

The Royal Agricultural University

Programme Specification:

FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management

2026-27

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION [ACADEMIC YEAR 2026/27]

This Programme Specification is designed for prospective students, current students, academic staff and potential employers. It provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the intended learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if they take full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the teaching, learning and assessment methods, learning outcomes and content of each module can be found in the Module descriptors.

Section 1 – Material Programme Information

Criteria	Details
Validating body	The Royal Agricultural University
Teaching Institution	The Royal Agricultural University
Subject Area	Agricultural Science and Practice (ASP)
Entry Award(s)	FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management
Final Award and exit route(s)	FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management Certificate of Higher Education Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management
Programme title	FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management
Location(s) of study	The Royal Agricultural University
Full time study	2 years
Part-time study	4 years
Language of study	English
Programme start month	September
Period of validation	September 2026 – August 2031
Name of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body	Not applicable
Type of Accreditation	Not applicable
Accreditation due for renewal	Not applicable
UCAS Code	D450
Quercus Code	FWC
HECos Code	
QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s) and other reference points	Subject Benchmark Statement: Agriculture, Rural Environmental Sciences, Animal Studies, Consumer Science, Forestry, Food, Horticulture and Human Nutrition (2024) 100998 - Sustainable Agriculture and Landscape Development 100864 - Ecosystem Ecology and Land Use
Academic level on Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)	Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement (2020) Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies (2022) Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food and Consumer Sciences (2019)
Approval at AQSC	08 October 2025 When printed this programme specification becomes an uncontrolled document. Please visit the RAU's website for the most up to date version of the programme specification: https://www.rau.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate-
Version	16 May 2025

Entry requirements (this should be the standard University entry requirements unless otherwise approved by the Academic Board, and include UCAS entry profile for UG programmes and IELTS)	Required: GCSE minimum five GCSEs at Grade C/4 including English Language and Mathematics (or Maths Numeracy for Welsh applicants) plus satisfactory level 3 qualifications: A-Level: (example grades CD) – minimum of 56 UCAS tariff points (points to include at least one full A-Level or equivalent qualifications) C&G Advanced Technical/BTEC - Level 3 Extended Diploma (1080) at Merit-Pass-Pass International Baccalaureate: 24 points Access to Higher Education: 45 credits at level 3 of which minimum of 15 must be awarded at Merit or higher. (Pass in Functional Skills level 2 are accepted in lieu of GCSE English & Mathematics) • Other level 3 qualifications will be considered. Interest from applicants who may not have the standard entry requirements is also invited. A wide range of qualifications and experience are accepted in order to join University degree programmes. The University always considers evidence of personal, professional (APL) and educational experience, (APEL), which show an ability to meet the demands of their intended programme of study.
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Section 2 - Programme Structure

The structure of all University awards complies with the University's [Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes](#) which includes information about the:

- Rules for progression between the stages of a programme;
- Consequences of failure for referrals, compensation and exist awards;
- Calculation and classification of awards.

FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management (240 credits)

This is a two-year Foundation Degree (FdSc) programme which can be a standalone qualification or be a part of a progression route onto a BSc (Hons) 'top-up', such as the RAUs' BSc Wildlife & Countryside Management. As well as the 2-year full-time option, the programme can also be studied part-time over a 4-year period. The academic year is between September and June.

The accumulation of credits to include a minimum of 120 credits at Level 4 and a minimum of 120 credits at Level 5 through the assessment of taught modules as detailed below.

Year 1 - Level 4

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Optional	Semester
4W002	People and Environmental Change	4	20	Core	1+2

4W003	Species Identification and Ecology	4	20	Core	1+2
4W004	Wildlife Handling, Ethics and Survey	4	20	Core	1+2
4A004	Soil Science and Ecosystem Services	4	20	Core	1+2
4A005	Farming Systems and Sustainability	4	20	Core	1+2
4M002	Professional, Practical and Study Skills	4	20	Core	1+2
	Certificate of Higher Education Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management		120		

Placement

Students will undertake a mandatory 30-day placement (210 hours). This will be in addition to the practical working days provided in the 4M002 module during the academic year, giving a combined total of 50 days. Whilst the placement can start soon after the Easter break, this can also be later in the year, but it should be completed before the start of year 2. There will be a related placement assignment in the 5W006 module.

