

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# AVON, BRISTOL, & COTSWOLDS ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION

By Harriet Williams



# INTRODUCTION

The Avon, Bristol & Cotswolds Environment Foundation (ABCEF) is being set up to provide donors with a *simple* and *effective* opportunity to support nature and climate work across the four counties of the former Avon region plus the lower Cotswolds.

*Simple*, because we will connect donors with a passion for this region with high-quality projects led by locally-based organisations, overseen by expert leadership.

*Effective*, because we will maximise the ‘value add’ for donors, steering towards strategic, long-term change as well as being responsive to fast-moving opportunities.

**Our aims are clear: we're looking to mobilise £150,000 in annual donations for three years in the first instance, to set up and run the Foundation. With this initial funding, we will then leverage up to £1 million to give to nature restoration and species recovery in the West of England over ten years, in line with 30% by 2030 global biodiversity framework goal.**

ABCEF will protect and restore nature while delivering benefits for climate and communities in the area spanning Bristol, Bath plus parts of Somerset and Gloucestershire. It will raise funds from people and businesses who care deeply about this region, and distribute grants to local organisations doing high-quality work for people and planet.

ABCEF will follow a proven model of place-based philanthropy created by [Conservation Collective](#) (CC), a global network that has launched and supported 20 local foundations. Over £12 million has been raised since 2020 for local nature protection and restoration initiatives.

We believe there is room for growth in the scale and impact of nature and climate-focused philanthropy in Avon, Bristol and the Cotswolds. With its buzzing ideas, diverse civil society and incredible natural assets, the region has plenty for funders to explore.

As a whole, the South West receives a higher share of environmental grants than the UK regional average. However, only a small percentage of funds percolate down to smaller, locally-led

organisations. A strong base of local action and support is vital to achieving effective, lasting change, but many initiatives struggle to connect with donors, or to access the type of funding they need to thrive, for instance to invest in building capacity or strategic development.

The Foundation will address these points by creating a more dynamic local grants market. We will emphasise community-connected groups in our grant-making and invest in organisational skills, capacity and network-building, alongside more project-oriented grants.

A local executive director will identify promising solutions to biodiversity loss and climate change, and propose them to a steering committee for funding. Projects will be screened by an advisory board with knowledge of local context, philanthropic strategy and civil society impact.

This report outlines three key themes for ABCEF:

1. Restoring and reconnecting nature
2. Responding to climate change and pollution
3. Community-led nature and climate action



Everywhere you look there are brilliant, passionate people working to create positive environmental change. Small amounts of funding, strategically directed, can supercharge this work. I'm so proud of this growing global movement.



**BEN GOLDSMITH, FOUNDER, CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE**

Photo by Lucy Masters

# CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE PHILOSOPHY

The Avon, Bristol & Cotswolds Environment Foundation will join a family of 20 other funds across the world, operating as part of Conservation Collective.

Environmental philanthropy faces two key challenges: persuading donors to give more to green issues (which attract less than 10% of UK foundation giving), and making sure that money is used effectively (which applies to how grants are managed, as well as what they are given to).

Conservation Collective has a proven formula for both parts of this equation.

