensuring that nature has rights.** ”

In summary, adopting a Rights of Nature approach would be a pathway to better human health. It could:

- Reduce physical health threats presented by climate change and pollution, and healthcare costs
- Improve mental wellbeing through better access to green spaces
- Empower community nature stewards to improve the environment for others
- Foster resilience in communities facing climate and nature crises

## Planetary Health: Nature as Shock Absorber

Last but by no means least, a Rights of Nature legal framework would defend our natural resources from exploitation and support the Earth's ability to sustain diverse lifeforms. Nature is our greatest ally in mitigating climate change and buffering its impacts: healthy forests sequester carbon and stabilise weather systems, wetlands absorb floodwaters and living soils store carbon more effectively. Conversely, when natural systems collapse, the consequences reverberate globally – through food insecurity, forced migration and economic instability.

“ **Is it time to quantify the benefits of Nature in reverse? In terms of the rising costs of dealing with rivers disappearing and species decline, or death due to pollution, global heating and air quality... and how it affects our mental and physical health.**

“ **Nature has the right to heal – and will, if we let it.**





## Chapter 3

### Implementation Strategies: Acting for Nature

#### Overview:

**Embedding the Rights of Nature in Western legal and cultural systems is a complex undertaking that demands systemic shifts across legal, political, economic, and civil society. Both top-down strategies (governance frameworks, law-making, financial systems change) and bottom-up approaches (grassroots activism, public awareness, cross-sector collaboration) are needed to drive transformation.**

This chapter captures the views of delegates in exploring strategies to drive this transformation, and the interplay between legal innovation, economic reform, human health, education, and community empowerment.



**We must engineer access to wildlife in cities and the countryside via volunteering schemes and school programmes, promoting place-based conservation through guardianship models.**

## 1. Top-Down Approaches: Law, Corporate Governance and Finance

### Using law to drive systemic change

Western law has historically prioritised human interests, but there is growing momentum from within the legal community (working alongside nature conservation groups) for a framework that recognises natural ecosystems as rights-bearing entities. We lack an overarching governance structure that places nature's interests at the centre of decision-making and provides clear policy guidelines for policymakers and regulators, as well as 'non-state actors' – including financial institutions, companies, cities, and regional bodies, non-profits and community groups.

“**We are at a similar point for nature as we were post-WW2 for human rights – a declaration or binding obligations are urgently needed.**”

There are existing precedents in law as well as activist movements concerned with the protection of nature's rights. These can be summarised as:

- **Nature-related litigation:** Encompassing all strategic claims brought before judicial bodies that focus on climate, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem services degradation. In a recent report<sup>18</sup>, [The Network for Greening the Financial System further breaks 'rights-based nature cases'](#) down into three types: 1) Right to a healthy environment 2) Indigenous Rights 3) Rights of Nature
- **Regional case law precedents:** Steady, incremental progress is being made through regional initiatives - individual cases brought by activist groups working with environmental lawyers. In the UK, we are seeing the emergence

of 'river charters' in 2025<sup>19</sup> that recognise the rights of specific ecosystems (see Box 4). While these charters may lack statutory force, they set important legal and cultural precedents

- **UK Nature's Rights Bill:** The UK charity Nature's Rights is working with the Green Party to advance the Bill, which would recognise Nature as a rights bearing legal subject and establish a governance framework embedding RoN and a legal duty of care across society<sup>20</sup>
- **Ecocide law:** A global campaign that is pushing for the mass damage and destruction of ecosystems to be recognised as a crime. Ecocide (or crimes equivalent to ecocide) is now recognised in 11 countries. [Stop Ecocide International](#) has a fuller definition<sup>21</sup>

However, the Rights of Nature movement in the UK and EU remains fragmented – with different groups advocating for different but complementary approaches – and would benefit from a coherent, overarching legal framework



## Constitutional and Political Change

Some countries are exploring constitutional amendments to enshrine the Rights of Nature, following the precedents set by Ecuador and Colombia. Ireland is one of them. In 2022, a [Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#) overwhelmingly recommended holding a referendum to amend the constitution to recognise the Rights of Nature. Subsequently, a Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action recommended that the government should advance the referendum. The proposed change would recognise natural entities as holding inherent rights "to exist, perpetuate, and be restored" and would allow citizens to have the legal authority to defend them.