Year 2 - Level 5

5W002	Biodiversity Recording and Habitat Management	5	20	Core	1+2
5W003	Landscape Recovery and GIS	5	20	Core	1+2
5W004	Environmental Access, Recreation and Education	5	20	Core	1+2
5W005	Nature Restoration and Species Reintroductions	5	20	Core	1+2
5W006	Project Management and Supervisory Skills	5	20	Core	1+2
5M002	Research and Evidence	5	20	Core	1+2
	FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management		240		

Students studying the FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management part time over 4 years will study the following modules in each year of study:

Year 1 – Level 4

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
4W002	People & Environmental Change	4	20	Core	1+2
4W003	Species Identification and Ecology	4	20	Core	1+2
4M002	Professional, Practical and Study Skills	4	20	Core	1+2

Year 2 – Level 4

4W004	Wildlife Handling, Ethics and Survey	4	20	Core	1+2
4A004	Soil Science and Ecosystem Services	4	20	Core	1+2
4A005	Farming Systems and Sustainability	4	20	Core	1+2
	Certificate of Higher Education Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management		120		

Year 3 - Level 5

Module code	Module title	Level	Credit value	Core/ Elective	Semester
5W002	Biodiversity Recording and Habitat Management	5	20	Core	1+2
5W003	Landscape Recovery and GIS	5	20	Core	1+2
5W006	Project Management and Supervisory Skills	5	20	Core	1+2

Year 4 – Level 5

5W005	Nature Restoration and Species Reintroductions	5	20	Core	1+2
5W004	Environmental Access, Recreation and Education	5	20	Core	1+2
5M002	Research and Evidence	5	20	Core	1+2
	FdSc Wildlife Conservation and Countryside Management		240		

Section 3 – Programme overview and Programme aims

The effective conservation of species, ecosystems and natural resources is vital for future sustainable development. The FdSc Wildlife and Countryside Management programme provides the academic knowledge, applied ecological theory and extensive hands-on field experience needed to manage habitats and conserve wildlife, equipping graduating students with the skills and knowledge that employers are looking for. Academic support is an integral part of this programme, and this aspect is emphasized in the upfront 'introductory' module (People & Environmental Change), which is intended to ease the transition of new students, some with lower entry tariffs, into higher education.

The intended educational aims of this Foundation Degree are to:

- Provide education and training delivering the appropriate knowledge and skills required for future employees in wildlife conservation and ecological occupations.
- Promote the acquisition of transferable skills to meet the future needs of employment in wildlife, conservation, and ecology-related occupations. Make available a progression route for those completing level 3 education and for those already employed in relevant

agencies as part of their continuing personal and professional development activities.

- Facilitate a progression route for students who successfully complete this Foundation Degree to proceed onto an appropriate BSc Honours conversion programme such as the BSc (Honours) in Wildlife and Countryside Management (top up) at the RAU.
- Stimulate a desire to pursue lifelong learning in both vocational and academic subjects.
- Enable existing workers in such jobs to pursue their lifelong learning further and to develop their skills through studying on this programme through part-time attendance.
- Assist both employed and volunteer workers who complete this programme to understand and respond to the changing and increasing pressures to conserve and enhance both the farmed and natural environments.

'Wildlife Conservation' and 'Countryside Management' are broad study areas, with each being a combination of interactions between both animals and plants, as well as with their environments, as well as the linkages with humans and the effects we have. This programme focuses on the conservation of wildlife and habitats, framed within a farmed environment, that are particularly relevant to the UK. However, since conservation is naturally a global issue, a range of international perspectives and case studies will also be considered.

Section 4 – Programme Sustainability

Fundamental to our Programmes is how they align with the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Goals have been set by the United Nations General Assembly and are designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" to be achieved by 2030. Each of these has been mapped against the programme modules and are presented in Section 5. In a broader sense, students are asked to develop forward-thinking processes that evaluate how the things they are taught and learning about sit within the economic, environmental and social sustainability framework. In addition, the programme has been designed and delivered in ways that widen diversity opportunities, enabling us to access the best talent. As such, equality, diversity and inclusivity are integral both in the recruitment process, as well as in the teaching and learning. Staff undertake regular CPD to reinforce and support such approaches.

