

Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve Activities 2025



Vattenriket 

Kristianstads Vattenrike is a UNESCO-designated biosphere reserve that serves as a model area for sustainable development. There are almost 800 biosphere reserves worldwide, eight of which are in Sweden.

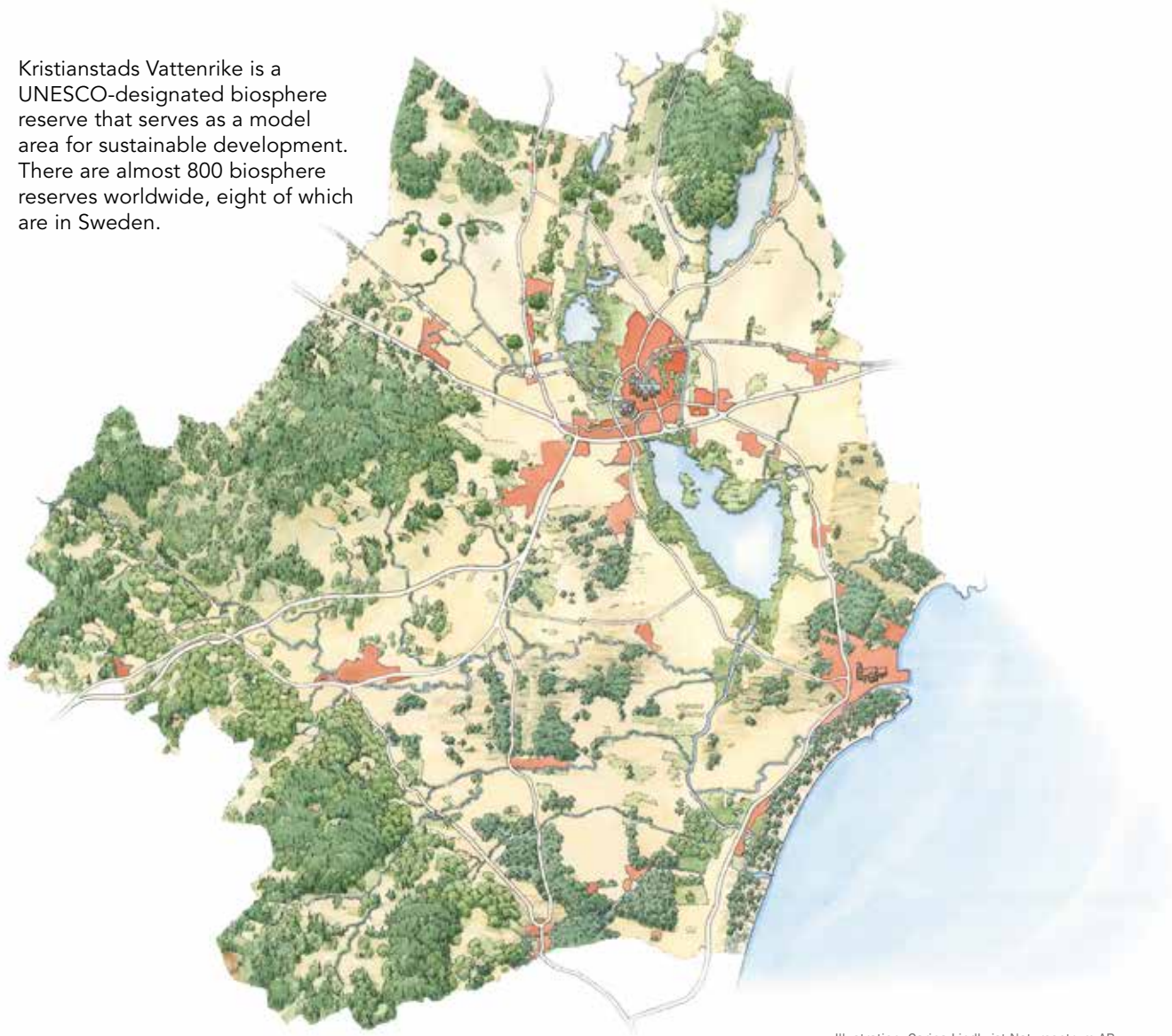


Illustration: Carina Lindkvist Naturcentrum AB

Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve

Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve (Vattenriket) occupies two thirds of the area of the municipality of Kristianstad. This rich cultural landscape is endowed with almost every type of natural habitat to be found in Sweden.

