

The conservation of biodiversity is both a local and global concern. The UK Government has made a commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and has set targets to restore some of our most threatened species and habitats. More people than ever before want to take action to help our beleaguered wildlife. The Biodiversity Action Plan process is the best way for efforts to be channelled. The forthcoming review of the BAP is the ideal opportunity for us to learn from our experiences over the past 10 years and refresh the process for the future.

Delivering this manifesto for change will ensure that conservation action is targeted at our current conservation priorities, that action is co-ordinated and integrated across all policy areas, that efforts are cost-effective and that people will continue to be able to enjoy the many benefits that biodiversity brings. In short, it will help enhance the well-being of people and wildlife throughout the UK.



▲ There is strong and growing support for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in the UK.

This publication is supported by the following members of Northern Ireland Environment Link, Scottish Environment Link, Wales Environment Link and Wildlife and Countryside Link:



This publication was produced by the RSPB.

Above: birdwatching by Andy Hay (rsbp-images.com) Front cover: white bluebells by David Norton and girl looking at a bug by Carolyn Merrett (both rsbp-images.com), anemones by Sue Scott (Marine Conservation Society)



Sustaining biodiversity

revitalising the Biodiversity Action Plan process



Contents

This manifesto highlights why biodiversity is essential to all our lives. It explains how the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) process has been developed to sustain and enhance this biodiversity and makes recommendations on the ways the process can be improved to meet the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010.



Red admiral by Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)



Sunset by Clyde H Smith (Still Pictures)

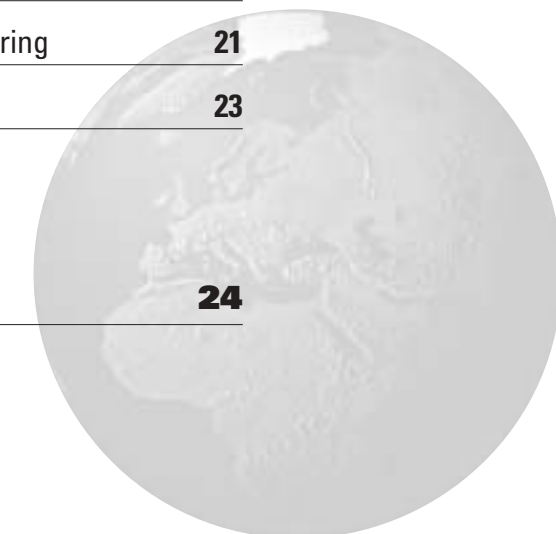


Bittern by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

	Summary	4
	Introduction	6
	A rich and healthy natural environment for all	6
	Achieving truly sustainable development	8
	The Biodiversity Action Plan process	10
	What has been achieved?	12
	Challenges for the future	14
	Revitalising biodiversity	16
	Getting biodiversity into the heart of policy	16
	Making the necessary resources available	17
	Redefining our conservation activities	18
	Refreshing priorities	18
	Updating targets	19
	Improving plans	21
	Enhancing survey and monitoring	21
	Objective reporting	23
	Conclusion	24



Walkers by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



Sustaining biodiversity

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What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the earth's life support system. It includes all plants, animals and micro-organisms and the places where they live. Biodiversity provides direct and indirect economic, social, aesthetic, cultural and spiritual benefits.

The state of our biodiversity is a key measure of sustainable development. We have already lost too much of our wildlife and wild places. Conserving and restoring the biodiversity that is left improves everyone's quality of life. It brings significant benefits for the economy as well as people's mental and physical health, and social well-being.

What we are doing about conserving it

The UK Government and its devolved administrations are committed to conserving biodiversity under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The BAP process – a common agenda for nature conservation in the UK – helps to meet these obligations. It co-ordinates and drives action at national and local levels by encouraging policies to rescue our most threatened wildlife and will enable the rest of our biodiversity to thrive.

The BAP process has plans for priority species and habitats. It also has strategies to develop and influence the policies that deliver the objectives that are detailed in the plans. Each plan involves auditing biodiversity to assess its condition. Priorities for action are then established and targets are set to help monitor progress.