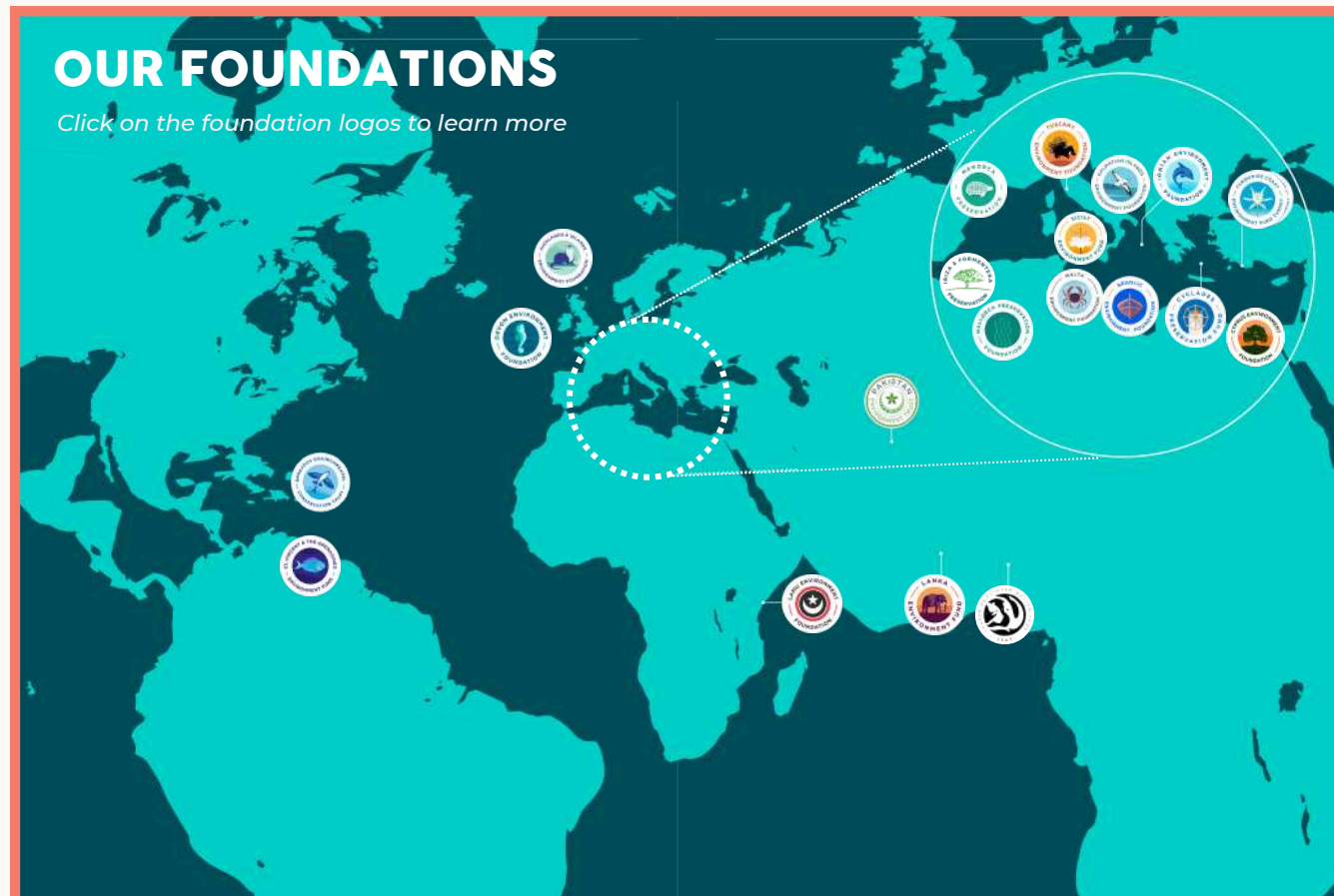
Conservation Collective launches and grows grant-making Foundations centred on specific counties, regions or countries.

We build clubs of donors linked to places with special meaning for them. This opens up new channels of green giving, which our Foundations direct to an array of nature and climate work, helping local environmental heroes to fulfil their potential as agents of positive change.

Wherever we go, we find great appetite among donors for this model, as a means of protecting the places they love.

Our growing network of Foundations has already raised millions of pounds for impactful initiatives, and we are only just getting started...

The power of Conservation Collective lies in our ability to replicate our model in new locations, raise funding effectively and efficiently, and share knowledge and expertise across the network. As a global ecosystem, we pride ourselves on removing barriers, empowering communities and getting things done.



# 2020-2023

## CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE AT A GLANCE



**FUNDS RAISED**  
**£12,148,719\***



**FOUNDATIONS**  
**20**



**FOUNDATION AVG SIZE**  
**£199,837**



**COUNTRIES**  
**12**



**PROJECTS**  
**505**

\*Funds raised estimated over £15,000,000 as at Aug 2024.

EXAMPLE OF A CC FOUNDATION IN THE UK

# DEVON ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION



Our Foundation in Devon works to protect and restore Devon's natural beauty by funding grassroots environmental initiatives.