The majestic River Helge å is a central feature. Fed by streams from the ridges and plains, it flows into Lakes Araslövssjön and Hammarsjön before reaching the sea in Hanöbukten Bay. The river is fringed by wetlands and seasonally flooded grasslands, but there are also leafy forests and dry sandy arable lands within the reserve.

Such variety creates numerous natural habitats: the species-rich

reserve, less than one fifth of one percent of the area of Sweden, is a refuge for some 20 % of the nation's red-listed species.

Kristianstad Municipality is committed to making the biosphere reserve a model area for sustainable development. Producing and sharing knowledge about the landscape and nature is crucial for an ecologically, economically and socially sustainable society, so we make inventories, publish reports, work with researchers, host conferences and welcome some 90,000 visitors a year to the naturum Vattenriket visitor centre.

We collaborate with local associations, companies and landowners to use and conserve natural values. We create wetlands and restore sandy grasslands. Species diversity and efficient ecosystems help us to cope better with climate change and other challenges.

Enabling people to experience nature inspires them to help conserve it. Vattenriket has some 20 visitor sites with observation towers, marked trails and outdoor museums. The jewel in our crown is the naturum visitor centre with exhibitions, a meeting room, restaurant and wide programme of activities. Here we explain how the biosphere reserve works and encourage visitors to explore the area for themselves.

Results have been positive. At the Pulken visitor site, migrating cranes, visitors and farmers co-exist in harmony. Catfish have been successfully reintroduced into the river, and otters fish close to the naturum. Thanks to a new-found respect for natural values, the wetlands are no longer seen as a problem, but as a valuable resource for Kristianstad – proof of a new insight into how we use our natural assets.

2025 – The year in review

I look back on 2025 with pride and joy. Deriving pleasure from shared achievements is important, not least in times like ours, and Kristianstads Vattenrike's 20th anniversary as a biosphere reserve gave us numerous opportunities throughout the year not only to celebrate, but also to recall our successes and build momentum for continued progress.

The year also saw us complete and submit a second 10-year evaluation report to UNESCO. In more than 200 pages we described our work and development, highlighting good examples – 17 in all – from our wide-ranging activities. Seventeen seemed an appropriate number, as the UN's Sustainable Development Goal number 17 focuses on partnerships, collaboration and implementation, all of which are central to our biosphere mission.

The examples chosen reflect the breadth of our work: activities, initiatives, meetings, experiences, knowledge exchange and collaboration with many different target groups – always with the aim of benefiting both nature and people.

Kristianstads Vattenrike became Sweden's first biosphere reserve in 2005, and in 2025, through the collective endeavours of Lund, Eslöv and Sjöbo municipalities, Storkriket was established as our nation's eighth. The 2025 World Congress in China adopted a new 10-year strategy for all 784 biosphere reserves worldwide, which will guide work on our Vattenriket action programme for 2026–2030.

2025 was a busy year for us with an increase in visitors to naturum – which attracted international attention after featuring in the Venice Architecture Biennale – a popular biosphere camp, 21 newly certified biosphere ambassadors, a successful youth forum with participants from the Baltic Sea region, new insights into the species-rich meadows of Mosslunda, the completion of pike spawning wetlands, new research collaborations and international visits that included a particularly memorable meeting with the mayor of Uman in Ukraine.

At the same time, we are reminded of the importance of seeing the bigger picture in the little things. Meeting

children's curiosity at the Copy Nature Wheel or witnessing the migration of sea trout via the River Mjöån's new fish camera brings our biosphere mission to life in a tangible, vivid and impactful way.

With this as our foundation, we are continuing our journey, drawing on experience, commitment and collaboration to write the next chapter in the story of Kristianstads Vattenrike.



