

Strategic Plan 2015-2019

A WORLD INSPIRED, INFORMED AND INFLUENCED BY ECOLOGY



British Ecological Society





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This strategic plan provides a framework for the activities of the British Ecological Society (BES) over the next five years as it sets out on its second century. Our vision, what we want to achieve, is

a world inspired, informed and influenced by ecology

and our mission, what we do to achieve that vision, is

to generate, communicate and promote ecological knowledge and solutions.

Ecology is the study of the distribution and abundance of organisms, the interactions among organisms, the interaction between organisms and their environment, and structure and function of ecosystems.

The BES has a long and proud history of successfully supporting the academic ecological community and this remains core to our future. However, the development of our new strategic plan has highlighted several areas where the BES needs to work harder. The Society must raise its profile and become more influential both nationally and internationally, demonstrating how ecological knowledge can help to meet some of the most important challenges of the 21st century. Part of increasing our impact is gaining a better understanding of the needs, behaviours and issues facing the communities with whom we work. We also need to help ecologists interact more effectively with those working in different disciplines and we need to do more to connect ecologists in higher education organisations with ecologists working outside academia so that both can benefit from a freer flow of information, ideas and collaboration. These themes are reflected across the five major goals of our new plan.

The first 100 years of the BES have seen unprecedented changes in the earth's ecosystems; the study of ecology has never been more important in understanding these changes and the impact of human society. This plan sets out how the BES will work towards its vision of a world inspired, informed and influenced by ecology.

ABOUT THE BES

The BES was established in 1913 and now, as then, fostering the science of ecology is at its core. The Society is a registered charity and governed by a Board of Trustees, our Council, who are elected by our members.

From an initial 47 members we have now grown to over 5,000 across the globe with 54% from the UK, 16% in Continental Europe and 30% from further afield.

In 1913, the BES published the first ecology journal, the *Journal of Ecology*, in conjunction with the launch of the Society. Since then we have developed a world renowned journals portfolio, publishing primary research across the whole range of ecological disciplines with global authors and readership.

Bringing ecologists together to discuss their work and develop new ideas has been a constant theme of our work. We organise and support an extensive range of events, helping ecologists communicate their work, network with peers and learn more about their science. The number of regional and international events that we support has grown significantly in recent years, as has the number of our Special Interest Groups which focus on particular subject areas within ecology.

Careers support in ecology is another important focus of our work. We help school students understand the rewarding opportunities available in ecology; help young ecologists through career transition phases and provide advice and support for those more established in their careers. Students have always been integral to the Society and currently comprise 25% of our total membership.

Although the Society has had a committee working on policy since 1970, it was only in 2004 that we employed our first full-time policy staff and our investment in this area has continued to grow. The focus for our policy work is to ensure policy makers have easy access to the best available scientific evidence.

We have a long history of directly supporting the ecological community through our grants portfolio. Today we give almost £0.4M per annum to support training and travel, ecological research, outreach projects and ecologists in Africa.



DEFINITION OF ECOLOGY

Ecology is the study of the distribution and abundance of organisms, the interactions among organisms, the interaction between organisms and their environment, and the structure and function of ecosystems.

Ecology provides knowledge and evidence on the interdependence between the biosphere and people. A better understanding of ecological systems enables society to predict the consequences of human activity on the environment and the importance of the environment for human welfare.

VISION

A world inspired, informed and influenced by ecology

MISSION

To generate, communicate and promote ecological knowledge and solutions

VALUES

Objective and evidence-based: Science informs all our work. We present the results of scientific research in an unbiased way and we are completely independent.

Influential: We work hard to ensure that all our activities positively influence and benefit society.

Open-minded and innovative: We constantly seek to improve the ways in which we work, learning from others.

Proactive: To remain relevant today we must set the agenda for tomorrow's issues and science.

Inclusive: We celebrate and encourage diversity. The science of ecology, our membership and our staff are open to the full breadth of society. We support our community to maximise its potential.

Professional and transparent: We are an open organisation, operating with clear governance structures, procedures and protocols. We run all of our services and activities to the highest professional standards.



Major Goal

1

COMMUNICATE WORLD-LEADING ECOLOGICAL SCIENCE

We will provide a robust, diverse and innovative range of communication channels to advance ecological science and understanding. We will be seen by the international ecological community as the best platform for the communication and dissemination of their work to their peers.