Section 5 – Programme intended learning outcomes

On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to demonstrate the following Learning Outcomes (LOs):

Knowledge and Understanding

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s

1.	Understand and apply concepts, principles and theories of wildlife conservation and management both in the field and within ex-situ collections in line with the principles of sustainable development and the ecosystem approach. (SDGs 11, 12, 13, 15, 17)	4W002, 4W003, 4A004, 4M002, 5B006, 4A005, 5W004, 5W005
2.	Understand the roles of regulatory and advisory bodies and apply in practice the policies, legislation and designations involved in the protection of wildlife and habitats in both rural and urban contexts. (SDGs 17, 15, 16)	4W002, 5W004, 4A004, 4M002, 5W006, 5B006
3.	Demonstrate an understanding of the ecology and conservation status of a range of species and ecosystems both in terms of theoretical understanding and live case studies from conservation practitioners. (SDGs 14, 15, 13)	4W003, 4M002, 5W002, 5W005
4.	Discuss the importance of wildlife conservation and sustainable use of environmental resources alongside the expectations of industry, agriculture, and society and the challenges associated with this at local, regional and global scales. (SDGs 11, 12, 15, 17)	4W002, 4A004, 5B006, 4A005, 5W004

Intellectual, Professional, Key skills

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s
1.	Understand and demonstrate a critical knowledge of subject specific theories, concepts and principles. (SDGs 3, 4, 9, 13, 14, 15)	4W003, 4A004, 5B006, 5W004, 5W005
2.	Apply the skills necessary for academic study and enquiry. (SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15)	4W002, 5B006, 5W004
3.	Demonstrate the skills necessary to plan, conduct and report on a variety of wildlife, habitat, and environmental conservation management projects. (SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17)	4W003, 5W006, 5W002, 4A005
4.	Apply professional judgement to balance risks, costs, benefits, safety, reliability, aesthetics and environmental impact. (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17)	5W004, 4M002, 5W006

Programme specific skills

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s
1.	Plan and undertake a variety of species and environmental surveys and analyse and report the results. (SDGs 3, 4, 13, 14, 15)	4W003, 4A004, 5B006, 5W002, 5W004
2.	Appreciate the role of academic research in ecology and conservation management and be able to design and carry out research projects consistent with the level of study. (SDGs 13, 14, 15)	4W003, 5B006
3.	Undertake a range of professional practical skills including taxonomic identification, wildlife handling and survey, conservation and land management techniques. (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17)	5W004, 4M002, 5W006, 5W002
4.	Make positive contributions to wildlife conservation by combining real world practical conservation activities with academic theory. (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17)	5W004, 4W003, 4A004, 4M002, 5W006, 5B006, 5W002, 5W005

Section 6 – Approach to Learning and Teaching delivery

The foundation degree programme adopts a mixed methods approach to learning and teaching. That is, the programme develops students' knowledge and skills through class based, field based (including practical activities, trips and visits) and laboratory-based teaching, learning and assessment. In practice this means that students are exposed to a range of different teaching and learning approaches including lectures, seminars, workshops, practical sessions, field visits and laboratory work that helps them to develop the graduate attributes that employers are looking for (see also Section 10).

Experiential learning is enhanced via the RAU's Wild Campus Project, the Living Land Laboratory Initiative and the Zero-dig Enterprise. Extensive use is also made of other local conservation sites and estates, alongside several overnight visits to other parts of the country too. A significant portion of the face-to-face teaching is given over to practical learning, helping better enhance the complementary graduate skills employers are seeking.

The teaching and learning on the programme are based on a minimum of three hours contact per module per week and this is complemented by practical work and field visits which may extend this contact time. Materials and resources for teaching, learning and assessment are captured on the RAU's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) known as Gateway. This provides a one-stop-shop for students to be able to access all the information they need to progress their studies. In the classroom, academics use a wide range of technology to support and enhance their teaching and learning whether that is the use of specific software for the handling of data or the use of technology such as QGIS, vevox, mind-mapping, padlett and socrativ.

Specifically, the face-to-face sessions are designed to:

- Allow students to express their views
- Enable academic interaction
- Facilitate discussions
- Provide opportunities to practice presentations
- Encourage structured research
- Enable sharing and diversification of information and experience
- Introduce group work and develop team works skills

Practical Activities & Enquiry-based Learning

A significant part of the programme is practical fieldwork, typically, 0.5 to 1 day a week throughout the academic year. This includes hands-on management and restoration of habitats and species (e.g. grassland/ woodland restoration for butterfly conservation), biodiversity surveys (e.g. UKHab Surveys, National Vegetation Classification (NVC), farmland bird monitoring), and habitat management experiment plots. Many of these approaches make use of online technology and software to support teaching and learning. There is also ample opportunity to meet and work alongside, and to network with, a range of organisations and people in the sectors.

Field activities are also combined with an enquiry-based approach to learning which encourages a diversity of approaches and encourages innovative ideas addressing environmental management issues. Management questions are explored with students and are refined into actual field experiments where data is generated and analysed, giving evidence-based recommendations for better management approaches. This combines the academic and practical elements of the course giving solid 'real-world' outcomes.