## IMPACT SNAPSHOT

[CLICK TO VIEW DEF'S PROJECT PORTFOLIO](#)

### RESTORING NATURAL HABITATS

**218,369 m<sup>2</sup> wildlife habitat** created by Wild About Devon volunteers.  
**63,800 native tree saplings** grown from seed by Moor Trees to restore Atlantic Rainforest.  
**20,000 wild plant seedlings** propagated across more than 30 native species by Keep it Wild.

### PROTECTING NATIVE SPECIES

**13 swift colonies** kickstarted by Devon Birds by installing nest boxes and lures in churches.  
**300 white-clawed crayfish** safely hatched by Wildwood Devon to prevent extinction.  
**15 wildcat kittens** born and **9 white storks** hatched at the Species Recovery Centre.

### REDUCING POLLUTION

**47% reduction in E.coli** achieved during Flete Field Lab's mycofiltration pilot.  
**Weekly water testing** to influence water company to reduce pollution in the River Dart.  
**22,000 kg plastic pollution** recovered by Till Coast is Clear from the South Devon coastline.

### BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE

**89 trainees** completed regenerative agriculture training at the Apricot Centre.  
**7,500kg carbon** removed from the atmosphere so far by Flete Field Lab biochar.  
**600 people** growing moss as part of Art and Energy's experimental peatland restoration.



Nature-based solutions are the biggest sources of hope in this era of climate and nature emergencies. If we learn to share space better with nature, and recognise its true value, we will be rewarded by seeing it recover and thrive.

AMANDA KEETLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DEVON ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION



# 2020-2024

## DEF AT A GLANCE



FUNDS RAISED

**£1.3 MILLION**



GRANTS SUPPORTED

**81**



NATURE EXPERTS ON OUR ADVISORY BOARD

**12**



PROJECT PARTNERS

**42**

# THE CASE FOR AN AVON, BRISTOL & COTSWOLDS FOUNDATION

This region has a lot to offer donors with a passion for nature, climate and community, and an interest in exploring the many ways these issues intersect.

Rolling hills, wooded valleys, moors and meadows are all to be found here, along with adders, dormice, bats and otters plus rare invertebrate and floral species. Migratory birds overwinter along the magnificent Severn Estuary, whose waters contain biogenic reefs and seagrass beds used by salmon, trout and eel. Important wild places in the ABC region include the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, along with internationally important wetlands, and dozens of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Like many places, the Avon and Cotswolds areas are already suffering impacts of climate change, while trying to chart their own trajectory to net zero through decarbonising transport, energy and buildings. Such actions need to be calibrated with social factors like the cost of living crisis, and evolving concepts of environmental justice.

Despite headline policies and targets, the region's nature is still in decline, and its carbon emissions are not falling at the pace required. Media coverage and public debate tends to emphasise winners and losers from green action, rather than cultivate the belief that planetary and human health go hand in hand.

To overcome these contradictions, there is a need to show what success looks like, and inspire citizens, communities, land managers and businesses to come along for the ride. In our region, we see plenty of potential for different stakeholders to lead or participate in positive action on habitat restoration, sustainable transport, farming and many other things besides.

ABCEF will seek opportunities to invest in such work, through grants to civil society groups that can connect the dots in the spirit of curiosity, optimism and trust.



Map of Council areas within the 'West of England'

## Threats and solutions

England is one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. In the ABC region as elsewhere, intensive farming, pollution and development have shrunk the size and health of natural habitats. Once common species of insects, birds and mammals are now on the endangered list, and none of the region's waterways are in good ecological condition.

Climate change will bring hotter, drier summers and wetter winters, along with more frequent floods, heatwaves and drought. As well as their impact on human health, rising temperatures are likely to accelerate coastal erosion and the spread of invasive species. ABCEF will seek out can-do grant partners, capable of shining light into this otherwise gloomy picture.

From urban wildflower plantings to nature-friendly farming, we will explore pathways to species recovery, and look to harness the power of nature in managing pollution and climate change.