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TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL:

- Within 5 years, ensure the performance metrics for all established BES-owned journals are within the top 10% of those for primary research ecology journals.
- Within 5 years increase the amount of ecological research published by the Society by 50% whilst maintaining high scores in quality metrics and key performance indicators.
- Widen the scope of the BES journal portfolio to increase the breadth of ecology covered. Within 18 months we will identify existing or upcoming fields in ecology not effectively covered by existing channels and create a route to disseminate that research.
- Within 3 years develop a system that officially recognises those who make data sets publicly available for re-use.
- Increase the range of ecologists attending BES meetings and the number of delegates participating in the Annual Meeting from 850 to 1,200 by 2016. Thereafter we will seek to grow participation in all BES meetings in a sustainable way.
- Hold 2 major scientific meetings a year in addition to the Annual Meeting.
- Facilitate better communication of research results and ecological management practices between academics and practitioners.



GENERATE, SYNTHESISE AND EXCHANGE ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

We will support producers and users of ecological science in the generation, synthesis and exchange of ideas and knowledge. We will achieve this by: catalysing innovation in ecological science; fostering a vibrant and strong ecological community; providing outlets for the synthesis of ecological knowledge; encouraging interdisciplinary work and dialogue.



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TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL:

- Within 3 years, trial a range of new interactive communication tools and formats which improve idea generation and knowledge exchange throughout our stable of meetings and activities. Within 5 years we will make core to our events as many of these tools and formats as appropriate.
- Within 3 years, increase the impact of the contents from our events, for example, by using them to influence research agendas and funding programmes.
- Set up a forum where emerging science and technology issues that could have an impact on ecology are turned into ideas, initiatives and links.



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- Support the BES Special Interest (SIGs) by:
 - ensuring that the range of SIGs reflects key research and applied themes in ecology;
 - increasing representation of disciplines, practitioners and Societies within SIGs;
 - developing interdisciplinary and international activities showcasing and translating ecological research;
 - broadening SIG membership and engagement with Society meetings and other Society activities;
 - increasing support for early career researchers and students.
- Build the capacity of the ecological community for interdisciplinary working by:
 - holding cross-disciplinary events that allow participants to meaningfully interact with researchers from other disciplines;
 - commissioning interdisciplinary publications;
 - offering workshops that specifically address difficult aspects of working with researchers from other disciplines;
 - providing early career placements and training opportunities in a variety of disciplines.
- Within 3 years, develop and deliver mechanisms for the synthesis of ecological ideas, for example, by commissioning individuals and organisations to produce syntheses.
- Collaborate with end-users, for example practitioners and policy-makers, to develop a set of services that connect them more closely with ecological research.



SHARE THE EXCITEMENT AND RELEVANCE OF ECOLOGY

We will engage in a dialogue with the whole of society to share the excitement of ecological science and show how useful it is for meeting national and global challenges. We will increase our public outreach activity, building on the success of our centenary programmes, and increase the capacity of ecologists to communicate effectively with different audiences. We will raise the profile and influence of the BES and ecology within policy and practice at all levels of government, business and the third sector.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL:

- Within 18 months develop a strong BES branding, communications and media strategy that will increase the recognition of ecology as an exciting scientific discipline and communicate ecological science to targeted audiences using a wide range of innovative techniques.
- Double our social media interactions each year of our strategic plan so that we are effectively communicating and interacting with a diverse global audience.
- Interact more effectively with policy, decision makers (government, businesses, internationally) and the media to raise the profile of ecology and the BES.
- Continue to support policy engagement with the devolved governments in the UK and seek to replicate the success of the Scottish Policy Group in the other devolved administrations.
- Develop and deliver an annual public engagement programme facilitating dialogue between ecologists and the wider community which builds on successful elements of the centenary activities.



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- Explore the potential to include and reward members' public engagement activities in our own programmes. The impact of these activities will be regularly assessed by a range of criteria including footfall, cost and quality of engagement.
- Develop the BES website as a resource for the public. We will measure the effectiveness of the Society's public engagement work by tracking website activity.
- Provide training (e.g. workshops at the Annual Meeting) for members in communication and public engagement that include more than 50% input from external professional experts.
- Develop free to attend public outreach activities at the Annual Meeting, such as an 'Ecology Fringe' event the day before the meeting. This could include highlights from the Annual Meeting delivered as short public lectures and interactive events, with the media invited to attend.
- Make the BES the go-to place as a source of expertise to inform ecological debate in the media.





