

WHAT IF SPECIES HAD RIGHTS?

RIGHTS OF NATURE

'Rights of Nature' is a concept, or way of thinking about how we can redefine our relationship with the natural world. By building on this relationship with reciprocity and care, we can learn (or remember) how to live in harmony with nature.

WHO WILL SPEAK FOR SPECIES WITHOUT A VOICE?

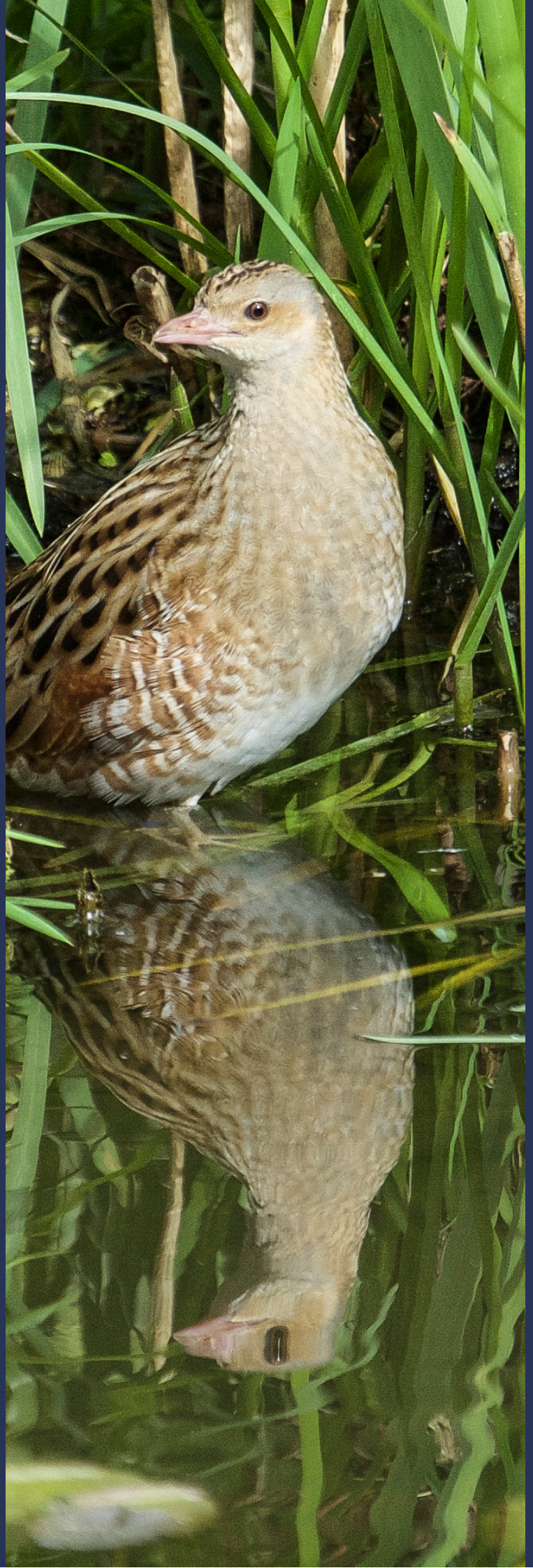
Due to habitat destruction, climate change and other threats, our global species extinction rate is 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than the natural baseline. The UN has called for 'transformative changes' for nature's 'unprecedented dangerous decline'.

Recognising that other species have the most basic of rights - the right to life, may bring us back from the brink.

In 2018, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe - a tribal nation in North America - did just that for manoomin (wild rice), their sacred food and traditional staple food. In doing so they secured the protection of manoomin, as well as for the fresh water resources and habitats upon which it depends. **Species have a right not to be destroyed!**

WILL WE?

Freshwater Pearl Mussels are an indicator of pristine water, they are also Ireland's longest living animal. Yet they are critically endangered. Mining activities, industrial agriculture and damaged bogs are some of the culprits. What if we recognised that species like the freshwater pearl mussel, corncrakes and curlews had a right to exist and their population restored? **Could we be their voice?**



HOW COULD WE RECOGNISE RIGHTS OF NATURE IN OUR LAWS, POLICY AND PRACTICE?

There are different spheres in which this can be done - from engagement at **community level**, to changes in laws, policy or even constitutions by **local and national governments**, but also extending to the development of a new **international** rights of nature movement.

On 3rd April 2021 the **community** of Greencastle, Co. Tyrone asserted the rights of community and rights of nature in the face of a mining threat and associated government abandonment of the ancient Green Road. **'People, nature and eco-systems are all part of our community including mountains, hills, rivers, streams, bogs, trees and all living therein.'** The assertion was a powerful message of community empowerment and solidarity with nature.

Taking inspiration from Blue Mountains County Council in Australia, Derry City and Strabane District Council became the first **local council** on the island to declare a motion on the Rights of Nature. Others have followed, including Fermanagh & Omagh, Belfast, Newry, Mourne and Down, and Donegal County Council; the latter being the first Council south of the border to do so. After these historic declarations, the job remains of finding a pathway to embedding the Rights of Nature in local law, policy, planning and practices.

Already **countries** such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Uganda and the state of Oaxaca, Mexico have written Rights of Nature into their constitutions. Nature now has those who will speak for her if threats arise. Of course this isn't the end of the story as big business also has its voice, but nature is no longer silent and governments have been forced to listen. The **international community** has also recognised rights of nature and the Rights of Nature movement is sweeping the globe. Organisations such as Centre for Democratic and Environmental Rights (CDER) and the Global Alliance for Rights of Nature (GARN) are helping communities, councils and states take a stand for nature. The United Nations are also taking steps forward - in 2009 the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on 'Harmony with Nature'. There are also advances in the global call to make ecocide an international crime.

For more information and resources, visit
www.ejni.net/rights-of-nature
or email Lynda@ejni.net

