

## Higher education sector commits to reverse biodiversity decline through worldwide Nature Positive Universities Alliance

- *During the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15), the University of Oxford and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) announce a new global initiative to drive the world's higher education sector towards a nature-positive future as part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.*
- *Through the Nature Positive Universities Alliance, 111 Universities have already taken an official pledge and begun assessing their environmental impact, in order to make tailored actions to improve their ecological footprint on our planet.*
- *A further 408 Universities worldwide have joined the Nature Positive University network to work towards making an official pledge, supported by a global student ambassador programme*

**OXFORD, MONTREAL, WORLDWIDE | December 8th, 2022** - Today at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15), the University of Oxford and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) announced the launch of the [Nature Positive Universities Alliance](#) – a global network of universities that have made an official pledge to work towards a global Nature Positive goal in order to halt, prevent and reverse nature loss through addressing their own impacts and restoring ecosystems harmed by their activities. This push is part of the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#), a movement to avert climate catastrophe and mass extinction.

The Nature Positive Universities Alliance brings higher education institutions together to use their unique power and influence as drivers of positive change. Universities already carry out environmental and conservation research to help inform government and company action, but by publicly tackling their own supply chains and operational impacts on nature, universities can help guide the wider community on a path to address the twin climate and ecological crises.

### **Harriet Waters, Head of Environmental Sustainability at the University of Oxford said:**

“The University of Oxford has an environmental sustainability strategy with dual targets of net zero carbon and a net gain in biodiversity by 2035. These targets for large institutions are challenging to achieve, but through collaboration and idea-sharing with other universities via the Nature Positive Universities Alliance, we can collectively make progress towards achieving biodiversity net gain.”

The initiative launches with 111 universities from 44 countries, who have made individual pledges to start a journey towards becoming nature positive. University pledges include four key elements: 1) Carrying out baseline assessments; 2) Setting specific, time limited and measurable targets for nature; 3) Taking bold action to reduce biodiversity impacts, protect and restore species and ecosystems, while influencing others to do the same; 4) Transparent annual reporting.

The initiative is part of the UN's Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and builds on the University of Oxford's experience in setting an ambitious target for biodiversity net gain by 2035 alongside net zero commitments. Oxford's Environmental Sustainability Strategy is founded on a study which quantified its [environmental footprint](#) and established a framework to address them.

**E.J. Milner-Gulland, Tasso Leventis Professor of Biodiversity at the Department of Biology, University of Oxford, and co-founder of the Nature Positive Universities Alliance, said:**

"As universities, we occupy a unique position in educating future leaders, researching solutions to environmental challenges, and influencing our communities and governments. By addressing our own institutions' environmental impacts, we can be powerful thought leaders while also directly contributing to restoring nature."

All the founding universities announced today have pledged to assess their impacts to determine the most impactful initiatives to introduce, and to report on their progress. Examples of initiatives so far have included:

- Establishment of **nature-friendly infrastructure** such as ecological corridors at University of Buenos Aires, Argentina and University of Campinas, Brazil and new green walls at the UK's University of Lincoln to support pollinators.
- Contributing to **afforestation and restoration** through the development of institutional forests at Government Dungan College in Bikaner, India, and the University of Aveiro, Portugal.
- Completing **university-wide surveys and audits of biodiversity** at the University of Turku, Finland, and targets to increase biodiversity for all University of Melbourne campuses.
- Improving their supply chain through **sustainable catering**, such as reducing food waste and more sustainable menus at the University of Oxford and producing high quality farmed produce on its land to supply university canteens at Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria.
- Commitments to **improve operational footprints**, such as achieving Green Lab accreditation across all University of Exeter laboratories.
- **Establishment of regional hubs** of universities collaborating towards a nature positive goal in Algeria, Nigeria, India and Canada.

People from a further 408 universities are already a part of the wider network, playing their part in bringing their universities closer to an official nature positive pledge, by developing research, lobbying their senior management and sharing case studies of their activities.