The BAP process is primarily delivered at the devolved level (ie England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). It is right that each country or devolved administration should develop its own biodiversity and/or sustainable development strategy, but it is vital that these collectively meet the UK's commitments to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Progress to date

Over the last 10 years the BAP process has successfully focused resources and effort on biodiversity priorities through a partnership of national and local government, business and the voluntary sector. The decline of some species has been halted, but there is still much more to do to prevent extinctions and habitat destruction.

What needs to happen now?

Action for biodiversity needs to continue and we need to keep the momentum up. This means that the BAP process needs some re-focusing to ensure that it is relevant and takes into account the changing world, including the implications of devolved government, major agricultural reforms and climate change. The 2005 review of the BAP process needs to challenge our ambitions. The biodiversity or sustainable development strategies need to inform and encourage the wider development of policies sympathetic to the needs of wildlife and people.

In this manifesto, we have identified 26 ways to improve our approach to wildlife. From the 26 action points, the following five themes are of particular importance:

- 1 Government commitment and policy integration:** It is important that the respective devolved administrations report frequently on the progress of their biodiversity and/or sustainable development strategies. They also need to show how biodiversity has been taken into account in all appropriate policy areas. *(Recommendations 1–3).*
- 2 Resourcing:** The scale of the action required to achieve favourable conservation status for BAP species and habitats means that more resources are needed. A review and revision of subsidies, incentives or policies that prevent biodiversity targets being achieved is needed from the devolved administrations. *(Recommendations 4–7).*



Pond dipping (rsph-images.com)

► **Biodiversity informs and enriches our lives, we all still have much to learn from it.**

3 Prioritisation and action planning: Revised lists of priority species and habitats at devolved and UK levels are needed to ensure our action is appropriate *(Recommendations 8–12)*. Targets for the species and habitats identified should be set at a devolved level and should be clear and measurable. These targets should also be amalgamated to produce targets for the UK as a whole that will achieve favourable conservation status for priority species and habitats. Habitat Action Plans need to be implemented at a landscape scale. *(Recommendations 13–18).*

4 Monitoring and surveillance: Improved monitoring and surveillance of biodiversity is urgently needed, and the UK Countryside Survey, planned for 2006, should be developed to help meet habitat monitoring requirements. *(Recommendations 19–25).*

5 BAP review timetable: The timetable for future BAP review is needed urgently from the Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee to show how a more effective BAP process will be delivered. *(Recommendation 26).*



Song thrush by Chris Gomersall (rsph-images.com)