We take hope from success stories, like peregrine falcons nesting near Bristol's Suspension Bridge, otters in central Bath, the planting of thousands of new trees, and the creation of community-led nature reserves and climate action plans.

Above all, we believe in the ability of locally-led action to make a difference, and are excited to see how CC's model of place-based philanthropy can help sustain and amplify these efforts..



Photo by Viktor Cap

Once nearly extinct in the UK due to hunting, and habitat loss, otters have rebounded— though pollution and road accidents still pose threats.



Photo by Henk Bogaard

Numbers of swifts and starlings in the Avon area have dropped over 90% since 1970, attesting to the loss of nesting sites and the ongoing decline of insect populations.

## Demographics, politics and business

Strong economic, political and ecological links between the old Avon counties make this a logical unit for the Foundation to focus on. Parts of the Cotswolds lie in Avon counties, while the Mendips and Cotswolds share a geological history going back to the Jurassic era - evident in similar above-ground landscape and habitat features today.

Nearly 1.2 million people live in the Avon area, and 140,000 within the Cotswolds AONB. Bristol is the largest city, other urban centres include Bath, Weston-Super-Mare and Yate, and the seaside towns of Clevedon and Portishead.



The region's substantial social and economic inequalities have led to a recognition that environmental action needs to work for communities of different circumstances, backgrounds and values. Access to nature and Just Transition are two topics that are seeing active efforts to bring social justice and environmental themes together.

Bristol was the first UK city to declare climate and ecological emergencies; all Councils in the area now have detailed climate and nature action plans as does the regional combined authority. Levels of environmental awareness run relatively high, reaching their zenith in Bristol, where over 80% of people are concerned about climate change and loss of local wildlife.

The region has three large universities in Bristol and Bath, along with England's leading agricultural university in Cirencester. All do influential work on sustainability topics.

The civil engineering, defence, financial services, utilities and creative sectors are all well-established here. The region's green reputation makes it a magnet for eco-oriented businesses and charities, offering good potential for the Foundation to partner with companies, in fundraising and other initiatives. Bristol and Bath have some of the highest numbers of B-Corp accredited businesses outside of London. An estimated 45,000 new green jobs need to be created, in order for the region to meet its 2030 net zero target.

## A sketch of local civil society

No master list of civil society groups in the ABC region exists, but alongside better-known environmental groups, there are probably hundreds of grassroots organisations working on green themes - for instance, food and farming, habitats and species, climate, energy, transport or waste. National charities based here include the Soil Association, Sustrans, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Sustainable Food Trust and City to Sea.

Groups in the ABC area are not short of ideas for climate and nature action, or the desire to collaborate for greater success. However, civil society leaders interviewed for this research believe the regional market for environmental philanthropy is under-developed, with room for innovation, impact and growth.

Levels of civil society activity vary across the region. Bristol and to an extent Bath are 'hot spots' that may offer opportunities to back ambitious initiatives, capitalising on well-organised civil society networks and high levels of environmental concern.

The Foundation could also look to build capacity in 'cold spots' of green action. For instance, in more rural areas with good potential for nature restoration, but less ability to instigate and implement such schemes.

The Foundation may want to support advocacy or campaigning related to the delivery of climate and nature policies, alongside work that builds momentum for positive change among communities and businesses.

High-level plans such as the West of England Nature Recovery Network, Tree & Woodland Strategy and the Bristol Avon Catchment Plan provide blueprints for action.

Civil society groups play a key role in the development, delivery and monitoring of such initiatives. The Foundation may wish to support their capacity to play this role, and potentially drive investment (grants or blended finance) to project delivery as well.



Photos left & right by Lucy Masters



Photo by Lucy Masters

## SUPPORTING LOCAL ACTION

ABCEF will lead with three areas of interest, namely:

### 1: Restoring and Reconnecting Nature

Patches of high-value habitat often exist as disparate islands - joining such fragments together boosts their ability to support wildlife, and creates a better chance for successful conservation outcomes. This approach aligns with policy frameworks (and statutory funding) for nature recovery. Improving the nature value of specific places and reconnecting pieces of habitat is a priority for many groups in the ABC region, as is the development of innovative finance and stakeholder engagement schemes to power these goals.