Increasingly popular 'Citizens Assemblies' would be an effective way of linking bottom-up action on biodiversity loss and nature's rights to top-down policy (local and national governance). In Northern Ireland, for example, they have influenced decisions made by the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly. They would be a valuable forum for exploring the issues raised by the Rights of Nature with a wider, more diverse audience.

## "River-lution" in the UK

A landmark precedent was achieved in the field of riparian rights in February 2025 when Lewes District Council adopted a decision to support the principles of a [Rights of River Charter](#) for the River Ouse. This is the first time such a decision has been taken by a local authority in the UK, and it was hailed as a "River-lution" by legal experts.

The organisations involved (including the Environmental Law Foundation, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, and Love our Ouse CIC) were inspired by international success stories, including the case of the Whanganui River in New Zealand's North Island, which won legal personhood in 2017.

Several of the delegates were directly involved (either advising or driving) in the shaping the River Charter for the Ouse. The charter included the right to exist in its natural state... to flow, to perform essential natural functions, to be free from pollution, the right to restoration and to support native biodiversity, and critically, the right to have a "voice" – in practice, vocalised by community groups.

The Ouse win has opened the door for many other UK river campaigning groups. Delegates cited the River Test, a vital chalk stream-fed river in Hampshire – at the time of the symposium its case was being considered by Test Valley Council. In July, the council voted unanimously to acknowledge "the intrinsic rights" of the river<sup>22</sup>, which means from now on, officials will have to keep the Test front and centre when making decisions on planning, land use, water management, and biodiversity.

## Corporate and Professional Governance

Beyond law-making, practical steps could be taken now by responsible businesses to recognise and integrate nature's rights in decision-making. Some of the different mechanisms are outlined below:

- **Aligning ethical codes of conduct:** Professional service providers and corporations can adopt ethical guidelines that require consideration of nature's interests in decision-making (e.g. including Rights of Nature in Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) principles)
- **Changing Articles of Association:** Companies can already become 'benefit corporations' – making a commitment to align value creation (profits) with ethical values and purpose. Articles could be amended to include nature protection and a recognition of nature's rights
- **Board and shareholder representation:** Some companies, including Faith in Nature, have innovated with appointing a "representative for nature" to their boards or even making nature a major shareholder (Patagonia). Having 'nature on the board' is a symbolic move that normalises the Rights of Nature, however this strategy has been criticised by some nature activists as potentially tokenistic if not implemented in a meaningful way
- **Making directors accountable for harm:** Directors' responsibilities could be expanded to include a DNSH clause for the environment and biodiversity. Where private companies or utilities providers violate nature's rights (for example polluting a river), there would be a clear recourse to action
- **Voluntary/Mandatory policy adoption:** Mandatory TNFD reporting would be a straightforward way to formalise a company's responsibilities to nature and make its impacts more transparent. The International Sustainability Standards Board's (ISSB) IFRS S1 and S2 will be mandatory from 2026 and will include nature-protection measures that are broadly aligned to TNFD. In the interim, responsible organisations can choose to report voluntarily
- **Biodiversity risk assessments** are increasingly reported on as part of annual corporate sustainability/impact reports, especially by firms with business models that directly impact biodiversity, like agriculture, fishing, and construction. It should be pointed out that assessing material impacts is a first step but does not protect natural habitats
- **Nature-risks:** Companies are already privately weighing up the physical risks of climate change and nature loss to their future revenues and economic viability, although only a few are making formal disclosures. Greater transparency of nature-risks, however, would help cement 'the business case for nature'



**There should be individual criminal liability for directors of companies involved in services, commodities, processes, etcetera, which lead to significant nature-harming outcomes. Directors need responsibilities not just to people and the law, but also to nature.**

## Financial Implementation: Integrating Nature

The concept of nature's rights is complementary to sustainable finance frameworks and Nature Capital markets and could be incorporated.

Existing principles for responsible investment and ESG-linked finance models broadly cover environmental stewardship, however, there are significant gaps. Biodiversity and habitat protection could be more systematically embedded in ESG taxonomies and financial resilience strategies for investors. Applied correctly, this means corporations operating in 'natural resources' (e.g. oil and gas, mining, dam construction, logging), unsustainable agriculture and aquaculture, and the worst polluters (e.g. fossil fuels, fashion, plastics, chemicals) would find it harder to access finance for harmful projects. On the upside, companies or sovereign states that fully disclosed biodiversity impacts and adopted nature-positive practices would have better access to finance.