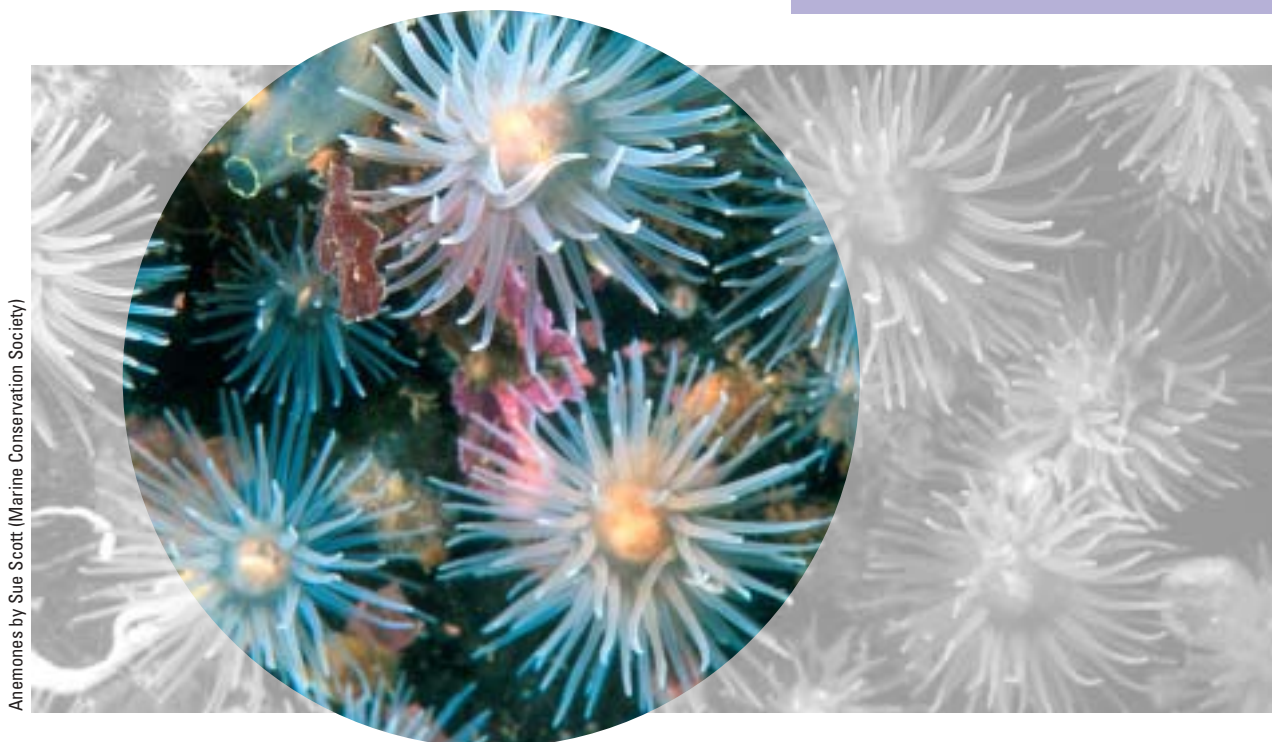
Cyclist by Andy Hay (rsph-images.com)

Introduction

In 1994, the UK started to meet its obligations to the 1992 Rio Convention on Biological Diversity by producing the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). For the first time, a common agenda for nature conservation was prepared and targets were set to judge performance. Government, voluntary organisations and industry joined forces at national and local levels to try to rescue our most threatened species and habitats.

Ten years on, much progress has been made. Some species have been saved from extinction, the loss of many habitats has been halted and some are being restored. But we still have much more to do. The pace of progress is insufficient if we are to meet new international commitments and adapt to the realities of climate change. We need to learn from our experiences and respond to new conservation priorities and changing public aspirations. We therefore believe it is time to reinvigorate this plan. This manifesto re-affirms why biodiversity is essential to all of us and offers a set of recommendations to help policy makers and participants in the BAP process meet the challenges ahead.

▼ **Biodiversity is not our gift to destroy but a responsibility to conserve.**



Anemones by Sue Scott (Marine Conservation Society)

A rich and healthy natural environment for all

Biodiversity is the variety of life on the planet. It includes all plants, animals and micro-organisms and the places or habitats where this wildlife lives. Conserving biodiversity is vital to our future survival and our quality of life. Our biodiversity is part of a shared global heritage and is the earth's life support system. This is why we have a duty under international conventions towards its conservation.

European environment ministers (including the UK minister), have committed to halting biodiversity loss by 2010 as part of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, (Presidency Conclusions of the Göteborg European Council, 15–16 June 2001, SN 200/1/01 REV 1)

'Biodiversity is still declining. The clock is ticking. It is time to ring the alarm bell – we have to move from words to deeds.'

Margot Wallström, Member of the European Commission, responsible for Environment, February 2004.

Biodiversity matters to people

- **It provides direct economic benefits** – eg in farming, fisheries, forestry, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing and tourism.
- **It provides indirect economic benefits** eg flood control, waste water systems, water quality, soil creation and stabilisation and human health.
- **It has a social value** eg for recreation and enjoyment of the countryside and urban areas.
- **It has aesthetic, cultural and spiritual value** – it enriches our quality of life, it inspires, entertains and motivates us. It makes the world a better and healthier place to live.