Carina Wettemark

Carina Wettemark
Coordinator, Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve
Manager, Biosphere Unit and naturum
Municipal Executive Office, Kristianstad Municipality

2025

40

Youth Forum
participants from

6

Baltic Sea countries

1

new fishing pier at
Hammarlundsvallen

632

species recorded
in the Mosslunda
inventory

2

student reports on
wetlands construction
at Fredriksdalsviken

33 370

visits to the
Årum boardwalk

21

Biosphere Camp kids

93 997

visitors to naturum

28

crane wardens to
welcome and assist
visitors at Pulken

1

new fish camera
by the River Mjöån

20

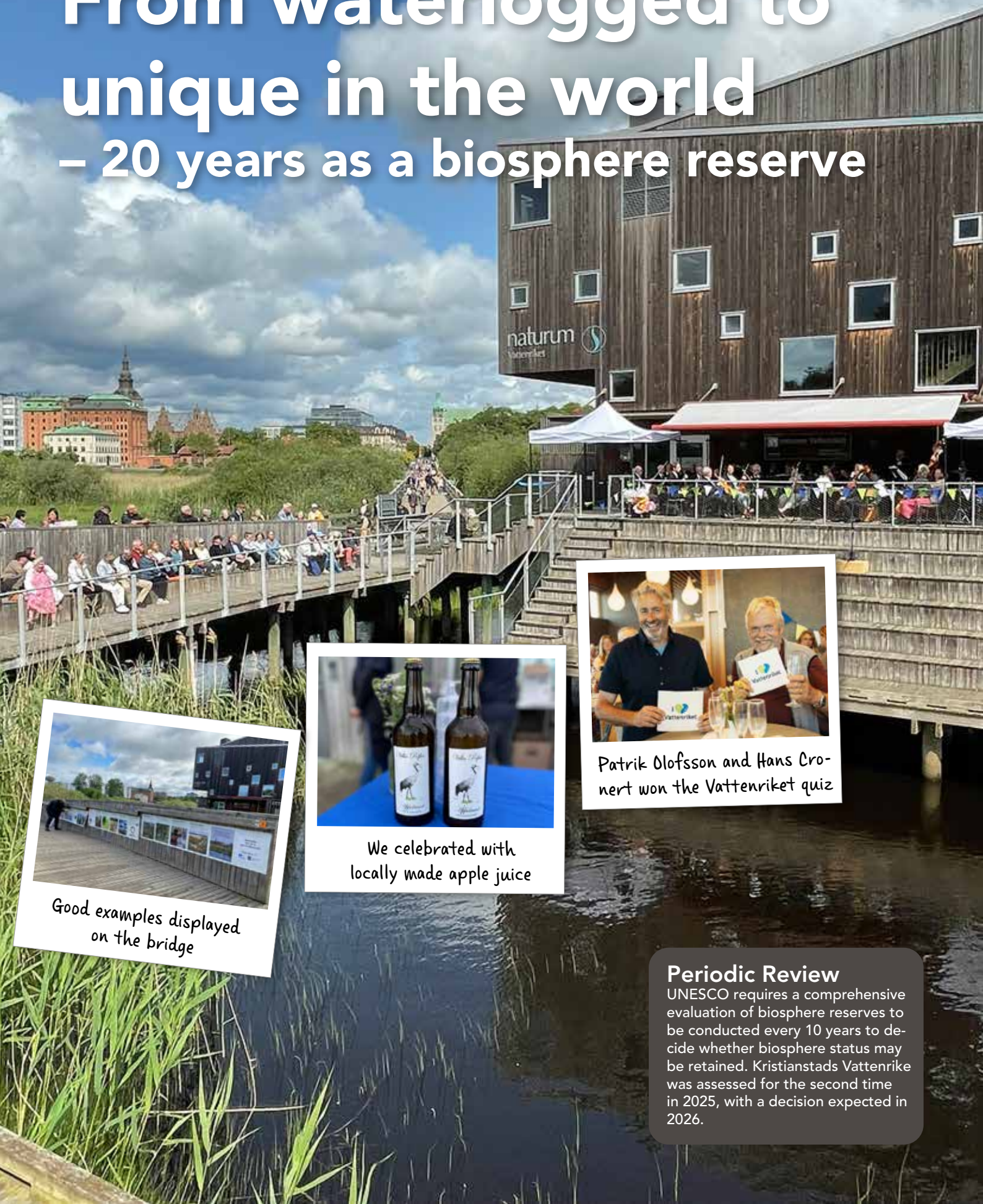
centimetres in size
means pike fry
are ready to leave
the pike wetlands

10

latest years of
biosphere work
evaluated

From waterlogged to unique in the world

– 20 years as a biosphere reserve



Good examples displayed
on the bridge



We celebrated with
locally made apple juice



Patrik Olofsson and Hans Cronert won the Vattenrike quiz

Periodic Review

UNESCO requires a comprehensive evaluation of biosphere reserves to be conducted every 10 years to decide whether biosphere status may be retained. Kristianstads Vattenrike was assessed for the second time in 2025, with a decision expected in 2026.