Section 7 – Approach to Assessment

The programme is based on six modules per academic year, each of which has a 20-credit allocation. The 20-credit modules are spread across the academic year (Sep-Jun) with most having interim assessments alongside the final, end of year submissions. A credit system is used to ensure a balanced workload across the programme, with each credit point requiring approximately 10 hours of student work. Thus a 20-credit module will require a notional input of 200 hours of work, and a complete academic year of 120 credits will require 1200 hours of work, or approximately 40 hours per week for full time, and half of this for part-time.

Whilst exams and in class tests do feature, there is more emphasis on a range of coursework types and some practical assessments (e.g. animal handling). The emphasis on other forms of assessment stems from the need for students to have the skills and outcomes to make a difference in the sector they seek to work in but also, as a global citizen who promotes a sustainable ethos. A wide range of assessment techniques will be applied throughout the programme to confirm learning outcomes. These will include:

- Academic research reports
- Professional reports
- Employers reporting on work-based experience
- Case studies
- Essays
- Conservation management plans

- Digital in-class tests
- Oral presentations
- Portfolios/appraisals
- Practical skills
- Production of publicity and information materials

Formative feedback is given within modules guiding students at strategic points of the Programme prior to summative assessment submissions. Assessments are normally set at the start of each module with a date for submission before the end of each module. Students are responsible for ensuring that assessments are submitted on time. Any non-submission or non-attendance will be recorded as zero and a note placed against the individual assessment and against the module.

Overall, the programme is assessed through*:

	Learning and Teaching			Assessment		
	Directed	Independent	Placement	Exam	Coursework	Practical
Year 1	30.00%	70.00%	0.00%	8.33%	86.67%	5.00%
Year 2	31.58%	68.42%	0.00%	5.00%	90.00%	5.00%

**Academic Quality will provide the data*

Section 8 – Course work grading and feedback

Assessment is an integral part of the learning experience of students. All University programmes are assessed in a range of different ways, each developed to provide the most appropriate means of demonstrating the student's achievement of a specified learning outcome.

The University operates standard pass criteria which can be found in the [RAU Academic Regulations](#). The normal basis for awards will be the overall average score in the final assessment, graded as follows:

Grade	Equivalent mark
Distinction	70% and above
Merit	60% - 69%
Pass	40% - 59%
Fail	0% - 40%

The final assessment will comprise an average score of the results of level 4 weighted at 30% plus the results of level 5 weighted at 70%.

In addition to assigning a percentage mark to the work, the tutor adds comments; usually about the strengths and weaknesses of the piece as well as advice about improving the work. All assessment decisions are subject to internal moderation and external scrutiny by the programme's External Examiners.

Section 9 – Work-based Learning Placement

In addition to the campus-based learning activities gained within the academic year, students will also be expected to complete a work-based learning placement, prior to their return at the beginning of year 2. The placement typically occurs during the summer but timing is flexible, with a start to the placement being possible soon after the Easter break. Placements are designed to further enhance and develop student graduate skills and employability alongside reinforcing learning and allowing for networking. The placement opportunities are generally viewed very favourably by potential employers and provide you with the chance to experience real organisational life at first hand. It is not uncommon, in some situations, for students to find that a placement may also result in a job offer, for take-up after graduation.

Foundation degree students will be expected to do a placement of duration equivalent to 10 weeks (50 days), broken down as follows:

- 30 days (minimum) of work placement with an external provider, typically over the summer, starting anytime after the Easter break.
- The additional 20 days will be integrated into year 1, mainly via the 4M002 module practical sessions.

The work-based learning placement will be assessed via a written report portfolio in the year 2 Project Development and Supervisory Skills module.

The placement opportunity is open to wide ranging possibilities of type of organisation, and also country. Previous placements have been with the National Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts, Ecological Consultancies as well as African Game Reserves and Sea Turtle Conservation Projects in the Bahamas!

The Placement Coordinator, assisted by the subject Academics, will provide support for students during the search process, and while the placement is underway, and they will be pleased to talk to students about possible placements. It is important for students to give thought to the placement in good time in order to arrange the best possible opportunity. Full placement details will be given in advance about the approval process, things to consider prior to and during the placement, and the related level 5 assignment.

Section 10 – RAU Graduate Framework

At the RAU we have chosen five values to underpin our learning community. These are the values which we will all work by and for which we want the RAU to be known for. We aim for our graduates to be:

Collaborative

We believe in the power of working together. We are stronger as a community of practice - inspiring each other, identifying shared goals, and providing reciprocal support leads to greater success.

