

REFLECTIONS ON THE UK BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

How to develop the UK Biodiversity Action Plan to ensure the UK fulfils its commitment to the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity



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The UK Biodiversity Partnership meeting in Battleby on May 21st-22nd was a key opportunity to reconsider the state and future of the UK Biodiversity process. The results of the 2002 reporting round indicated that significant progress has been made but we still have much more to do if we are to meet the World Summit on Sustainable Development target of 'significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010'.

Wildlife and Countryside Link believes that the Biodiversity Action Plan remains an extremely effective tool in helping the UK Government fulfil its commitment to the conservation of biodiversity under the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity. It must however continue to evolve to respond to changing political and biological needs. We also feel that we should use this process to take on board our commitments to other legislation, especially that from the European Union, and to integrate such obligations with our national, regional and local aspirations for biodiversity conservation. WCL has developed the following points to help steer the thinking in the lead up to the 2005 review.

- We need **leadership and vision** from Government at UK and country level to take forward the biodiversity planning process and to ensure its integration into all aspects of political life at national, regional and local levels. We should be aiming to implement the BAP from the European to the parish level and to see this form part of a consistent policy. The Biodiversity Action Plan should provide the mechanism to draw together our conservation actions, commitments and obligations and greatly increase the clarity and commitment from all sectors of society. It should integrate international, European and national legislation and show how these can develop into country, regional and local actions.

The non-government bodies are committed to playing their part in delivery of conservation actions, but cannot do this on their own.

- The Country Biodiversity Groups should clearly re-state a **firm commitment to the target driven approach** to biodiversity conservation. This includes setting specific biological objectives for priority species and habitats, monitoring progress, reviewing/resetting targets and reviewing/updating priority lists. In doing so they should empower the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee and the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group to carry out these tasks at a UK level. UK targets should, where necessary, be reflected at the country, regional and local levels.
- The UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee should be responsible for agreeing and disseminating a **route map** to identify the timing and key elements that will enable the biodiversity planning process to be successfully taken forward to at least 2005/6.
- **Reporting** on Habitat and Species Action Plan progress against targets on a regular basis and in an integrated and consistent manner, at local, country and UK levels, is an essential element of the biodiversity process. This must be

adequately resourced and findings from each round must be used to highlight and fill gaps in knowledge and inform future actions, including policy initiatives. Information gathered through reporting could be made more useful if Government were to provide tools for map-based reporting where possible.

- Progress on habitat action plans has been slow and patchy. **Habitat Steering Groups** need to be revitalised and their composition and terms of reference should focus their work on auditing their habitats and delivering/facilitating conservation action on the ground. Lead Agencies need to take responsibility and have the necessary resources for monitoring the extent and condition of habitats and make much more progress on this issue. For habitat conservation to be delivered on sufficient scale, **policy blockages must be addressed by the country biodiversity strategies**. Progress on policy issues must, in turn, be reported to the Habitat Steering Groups.
- The results of the 2002 reporting show that **targeted species recovery work** can be a very effective mechanism for delivering species conservation. The Government Conservation Agencies should ensure that such work is adequately funded and covers all appropriate UK BAP priority species and not just those with high public profile. **Lead partners** (in both the statutory and voluntary sector) should be given the necessary time and resources to properly co-ordinate the delivery of their species action plans.
- **Marine species and habitats** are not currently well catered for by the BAP process. Commitment to marine BAPs needs to be stepped up by all involved to complement the other current opportunities for the marine environment and its wildlife, arising from the Review of Marine Nature Conservation and other initiatives.
- The **appropriate level for delivery** of biodiversity conservation needs to be agreed and properly communicated. In particular, targets need to be set at UK, country and regional levels and activities best done at the national, regional and local levels need to be identified and adequately resourced.
- More effort is still needed to improve the quality, quantity and communication of **biodiversity information** to enable the best possible decisions to be made on policies and programmes for biodiversity.
- There is an urgent need for dedicated funding for **biodiversity research**. Biodiversity action needs to continue to develop a stronger evidence-base. Further systematic review of research findings is required to identify areas where evidence exists and areas where research is needed. It should be the task of the Biodiversity Research Advisory Group to identify priorities and to find the necessary resources to address these issues.
- Delivering biodiversity conservation through biodiversity action plans can involve making the links between **ecosystems and the services they supply** - environmental, economic and social. Developing and disseminating these examples of the ecosystem approach will provide a helpful tool for communication, education and public understanding programmes.

- The BAP process provides us with a sound framework to consider the changes necessary to deal with overarching issues such as **the impact of climate change**, although more work is currently needed in this area. The review in 2005 is a major opportunity to strengthen the BAP to take account of these changes and to ensure we can meet the CBD target of halting the decline in biodiversity by 2010.

Refreshing and re-invigorating our commitment to biodiversity conservation is not only important to help fulfil our international obligations but also for our quality of life and the economic wellbeing of the nation. For example, getting otters back in our rivers, twinflowers back in our pinewoods and sparrows in our towns and cities will do wonders for our spiritual well being. Delivering the targets of species and habitat action plans is the first and most crucial step we can take in getting biodiversity back at the landscape scale. Maintaining and re-creating habitats, such as woodlands, moorlands and heathlands, rich in wildlife will provide crucial ecosystem services and improve public health by encouraging sustainable exercise and recreation.

Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of the UK's major environmental non-governmental organisations, united by their common interest in the conservation and enjoyment of the natural and historic environment. Between them, Link's members turn over more than £700 million per annum, have the support of approximately seven million people, and the help of 81 000 volunteers in the UK.

This paper is supported by the following organisations:

*Bat Conservation Trust
Biological Recording in Scotland
British Ecological Society
Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
Butterfly Conservation
The Herpetological Conservation Trust
Marine Conservation Society
Plantlife
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
The Wildlife Trusts
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
Woodland Trust*