People flocked to the classical concert celebrating 20 years of the biosphere reserve.



Camilla Palm, Chair of the Municipal Executive Committee, and Heléne Fritzson, her predecessor when the biosphere reserve was formed in 2005, congratulate biosphere coordinator Carina Wettemark (centre).



The Biosphere Bus toured projects in the wetlands, the sandy grasslands and on the coast.



Every celebration needs a cream cake.



Proud partners celebrate 20 successful years.

In 2025 Kristianstads Vattenrike celebrated 20 years as a biosphere reserve – an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and recognise the dedication of all who have helped preserve and develop the area's high natural values.

UNESCO designated Vattenriket a biosphere reserve in 2005. Its mission: to serve as a model for sustainable development through collaboration, dialogue and best practice.

Over 20 years we have worked to restore seasonally flooded grasslands, improve water quality, promote biodiversity, establish international collaborations and encourage more people to explore the area for themselves. Today biosphere work is an integral part of the municipality's sustainable development work.

Since opening in 2010 the naturum visitor centre has welcomed over 1.4 million visitors. The iconic building in the heart of the wetlands is a hub for knowledge, meetings and learning, where exhibitions, activities and school collaborations cultivate curiosity and inspire awe for nature.

Sustenance for body and soul

On Sweden's National Day crowds flocked to the naturum to hear Kristianstad Symphony Orchestra play Handel's Water Music. While visitors celebrated the anniversary with local cider and traditional spettekaka cakes, biosphere coordinator Carina Wettemark praised the many dedicated individuals and organisations involved in developing the biosphere reserve.

The jubilee year also featured numerous local activities: businesses working in the biosphere spirit were highlighted, farmers showed how to put nature-based solutions into practice, and a biosphere bus made tours to ongoing biosphere projects.

A positive change in attitude

Partners, stakeholders and former colleagues met for an evening of mingling and celebration with cream cake and a music quiz. MEP Heléne Fritzson expressed pride in how attitudes to water – no longer a problem, but now a resource – had changed. Camilla Palm, Chair of the Municipal Executive Committee, urged Kristianstad residents to take pride in the unique initiative that has emerged.

UNESCO statutory review

We also submitted a second Periodic Review to UNESCO in 2025. This statutory evaluation summarises ten years of collaboration, projects and measures for climate action and biodiversity.

The biosphere reserve is a platform for cooperation among officials, researchers, associations, businesses and engaged residents. While local engagement remains fundamental, international collaboration has also been strengthened. One example, the Biosphere for Baltic network, has led to an EU project focused on nature-based solutions to address climate challenges and strengthen biodiversity.

Our 20th anniversary demonstrated the power of long-term collaboration and commitment. Now we can look ahead with pride and optimism, as we prepare a new action programme to continue to lead the way towards a sustainable future.



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

Naturum Vattenriket visades på Arkitekturbiennalen i Venedig

Naturum Vattenriket was showcased in UNESCO's Deep Surfaces exhibition at the 2025 Architecture Biennale in Venice to demonstrate how high-quality architecture and engaging activities contribute to UNESCO's sustainable development goals.

As the sole Nordic representative among some 50 biosphere reserve visitor centres, World Heritage sites and geoparks from around the world, naturum Vattenriket was presented through photos, text, and film as an inspiring example of how to disseminate knowledge, spark engagement and serve as a hub for collaboration.

Among around 100 guests invited to

the opening in UNESCO's premises in Venice was naturum director Karin Magntorn, who observed keen interest in both Vattenriket and our biosphere operations.

Many guests were fascinated by a drone sequence showing how the naturum visitor centre blends seamlessly into its natural surroundings in the city centre environment. The combination of architecture, setting and the way naturum welcomes and engages its visitors was particularly highlighted.

By strengthening the image of Vattenriket as a place where nature and people can meet in a harmonious way, participation in Venice opens the door to new contacts and increased international interest.