“**Messaging needs to focus on the financial benefits of giving nature legal protections.**”

As proposed in Chapter 2, a Rights of Nature framework could support the development of the Nature Capital markets, adding credibility and assisting growth following the pattern of the carbon markets. The voluntary carbon markets (VCM) emerged in the 1980s but only gained credibility when regulated trading was introduced (Kyoto Protocol, 1997), gained further traction with the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (2005), and really took off when large companies were legally required to report on their GHG emissions (2013 in the UK, 2014 in the EU). Collaboration with the Nature Capital sector will be key to implementation.

Much work is still needed to quantify the financial benefits of protecting nature, for example, the cost of improving air quality, cleaning up rivers, and avoiding desertification. The insurance and reinsurance sector has been a pioneer in this regard – from the perspective of loss mitigation – and has demonstrated that the cost of climate and nature 'shocks' to assets, homes, and businesses can be quantified. Cooperation with the sector – and with institutional investors in general (including pension funds, mutual funds, etc.) – would be beneficial to the Rights of Nature movement.

“**The groups who are designated as nature's stewards must have financial recognition and provision.**”

In summary, integrating the Rights of Nature into the financial system can happen through a multi-pronged approach.

- **Sustainability-linked finance:** Linking access to finance with nature protection outcomes – incentivising companies and countries for nature stewardship with penalties for those who do harm
- **Nature Capital markets:** Development of an integrated nature's rights framework to bolster nature finance products such as biodiversity credits and blue carbon credits
- **Quantifying and communicating benefits:** Building the evidence base and effective narratives for the economic value of nature, from improved air quality to reduced disaster risk. The nature metrics and insurance sectors could be powerful partners in this endeavour. The Rights of Nature movement should use language that resonates with financial services professionals
- **Impact investing and corporate philanthropy:** Funding structures must be put in place so that this function doesn't rely solely on the third sector and community volunteers

## 2. Bottom-up Approaches: Education, Storytelling and Community Empowerment

### Education and Storytelling

Changing the law and economic systems is only part of the solution; changing hearts and minds is equally important for advancing the cause of nature's rights. Education is needed at all levels of society – from schools to communities to boardrooms – to help people understand that nature is a rights-bearing entity, not just a resource to be exploited. The interdependency between human health and basic human rights (clean environment, nutritious food, secure housing etc.) and nature's rights (safeguarding healthy ecosystems and soils, defence against climate change etc.) must be communicated.

“**We need to do a better job at this than we have on climate; it should be easier to engage people emotionally on nature and its relevance to everyday life than a tonne of carbon or the theory of net zero...**”

Key education strategies:

- **Curriculum reform:** Introducing the Rights of Nature and the concept of interconnectedness with the environment into school curricula, supported by field trips and experiential learning
- **Public awareness and advocacy campaigns:** Using compelling storytelling, the arts, and media to make the case for nature's rights in ways that resonate emotionally and rationally

“**We must engage young people and future leaders to build long-term support for the Rights of Nature.**”

- **Engaging the next generation:** Empowering young people to become advocates for nature, through educational trusts, youth-led projects, and creative initiatives. This is especially important in an increasingly digitally mediated society, where young people's experience of the natural world is shrinking
- **Teaching nature's benefits:** Storytelling should focus on the “tangible benefits” such as human health and wellbeing. Food chains can be a powerful vehicle for teaching, for example
- **Empowering stories:** Inspiring case studies – for example, where Indigenous People have organised themselves to challenge developments and the success of the river charter movement in England – could be used to inspire public sentiment and build momentum

“**Education is needed at all levels – focusing on how nature delivers improved outcomes for people's everyday lives such as improved wellbeing, the opportunity to re-connect people with their community.**”



### Community Empowerment: Support from the Grassroots

In Chapter 1, we considered how access to nature is not equitable, and many people feel disconnected from the natural world. The remedy for that lies in empowering communities to become guardians of their local environments, initially through volunteering (designating nature stewards and river guardians), but ultimately those efforts should be remunerated.

There are multiple upsides to a community stewardship approach, as well as benefits for wildlife: land would be better managed, health and nutritional benefits (exercise, foraging, permaculture and soil health), mental health benefits ('green therapy'), as well as community cohesion. Furthermore, a sense of "collective ownership and belonging that transcends class and political divides" would be fostered.