Open-minded

We are receptive to new ideas and we value the diversity of experiences and skills. We are committed to listening to everyone across the RAU community.

Resourceful

We adopt creative approaches to achieve our goals while setting higher standards, promoting professionalism and sustainability.

Responsible

Individually and collectively, we take accountability for our actions working with integrity to achieve the highest ethical standards.

Inclusive

We acknowledge the fundamental value and dignity of all individuals and are committed to maintaining an environment that seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination and respects diverse traditions, heritages, and experiences.



Section 11 - Progression

As the Foundation Degree students advance from year 1 through to their completion of year 2, they not only progress from the perspectives of their subject knowledge, understanding and professional skills, but also in their appreciation as to the expectations of them from future employers in the wildlife and countryside sectors. Having such an awareness of what the employer might want from them will, in turn, allow students to formulate their own development action plan ensuring they are ticking the appropriate boxes to best place them for any upcoming job interviews. These aspects are built into the 4M002 and 5W006 modules. Details of the generic criteria are given in Section 10.

Whilst this is a two-year Foundation Degree (FdSc) programme which can be a standalone qualification most students decide to progress onto a BSc (Hons) 'top-up', such as the RAUs' BSc (Hons) Wildlife & Countryside Management. Most of our foundation degree students do choose to follow this route and are very successful. Typical jobs that have been secured in the past amongst graduates have included:

- Countryside Ranger
- Wildlife Reserve Manager
- Ecological Surveyor/ Consultant
- Conservation / Biodiversity Officer
- Farming and Wildlife Advisor
- Environmental Education Officer

The programme has developed strong linkages with a wide number and range of conservation and environmental organisations including the Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Cotswold Conservation Board (AONB), Butterfly Conservation, various Ecological Consultancies, Local Authorities, amongst many others. Students have multiple opportunities to meet with and often work alongside organisations and people from the conservation sector via our practical field activities and teaching sessions.

Academic pathways are also available with some of our graduates progressing onto MSc or PhD programmes, within students' chosen field of expertise.

Section 12 – Student support, wellbeing and counselling

The University is offering a wide range of support to all RAU students, including practical advice and guidance as well as emotional support.

Disability and Neurodivergent support

We support disabled & neurodivergent students and students with long-term health conditions. These disabilities include dyslexia, mental health diagnoses, ADHD, autism, mobility challenges, sensory impairments and many more. Students are encouraged to make contact with Student Services as early as possible by emailing: studentservices@rau.ac.uk. When you tell us about a disability, you will be offered support based on your specific needs, which can include:

- Alternative exam arrangements such as extra time, rest breaks, or a smaller room.
- Access to support workers such as study skills tutors, specialist mentors, readers and scribes.
- Access to assistive technology (AT), which helps remove barriers to learning, communication and participation. The AT can help students who face difficulties with taking notes, organisation and time management.

Mental Health Support

Student Services has a dedicated team who are here to support you with the emotional challenges that can crop up during university life. They take a wide-ranging approach to

mental health support, and the team ensure they are available for informal chats as well as providing in-depth support for students with emerging or existing mental health conditions.

The team also offer mental health support in the form of daily drop-in sessions, weekly group Time to Talk sessions, mental health workshops, awareness and campaign days and 1:1 confidential meetings for when students face challenges to their wellbeing.

Student Services can also refer students for counselling sessions with an external agency if they are required. They can also signpost you to our Student Assistance Programme, providing 24/7 care, support and advice.

Academic Support Tutor Programme

All students have access to the Academic Support Tutor (AST) programme, which provides high-quality academic support for students. ASTs provide timetabled group tutorials and individual support for students who are most at risk. Group tutorials focus on providing high-quality academic support at the appropriate academic level; advice and guidance in relation to the course; and advice about making study choices on the course (in line with the AST Handbook). Individual support focuses on continuation and may be in person or online..

Section 13 – Enhancing the Quality of Learning and Teaching

The programme is subject to the University's rigorous quality assurance procedures which involve subject specialist and internal peer review of the course at periodic intervals, normally of 6 years. This process ensures that the programme engages with the applicable national Subject Benchmarks and references the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

All programmes are monitored on an annual basis where consideration is given to:

- External Examiner Reports
- Key statistics including data on retention and achievement
- Results of the Student Satisfaction Surveys
- Feedback from Student Delegates from programme committees
- Feedback from Student-Staff Liaison committees
- Annual Programme Monitoring