Unesco's Venice office



Nature-based solutions for the Baltic Sea

Pupils from Önnestad Upper Secondary School took part in the restoration of the River Mjöån, a learning site in the international Supported by Nature project that demonstrates how nature-based solutions can strengthen Baltic Sea ecosystems.

Supported by Nature is a collaborative project within the Biosphere for Baltic network. The goal is to create 17 learning sites in the Baltic Sea region, focusing on wetlands, coastal water habitats and watercourse restoration. Mjöån is among the sites chosen for hands-on learning.

Guided by limnologist Per Torstensson, pupils loosened river substrate using the Hartijoki method and constructed freshwater fauna refuges from stones and dead wood. Such initiatives pro-

vide better spawning grounds for sea trout and improve water quality. The learning sites give students hands-on experience of nature conservation and sustainability, as they see for themselves how nature-based solu-

tions contribute to cleaner water and increased biodiversity.

This is just one concrete example of how nature itself can be part of the solution — and how learning and conservation go hand in hand.



New pike wetlands for ecosystem balance

New pike wetlands help rebalance the River Helge å ecosystem, benefiting pike and other species, and improving local grazing lands.

The Biosphere Office has established pike wetlands near Kavrö Bridge and Graften to strengthen pike reproduction. Limnologist Per Torstensson released a handful of

pike into two of the wetlands in April to initiate spawning. By mid-summer he was able to release large numbers of 20 cm fry, big enough to eat sticklebacks instead of falling prey to them. Per hopes the fish will return in two years' time to spawn.

The new wetlands should also attract waders and other species. But landowners benefit too, as areas once overgrown can now be used as



damp pasture.

The measures – part of a WWF project to restore the Baltic Sea's vitality – create a more balanced ecosystem where pike, birds and agriculture can thrive in harmony.





Waves for Change – young voices for

In June some 40 young adults from biosphere reserves in the Baltic Sea region met in Vattenriket for the youth forum Waves for Change. Over four days, they explored marine life, learned about nature-based solutions and formulated sustainable visions for the Baltic Sea of tomorrow.

Furuboda Conference Centre was the base for lectures, workshops and field trips. The aim was to create engagement, build regional networks among young adults and deepen their understanding of nature-based solutions to the challenges facing our sea.

Using the 'What if' method, participants developed visions grounded in hope, solidarity and empowerment in a spirit fully aligned with Vattenriket's work to inspire minds and encourage changes in attitude. The conclusions were presented in words and pictures to representatives from HELCOM, the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO, the Swedish Institute for the Marine Environment, the Municipality of Kristianstad and Kristianstad University.

Paintings depicted a sea in balance: clean, healthy water rich in biodiversity. Gently swaying eelgrass and bladderwrack teeming with life symbolise a future in harmony with nature that benefits people and ecosystems alike.

Inspiration, collaboration and nature-based solutions were highlighted as paths forward: from solar panels and reuse to community science and education. By actively involving young people in decision-making in this way, education, sustainable community planning and ocean awareness can pave the way to behavioural change.

The forum was organised by Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve as part of the Swedish Institute funded project Biosphere for Baltic: Future Generations.

Youths – a key target group

Young adults are a key target group both in UNESCO's global strategy and for the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO. The Future Generations





Participants got to know Vattenriket, from Helge å ...



... to sandy grasslands ...



... River Mjöån and the sea.

or the Baltic Sea

project was launched specifically to draw on the perspectives, insights and visions for tomorrow that young people contribute.

After four intensive days, participants returned home with new knowledge, inspiration and optimism for the future. The project continues as the forum's call to action, paintings, statements and photos will soon form the basis for an exhibition and a handbook on how to engage young people in biosphere work.

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“It's been a fantastic experience, meeting new people, listening to inspiring lectures and feeling such a strong sense of community. We've learnt a lot that can help us achieve great things together in the future.”

Mira Prost, Archipelago Sea Biosphere Reserve, Finland.

“The forum brought young people together, inspired new ideas and lay the foundation for a future network.”

Oliver Matto, West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve, Estland

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Inspiring interest in nature at Näsby



NaturligtVis at Näsby offered pupils new nature experiences in Vattenriket – from crane watching to netting river fauna.

The NaturligtVis project, led by educators from naturum, enabled pupils from Lingenäs and Frökneård schools to explore nature in Vattenriket. During the year this included everything from cranes at Pulken to the species-rich River Vramsån and birdlife around naturum.