“**Empowering otherwise disenfranchised individuals to do something positive and tangible for their communities, and potentially recognising this as a path to economic development.**

“**In my experience, fighting for nature in England goes beyond social class and political parties, there is a common ground here.**

Key strategies for empowering communities:

- **Place-based conservation:** Supporting community-led projects such as river clean-ups, wildlife protection and 'citizen science' initiatives
- **Democratising access:** Collaboration with councils, landowners, and park stewards to ensure everyone can experience and care for nature
- **Economic recognition:** Providing funding and recognition for communities and not-for-profits that act as nature's stewards

“**Empowering individuals to protect their 'little corner of the world' – this transcends class and political divides.**

### 3. Cutting across Silos: An 'All of Society' Approach

No single sector or strategy can deliver the systemic change required. Cross-sectoral collaboration – breaking down silos between legal professionals, financiers, scientists, artists, policymakers, businesses, and communities – is essential.

Key vehicles for collaboration:

- **Citizens' assemblies:** Bringing together broadly representative groups to deliberate on and recommend policy changes, ensuring that the Rights of Nature agenda is inclusive and representative
- **Cross-sector partnerships and working groups:** Fostering ongoing dialogue and joint action across disciplines and sectors, building momentum for legal and cultural transformation. Stakeholder mapping will be an important first step
- **Knowledge sharing:** Learning from international case law examples and Indigenous knowledge systems, adapting successful models to local contexts
- **Advocacy campaign:** A cross-sector campaign to raise awareness for the Rights of Nature agenda and bring politicians on board



**An 'all of society' approach is needed to re-centre our relationship with nature.**



# Conclusion

The Rights of Nature movement in the UK stands at a pivotal juncture. While the challenges to embedding nature's rights in law, and "eco-centric decision-making" in governance, finance, and business are formidable, they are not immutable. Moreover, the consequences of inaction are far more severe.

Integrating the Rights of Nature in law and wider society requires a sustained process of transformation. Legal and economic systems must be realigned with nature-positive outcomes. Alongside those efforts, the relevance of nature's rights – and the importance of representing them in decisions that affect our future – must be powerfully communicated to the private sector and the public.

Many of the solutions are interdependent. For example, public education must go hand-in-hand with better access to the countryside and waterways. The integration of nature into corporate responsibility must happen both from within (at board and financial accountability level) and without (better regulation). The tensions that exist today between public policy and nature's rights must be examined in the context of the true cost of biodiversity collapse.

Discussions at the Symposium about whether top-down or bottom-up strategies would be more impactful, led to the conclusion that it must be both at the same time. Legal recognition for nature's rights, economic, and cultural transformation are all equally critical and urgent – and ideally should be progressed together, in a joined-up approach.

## Next Steps: Taking it forward

The roundtable sessions that this report is based on lasted less than an hour – not long enough for the delegates to dive into great detail or produce a coherent plan of action for advancing the Rights of Nature. However, there were clear indicators of where the discussion could go next. The multiple legal challenges and opportunities must be plotted and unpicked. More consideration of how to incorporate nature's rights into financial strategies and responsible business practice was needed – taking sectoral differences into account. Extensive stakeholder mapping to better understand the policy and cultural landscapes and inform the best strategies was required, and so on.

The next Rights of Nature Symposium in 2026 will be an opportunity for the participants to further unpack the issues raised, together with new stakeholders and fresh input. In the interim, working groups will be set up to focus on transformation across different sectors and disciplines. The findings of those groups will be reported back in a plenary session. The findings of those groups will be reported back in a plenary session. In addition, Achill Legal will be supporting the formation of an overarching coalition for the Rights of Nature, to bring the disparate groups and stakeholders together in order to accelerate action.



**Every new child is  
nature's chance to  
correct culture's error**

**Ted Hughes**

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## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this report are based on the discussions and presentations that took place during The Rights of Nature Symposium, a collaborative event supported by Achill Legal, the Environmental Law Foundation, and Fleet Street Quarter. They reflect the perspectives shared by delegates during the roundtable discussions and do not necessarily represent the views, policies, or positions of Achill Legal. This report is intended for informational purposes and to provide a summary of the event's discussions.