In rural areas, ABCEF could focus on protecting and restoring key habitats like woodlands, wetlands and grasslands, engaging with farmers and other land managers. In urban areas, communities can be engaged in initiatives to welcome more wildlife into parks, gardens and other green spaces.

### 2: Tackling Climate Change and Pollution

Regional politicians and businesses have adopted a slate of commitments related to tackling climate change - but implementation is everything. Many civil society groups are seeking support for creative and campaigning work on these topics, including at grassroots level. This theme also aligns with nature-based solutions to climate change, for instance the restoration of rivers to manage flood risk, or the planting of trees in urban areas to protect against heatwaves. The pollution aspect could cover sources of air, water and soil pollution, such as from plastics, transport, and agriculture.

This area of interest could see ABCEF invest in various tactics and approaches. For instance, partnerships and pledges as a means of accelerating business action towards sustainability goals, alongside well-measured policy advocacy work toward decision makers.

### 3: Community-Driven Nature and Climate Action

The region has diverse communities, in terms of age, income, ethnicity and world view. Environmental protection is not a priority for everyone, but many people have potential to journey into awareness and action, given the right inspiration and support. Grassroots efforts not only 'get things done', but broaden public support for meaningful policy action, itself a precondition for the delivery of the region's climate and nature strategies.

ABCEF could fund projects to promote eco-friendly behaviours (for instance, wildlife-friendly management of gardens), on consolidating public support for key environmental policies (for instance, on transport, waste and energy), and on projects that deliver co-benefits for ecological and human health. The Foundation could also explore initiatives to develop skills, capacity and leadership in particular demographic groups, for instance youth and from ethnic minority backgrounds.

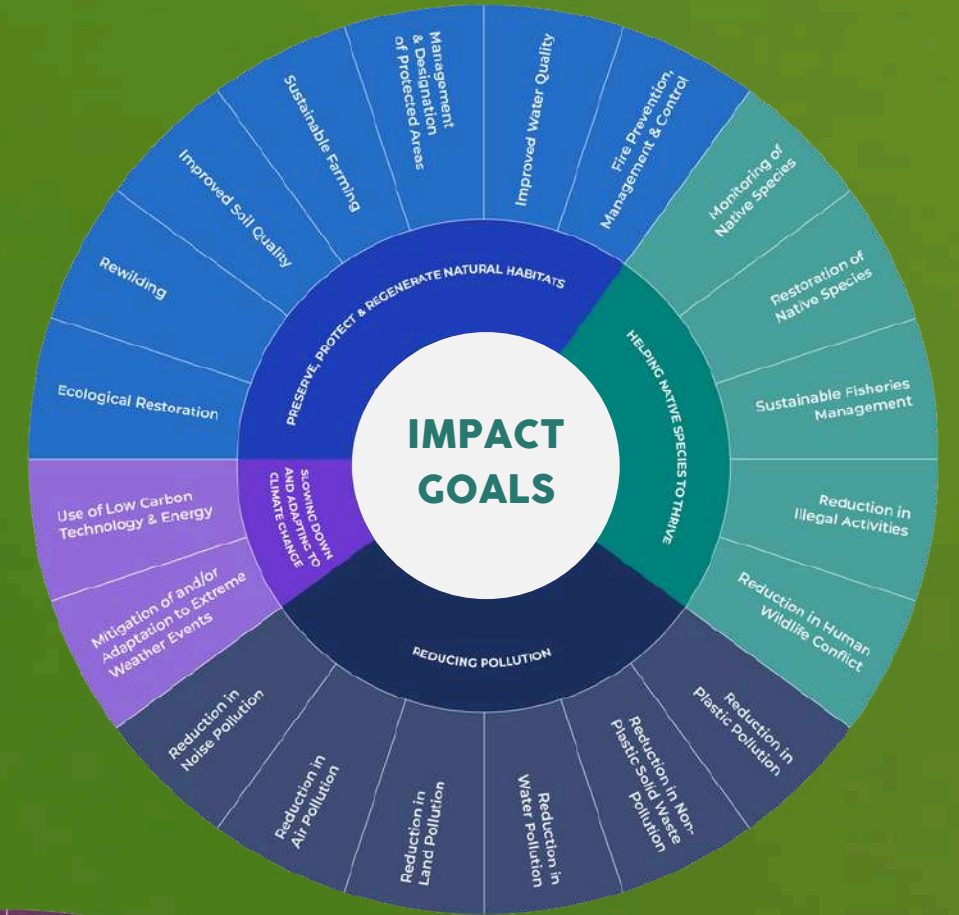
**ABCEF will allow donors to explore environmental themes from a locally-grounded perspective, and to connect their funds to 'triple win' solutions that deliver benefits for biodiversity, climate and human well-being.**