Nature as a classroom

Field trips and nature-based education aroused curiosity in animals, seasons and ecological connectivity. Lessons were linked to the schools' work on migratory birds and ecosystems, with many pupils seeing things they had

previously only heard about in the classroom.

The aim of the project, carried out as part of the Näsby Urban Development initiative and funded by Sparbanken Skåne, was to strengthen children's experiences of their natural surroundings and lay the foundation for their future interest in nature and sustainable development.



The year in review



Community science for knowledge and engagement

Nature educator Sam Peterson took part in a pan-European conference on the island of Vilm in the Southeast Rügen Biosphere Reserve, organised to discuss how community science can contribute to scientific understanding and greater engagement with nature.

Sam presented a paper on Seaweed Research Summer, a project where school students collect data on Baltic Sea bladderwrack forests to gain a deeper understanding of the marine environment and provide researchers with valuable data. This sparked interest in expanding the project into a broader collaboration among Baltic Sea neighbours.

The conference shared inspiration from many biosphere reserves, opening the door to new collaborations that strengthen connections between people and nature.



Copy Nature Wheel showcases nature's smart solutions

Visitors to the naturum auditorium in 2025 discovered some of nature's smartest solutions, as our nature interpreters spun the Copy Nature Wheel and gave examples of Vattenriket species that have inspired nature-based inventions.

Spiders spin a thread thinner than a human hair, as elastic as a rubber band and stronger than steel – properties that have led scientists to develop artificial spider silk. Mussels attach themselves using an adhesive that works underwater, a tactic that has inspired new materials in medicine and construction.

Biomimicry – the art of imitating nature – demonstrates how nature's own ingenious solutions can contribute to sustainable development. By sparking curiosity and inspiring learning, naturum serves as a bridge between natural science and everyday life, helping more people to see nature as a source of knowledge and sustainable ideas.



NordMAB network – inspiration and experience sharing

Vattenriket delegates were able to enjoy Norway's majestic scenery, mid-night-sun hikes and valuable exchanges of experience, when the NordMAB network met in Lofoten.

Our own presentations focused on work with nature-based solutions in the Interreg project Supported by Nature and the Swedish Institute funded initiative Biosphere for Baltic: Future Generations, which promotes youth engagement for a sustainable Baltic Sea.

Exchanges with colleagues from the Nordic countries, Scotland and Canada inspired new ideas for sustainable tourism, education and project development. The meeting strengthened cooperation by demonstrating the transnational potential of methods, while also contributing to the network's goal of promoting sustainable development and nature conservation in northern regions.



Finnish support helps us grow the sea's own nursery

In May and June almost half a hectare of eelgrass was planted off the coast of Åhus, thanks to support from Finland's John Nurminen Foundation. Eelgrass meadows play a crucial role in stabilising the seabed, reducing erosion, capturing carbon dioxide and providing nursery habitats for fish.

Larger, contiguous populations of eelgrass in areas where the plant was previously scarce should help restore the vitality of the Baltic Sea. Results from earlier plantings have been highly positive, and work on a second half hectare will resume next year.

Eelgrass restoration contributes to a more resilient ecosystem in Hanöbukten Bay and demonstrates the positive impact of international cooperation on biodiversity and climate adaptation in the Baltic Sea.

Photo: Hampus Södergren

The year in review

Ambassadors act to save Vramsån's river water crowfoot

Under 2025 hölls en återträff för Biosfärområde Kristianstads Vattenrikets A reunion of Vattenriket biosphere ambassadors by the River Vramsån in Gärds Köpinge in 2025 combined knowledge sharing, immersion in nature and hands-on conservation work. Participants learned about the river's history and high natural values, the biosphere reserve's recertification process and Biosphere Office measures to improve the health of rivers and streams. Ambassadors were encouraged to net and examine small aquatic animals and fish, such as the stone loach, and to lend a hand in improving the river's unique plant habitats, in particular that of the rare river water crowfoot.

To date, a total of 414 biosphere ambassadors have been trained to spread knowledge and engagement. A course consists of four sessions, held at the naturum visitor centre and on site, to learn more about Vattenriket as a biosphere reserve and a visitor destination.