Major Goal

4

INSPIRE, ENGAGE AND RECOGNISE TALENT



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We will maintain and enhance a strong, vibrant and responsive global community of ecologists. We will increase engagement with and among all present and future members to foster and use their abilities and skills to further our mission.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL:

- Identify key 'roles' for members at all career stages and ensure their active engagement in BES activities (from undergraduate to post retirement).
- Encourage and inspire international audiences to be involved in the BES by:
 - having at least 1 international member on BES Council and Committees;
 - holding 2 non-UK meetings in the next 5 years in collaboration with other organisations;
 - increasing our attendance at other international conferences and meetings.
- Increase the diversity of those doing ecology by:
 - holding at least one summer school per annum for 50 undergraduates;
 - extending the core mentoring scheme for women;
 - extending our existing provision for under-represented groups to engage in Higher Education;
 - recruiting women and under-represented groups into the BES and promoting opportunities for engagement for example, standing for Council;
 - celebrating the contribution to ecology by women and under-represented groups;
 - applying the Athena SWAN principles to the BES and its activities by embedding the analysis and reflection of diversity data within all BES processes, and using these data to inform proposals for changes to increase diversity.
- Within 5 years to scope and develop a career progression programme that actively engages at least 30% of our membership.
- Within 1 year to have developed and implemented at least 1 project for each career transition phase.
- Extend engagement with ecologists outside academic education environments and within 2 years have a portfolio of at least 3 specific membership services that would be of value to them.
- Raise the profile of ecology in curricula design by:
 - engaging with each iteration of curriculum design relevant to ecology;
 - using BES members' expertise to develop/prototype new and stimulating ideas;
 - generating support materials and training to encourage the use of these ideas.
- Within 2 years launch a Teaching and Learning focussed SIG that provides support, training and opportunities to share good practice for members engaged or interested in Higher Education teaching, fieldwork, education policy and other related activities.
- Within 1 year implement an annual award that recognises and rewards members engaged in teaching and the sharing of best practice.



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BUILD A SUSTAINABLE, RESILIENT AND EFFICIENT SOCIETY

We will grow our membership to ensure the Society continues to thrive. We will increase the diversity of income streams and carefully monitor trends in income and expenditure to ensure long-term financial stability. We will continue to develop our staff so they have the right skills to support the Society and build on the opportunities within Charles Darwin House to operate more efficiently.



TO ACHIEVE THIS WE WILL:

- On an annual basis, use financial modelling to ensure our resources will enable us to achieve our aims, reviewing the underlying assumptions that underpin this forward view.
- Diversify income streams so that in 5 years' time income from non-publication sources doubles from £370k by:
 - commissioning external advice on fundraising and commercial/business engagement;
 - expanding the skills set of BES staff, Council and Committee Members to implement that advice;
 - being more proactive in seeking fundraising and sponsorship for projects;
 - launching new sellable products and services;
 - consider ways to make BES meetings more profitable.
- Make the most effective use of Charles Darwin House buildings by increasing the number of BES activities we hold there, reviewing at least two 'back office' functions with the co-owners and annually organising at least two joint events with one or more of the co-owners or other organisations.
- Increase the resilience of journal income by developing other paid services from our publications portfolio.
- Increase membership through recruitment and retention. We will increase the number of members from the current base of 5,000 to 6,000 by 2017 and to 7,000 by 2020. By 2017 we will also increase the number of members who have been with the BES for more than five years.
- Construct a comprehensive, up-to-date and resourced relational database on all members, including career focus, career stage and roles so that the BES remains relevant for its members and their interests within 12 months.
- Get a better understanding of the services and benefits that members and non-members want by conducting market research every 2 years.
- Develop a strategy for retaining and recruiting ecologists outside of academia.
- Within 6 months assess and benchmark good practice across the Society and use that information to maintain a resilient, professionally run Society. Repeat this exercise at the interim review point of this strategic plan.
- Ensure our governance decision making processes and structure are robust and efficient.

