

BBC Wildlife Fund: Giving back to the natural world

As the BBC Wildlife Fund begins its wind-down **Amy Coyte** looks back on its achievements

ONE OF THE JEWEL'S in the BBC's crown, the Natural History Unit in Bristol, founded the BBC Wildlife Fund (BBCWF). After years of bringing the wonder and beauty of the natural world into our living rooms whilst at the same time witnessing the dramatic declines in populations of species they were filming, the NHU desperately wanted to give something back.

Since the fund's foundation the BBC

- **Amur tiger: Back from the brink**
- **Cuckoo numbers down nearly 60%**
- **Coral reef at project site destroyed by fish blasting**

has broadcast two live appeals. The first, in 2007, followed BBC One's *Saving Planet Earth* series and raised £1.8 million; it was supported by celebrities including David Attenborough, Graham Norton and Edith Bowman and marked the beginning of a groundbreaking initiative. In 2010 BBC Two commissioned a two-hour appeal programme. This time we adopted the *Children In Need* (CiN) and *Comic Relief* models

with an appeal season encouraging wider BBC engagement and community fundraising. Everyone was excited – and a little daunted – as Kate Humble launched the *Go Wild Season* on the *One Show* in May. Radio 4, Radio 2, BBC learning, BBC Online and BBC Worldwide all joined in. Comparisons with CiN and *Comic Relief* were inevitable but both were warm and generous and the first to remind us of their own humble beginnings.

Tim Scones (*Wild Night In* executive) and the NHU team pulled out all the stops. I was delighted with the open minds and willingness to help we met throughout the BBC. David Attenborough introduced the programme, Kate Humble, Chris Packham and Martin Hughes-Games presented. A range of celebrities supported the charity including Joanna Lumley, Bill Oddie, Steve Backshall and many more.

The Springwatch team auctioned their sofa to start the wild auction. The RSPB offered the rare chance to see Sea Eagles (a project supported by the BBCWF). The list of generous donations inspired us.

The *Wild Night In* raised £1.2 million. The number of viewers actively donating gave a 4.1% conversion rate, well above *Children in Need*'s 2.2% in their previous appeal. And all against the competition of a major world cup game!

Did we make a difference? Most certainly. The variety of life on the planet is central to all our futures. One quarter of all the fish we eat depend on coral reefs at some stage of their life cycle. But if the degradation of coral reefs continues at current rates we will lose almost all

of them over the next thirty years. (75% of coral reefs are under threat right now.) The BBCWF is currently supporting a project run by the Marine Conservation Society, in collaboration with local communities in Malaysia, using innovative techniques to restore coral reefs whilst also tackling the causal issues of degradation. It is not all doom and gloom. There is much hope.

Many of us support wildlife conservation because we cannot envisage being without the natural world. Imagine spring without the chance to hear a cuckoo – yet the UK has lost two thirds of its cuckoos in the last 25 years. Audience donations to the BBCWF are enabling the British Trust for Ornithology to track where cuckoos go when they leave our shores and so hopefully find out how to address their decline.

Reports from our projects regularly highlight the impact the donations have made. For example – the last remaining 450 Amur tigers and 35 Amur leopards now have a chance as a result of the BBCWF's support – visit www.bbc.co.uk/wild for further information about all 87 projects funded.

The BBCWF has supported both iconic popular species and less well known, equally threatened ones. We cannot afford to be complacent or leave it to others – our future lies with the future of biodiversity on this planet.

The BBCWF remains a proud example of what can and should be done.

Amy Coyte is Director of the BBC Wildlife Fund