**The following values will underpin all the Foundation does:**

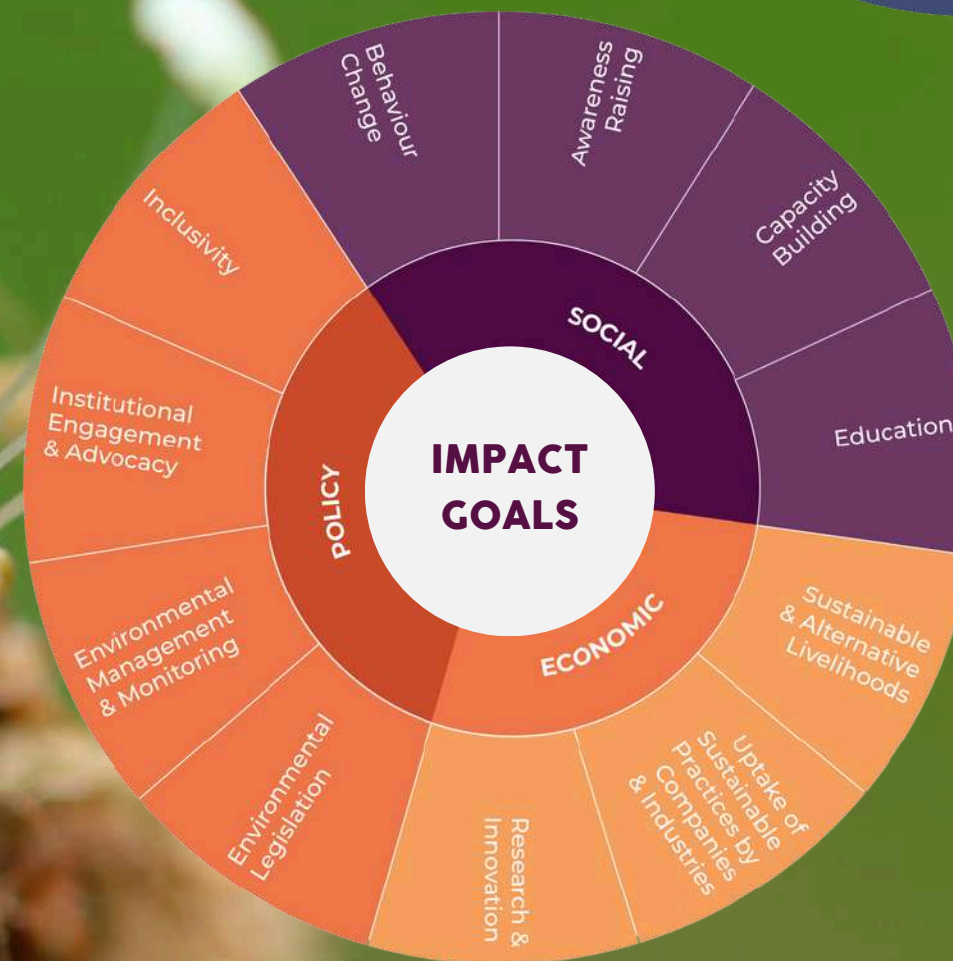
**ambition | collaboration | imagination | inclusivity | systemic focus**

**These values will find expression in our day-to-day operations, including choices about the types of work and organisations the Foundation will prioritise for support.**

**2** SOCIAL ECONOMIC & POLICY OUTCOMES



**1** ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES



# CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE'S IMPACT MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

As a branch of Conservation Collective, ABCEF will receive support to use the Impact Measurement Framework, a unified data-collection tool to track progress across four impact goals: Restoring Natural Habitats, Protecting Native Species, Reducing Pollution, and Building Climate Resilience.