The network also includes a Student Ambassador Programme, which totals over 100 students from across 35 countries who are taking action toward nature positive awareness and approaches on their campuses. They are encouraging their universities to make an official pledge, through advocacy, organization of nature-positive activities such as volunteering for nature restoration, establishment of sapling nurseries and using their studies to further advance their institutions' sustainability.

**Sam Barratt, Chief of Youth, Education and Advocacy at the UN Environment Programme, said:**  
“Universities live at the heart of cities, at the crossroads of students’ futures and provide ground-breaking research that educates and informs society. We are delighted to see Universities will be joining hands to reset our relationship with nature so that, through this Alliance, new action and possibilities are created. The virtue of higher education has come from a reappraisal of the present to then steer the world to a new future. We look forward to seeing how the Nature Positive Universities Alliance does just that for this agenda too.”

The Nature Positive Universities Alliance is calling on other Universities worldwide to join its collaborative network and to make an institutional Nature Positive pledge. Information on different ways for universities and their members to engage, or how to ask your university to consider making a pledge, can be found at [www.naturepositiveuniversities.net](http://www.naturepositiveuniversities.net).

**-ENDS-**

#### **Notes to editors**

Accompanying imagery and videos are available here, along with a list of current pledged Universities: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/cqh6z93ee8okl0w/AABauCw5f3rpo8pKKCVYcDMaa?dl=0>

Interviews with EJ Milner-Gulland, University of Oxford and Sam Barratt, UNEP are available on request. Media contact below:

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- [Keisha Rukikaire](#), Head of News & Media, UN Environment Programme

The Nature Positive Universities Alliance will be launched at the CEPA Fair at COP15 in Montreal on **8th December 2022** at **8am EST / 1pm GMT**. You can register to [join the event virtually here](#).

#### **About Nature Positive Universities**

Nature Positive Universities began in 2022 as a partnership between UNEP and the University of Oxford, established off the back of research by the Department of Biology into the University’s biodiversity footprint. The aim is to engage Universities in the prioritisation of nature restoration within the higher education sector, which will form a major contribution to the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and the Sustainable Development Goals. Universities have a substantial role to play in moving urgently from degrading nature to restoring it: our students are our future leaders, we create knowledge and nurture thinkers, and we directly impact the planet as land owners and consumers. Uniting universities for ecosystem restoration therefore has wider impact into our local communities and beyond.

More information can be found at [www.naturepositiveuniversities.net](http://www.naturepositiveuniversities.net)

#### **About the University of Oxford**

Oxford University has been placed number 1 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings for the seventh year running, and number 2 in the QS World Rankings 2022. At the heart of this success are the twin-pillars of our ground-breaking research and innovation and our distinctive educational offer.

Oxford is world-famous for research and teaching excellence and home to some of the most talented people from across the globe. Our work helps the lives of millions, solving real-world problems through a huge network of partnerships and collaborations. The breadth and interdisciplinary nature of our research alongside our personalised approach to teaching sparks imaginative and inventive insights and solutions.

Through its research commercialisation arm, Oxford University Innovation, Oxford is the highest university patent filer in the UK and is ranked first in the UK for university spinouts, having created more than 200 new companies since 1988. Over a third of these companies have been created in the past three years. The university is a catalyst for prosperity in Oxfordshire and the United Kingdom, contributing £15.7 billion to the UK economy in 2018/19, and supports more than 28,000 full time jobs.

The Department of Biology is a University of Oxford department within the Maths, Physical and Life Sciences Division. It utilises academic strength in a broad range of bioscience disciplines to tackle global challenges such as food security, biodiversity loss, climate change and global pandemics. It also helps to train and equip the biologists of the future through holistic undergraduate and graduate courses. For more information visit [www.biology.ox.ac.uk](http://www.biology.ox.ac.uk).

#### **About the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

#### **About the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration**

The [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030](#), led by the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and partners, covers terrestrial as well as coastal and marine ecosystems. A global call to action, it will draw together political support, scientific research and financial muscle to massively scale up restoration. [Find out how you can contribute to the UN Decade](#). Follow [#GenerationRestoration](#).