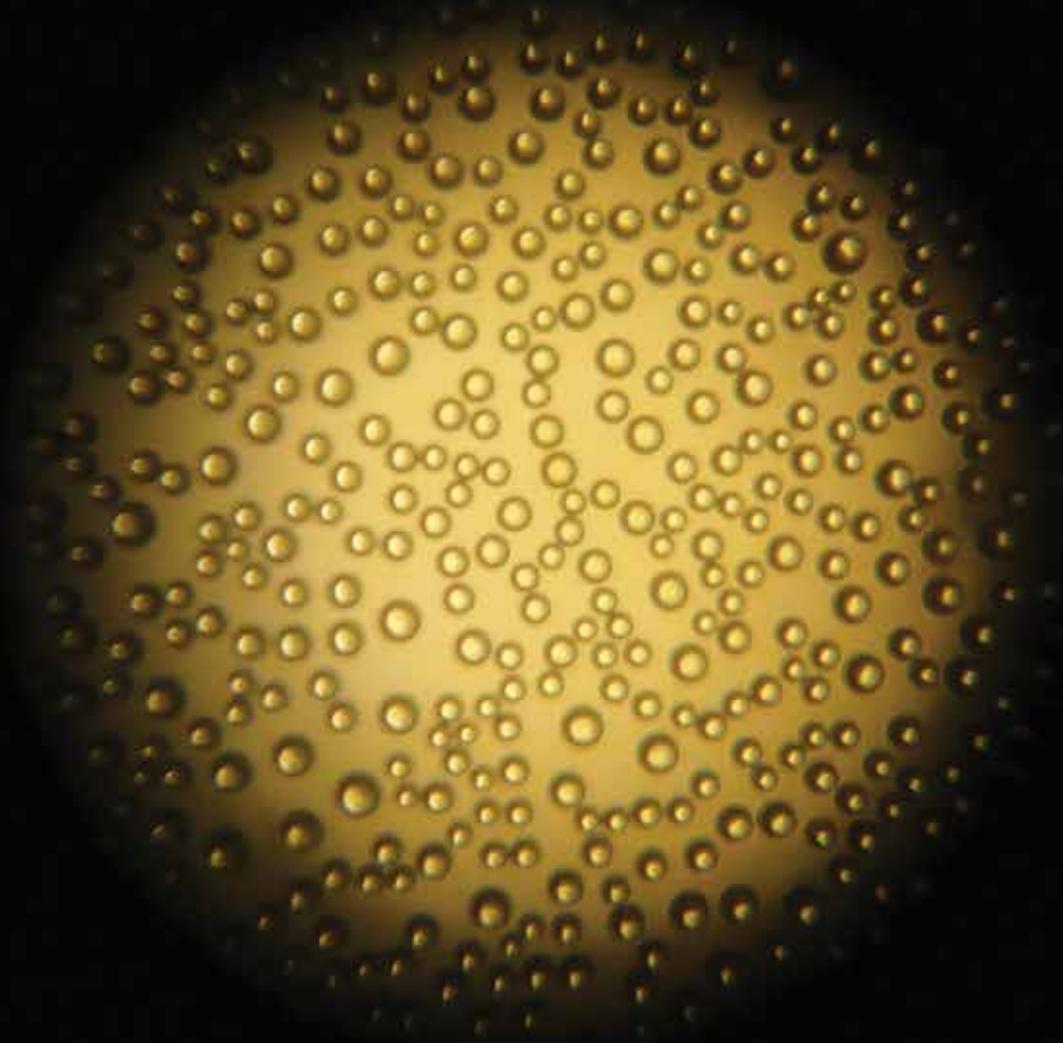




METHODOLOGY & MONITORING

At the end of the Centenary Year in 2013, BES Council agreed to craft a fresh vision for the organisation as we moved into our next 100 years. We spent 3 months gathering an extensive set of data including a membership survey, external stakeholder engagement, staff workshops and internal analysis. This data was used to inform the first draft of a strategic plan in April 2014 which was finalised in June 2014 at a BES Council meeting. Over the summer a draft five year operational plan was developed, refined in the autumn and the plan launched in late 2014. Council will monitor and evaluate progress through a set of strategic performance indicators reviewed annually and yearly business plans. Council will review the plan at its mid-point in 2017.

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