These outcomes and their indicators will provide a valuable framework for ABCEF, its grantees, and Conservation Collective to measure and demonstrate impact on the ground, share learnings, and report to donors. This, in turn, helps build momentum and escalate support for environmental and climate solutions.



# LAUNCHING THE FOUNDATION

New CC Foundations follow a series of steps along a journey. ABCEF's progress has been illustrated below.

The Foundation will be based on CC's best practice toolkit. CC sets up about two new foundations annually, offering 30,000 (local currency) in seed funding, donor introductions, financial management, and facilitating UK taxpayer donations.



# CC SUPPORT SYSTEM

Conservation Collective equips member foundations to bring about more and more effective environmental philanthropy.

A core team of ten based in the UK strengthens the ecosystem of Foundations, ensuring high governance standards and sharing best practices. Foundations have access to a tools and resources library, templates, and guidelines across the following areas:



## Fundraising

CC acts as a trusted funding intermediary for private donors, trusts and foundations, and businesses, often bringing new funding into the environmental sector. Networking and events for Málaga's diaspora, home and business owners will be arranged.



## Speaking with a Collective Voice

CC aims to boost local impact stories by promoting them to global audiences through digital marketing, press, and events. A communications toolkit will be shared with the local leadership team, with hands-on support for storytelling and brand-building provided.



## Governance & Risk Management

CC ensures robust internal controls are implemented to ensure good governance, high levels of risk and financial management and compliance. The target is to give 75% of funds raised out as grants within three years.



## People & Culture

We build happy, high-performing teams with HR support and training courses through a supportive global community. Once a year local directors will have the opportunity to meet at one of CC's global locations for knowledge exchange meetings. A global advisory panel is available to complement local knowledge.



## Impact & Learning

A measurement, evaluation and learning tool has been developed based on CC's theory of change. A Salesforce based application and reporting tool will be locally configured, and regular strategic webinars hosted by experts are arranged.

# JOIN US!

- **Drive change** at the grassroots with fellow people who care passionately about Avon, Cotswolds, and Bristol
- **Learn and engage** with local conservation experts.
- Become part of a **global movement**.

We will build a community of donors and grant partners, coming together in a shared passion for the Avon, Bristol and Cotswold region.

The Foundation will be open to individual, foundation and corporate donors. Funds will be raised via events, partnerships and digital channels. All donors will receive a high-quality philanthropic advice and management service, led by an experienced team.

In addition to financial support, the Foundation will offer donors opportunities to learn about the local context, and to contribute their time and skills (if donors so wish) to strengthening the impact of locally-focused environmental work.

The Foundation will serve as a platform where donors can directly connect their Foundations with the talent and energy of local changemakers.

Our grant making will be guided by a) what works best for nature, climate and communities, and b) where the unique attributes of philanthropic capital can add the most value.

## How can I help?

- **Champion:** Advocate for our mission by sharing awareness of our Foundation
- **Invite:** Help us brainstorm strategic people who can help us build the Foundation
- **Donate:** You can support as an annual private donor, a steering committee member (min \$10,000 per year) or a business partner.

To discuss - please contact:

### Jade Brudenell

Executive Director, Conservation Collective  
[jade@conservation-collective.org](mailto:jade@conservation-collective.org).



I have managed philanthropic programmes all over the world, and seen up close the difference that well-deployed giving can make – even small sums can be rocket fuel for locally-led organisations, propelling them to greater success and impact. I am delighted to bring this experience back to the ABC region where I was born and bred, and excited to see what this new Foundation can achieve for nature, climate and people in this amazing part of the world"

HARRIET WILLIAMS, CONSULTANT, AVON BRISTOL & COTSWOLDS ENVIRONMENT FOUNDATION

Photo by Lucy Masters





**Protect and restore  
the wild places we know and love**