DNA detectives trace the species living in our rivers

Measuring eDNA, the genetic material in environmental samples, is an effective and non-invasive way to ascertain the presence of species in our rivers. In 2025 the Biosphere Office tested the method to learn more about the area's biodiversity.

Mix Research Sweden was commissioned to take ten samples from the rivers Vramsån, Mjöån and Vinneån. Lab analyses of the filtered water revealed small DNA fragments and matched them against databases to identify 25 species of fish – mostly perch, trout, roach and bleak, with sunbleak as a surprise find – and six species of freshwater mussels, as well as newts and otters.

eDNA complements electrofishing and enables large datasets to be quickly acquired. The long-term goal is to conduct our own sampling so we can detect invasive species and identify key spawning areas in the river Helge å and its tributaries.



Land4Climate researchers visit Vattenriket

As part of the Land4Climate project, researchers from Sweden's University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Denmark's Gate21 organisation visited Vattenriket to study wetland restoration on peat soils and Vattenriket's first climate-focused initiative: the closure of drainage ditches on Fjällmossen.

Such initiatives are few in Sweden, and in Denmark the focus is on rewetting agricultural land. As progress in both countries is slow, Land4Climate is looking at how to scale up activities.

A visit was also made to a constructed wetland on the Kristianstad Plain. This project to improve water quality and strengthen biodiversity brings together stakeholders such as SLU, the University of Copenhagen, Gate21 and Halland county's agricultural consultants.



20th anniversary visits to two sustainable companies

As part of activities marking the biosphere reserve's 20th anniversary, the Biosphere Office, together with municipal business development officers and the municipal council, visited two local companies that integrate sustainable solutions into their operations.

Staff at Vistagårds Gris spoke about pig farming and the processing of products served in their restaurant. The company works with circularity: all feed comes from local producers, and it also operates a 10-hectare solar park on its land.

Farmer Nicklas Göransson grows mainly potatoes and onions. As an example of nature-based solutions that are important for the future of agriculture, a wetland has been established on his land to improve irrigation and nutrient retention and to promote biodiversity.





New fishing pier at Hammarslundsvallen

In October a new pier at Hammarslundsvallen opened for fishing, relaxation and closer proximity to the lake and reedbeds. During the festivities with cake and speeches, several fish were also hooked. Bo Silverbern, Chair of the Municipal Council, shared tales from the past before untying the ceremonial blue ribbon, aided by youngsters from the Peshku angling club.

To respect the natural environment and the habitat of grass snakes, construction minimised disturbance to the slope and reused the existing stone steps. The pier is part of the project På vatten i Vattenriket, funded by municipal resources and support from the Lower Helge å Fishery Conservation Area. The project aims to facilitate access to the River Helge å and Lake Hammarsjön, and includes measures such as the renovation of Kavrö Bridge and the creation of a digital fairway.



Biosphere Conference for knowledge and collaboration

Researchers, officials and engaged citizens met at the 2025 Biosphere Conference to share new knowledge about Vattenriket. Much focus was on the new wetland at Fredriksdalsviken, where initial results show the facility is effective in reducing the leaching of metals into the River Helge å.

The conference, co-organised with Kristianstad University, plays a key role in Vattenriket's knowledge-sharing mission. Moderator Johan Elmberg guided the audience through presentations ranging from species inventories to eDNA and research on geese and wetlands.

Kristianstad Municipal Director, Charlotte Nygren-Bonnier, emphasised Vattenriket's importance as a model area for sustainable development. Biosphere Coordinator Carina Wettemark reflected on 20 years of collaboration that have restored seasonally flooded grasslands, improved water quality and strengthened biodiversity.



Replacement of naturum's beams and guided tour

In the autumn scaffolding that seemed to float in the air was attached directly to the naturum façade as part of an ambitious project in a sensitive environment on a construction standing in water.

This marked the start of work to repair moisture-induced decay and prevent more extensive damage to naturum's glued and laminated timber beams. At the same time, the sunscreen battens and parts of the wooden decking were replaced.

The work sparked such curiosity that, in a joint initiative with the Public Works Department, Ställningsbyggarna, Treano Bygg, and Stålsmeden Syd, naturum offered a guided viewing to members of the public interested in construction. The event attracted some 60 participants. The entire project is scheduled for completion in spring 2026.

Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve
– benefiting nature and people

Read more on our homepage, complete with contact details:
vattenriket.kristianstad.se