Bottlenose dolphin C Gomersall (spb-images.com)

▲ **Bottlenose dolphins in the Moray Firth. Wildlife watching is an increasingly important contributor to the economy. It also inspires people.**

Biodiversity is valued for its own sake. We care about whether or not it is conserved. People value knowing that species and habitats exist, and worry about the loss of UK plants and animals. But biodiversity conservation is about more than preventing extinctions – it is also about putting back what we have lost where we can, and ensuring it is in good health for future generations. Maintaining and restoring habitats, from deep water corals to woodlands and wet meadows to coastlands, helps us fulfil our international obligations, provides crucial protection for important resources and improves public health by encouraging sustainable exercise and recreation.

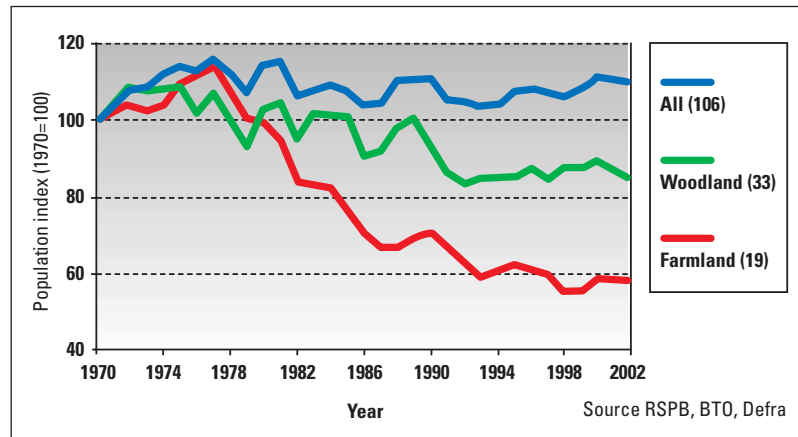
If we are to continue to benefit from biodiversity, and meet our international responsibilities, we need a renewed commitment and a long-term strategy that better integrates environmental actions. This is also necessary for us to gain support from all sectors and use resources efficiently. Governments identify goals and strategies for health, education and the economy and equal weight needs to be given to the environment.

▶ **Lack of physical activity is a national problem: it costs the National Health Service in the UK millions of pounds per year. Projects encouraging people to take up walking or undertake countryside management really work¹. The attractiveness of the countryside, which is strongly dependent upon biodiversity, acts as a real motivator. Look after biodiversity and we help look after the nation's health.**

¹See *Walking the way to health*, www.who.org.uk, and green gym www.btcv.org/greengym/

Walkers on Pembrokeshire coastal path by David Woodfall (Woodfall Wild Images)





▲ Population of wild birds in the UK 1970–2002.

Conserving and restoring biodiversity will improve our quality of life. For example, in England, the Government has officially recognised this by considering the population of wild birds as one of its 15 'headline' quality of life indicators. Other indicators include the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, progress with Biodiversity Action Plans, and the area of land under agri-environment agreements/schemes.



Tree sparrow and tractor. by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



The population of wild birds is also one of the key indicators of sustainable development in Wales. In Scotland, sustainable development indicators include the percentage of BAP species and habitats identified as stable or increasing and the proportion of fish stocks within safe biological limits.

Protecting wildlife sites makes economic sense. A recent study estimates that a global nature reserve network would bring goods and services worth about one hundred times the cost of such a network.

(Balmford et al 2002, Science 297:950-953).

Achieving truly sustainable development

The state of our biodiversity should be a key measure of sustainable development. For sustainable development, economic and social development should not be at the cost of biodiversity. Government at all levels needs to check that policies result in maintaining the presence of our natural heritage and enhancing it. The biodiversity process provides the UK Government, devolved administrations and local government with a way of delivering their sustainable development obligations, often through international agreements that have been ratified by the UK Government.

One practical way of encouraging sustainable development is through the application of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) to all plans and programmes. The EU Directive on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (or SEA Directive as it has become known) was agreed in 2001. It is to be implemented by Member States by 21 July 2004 and it should help to ensure that the environmental consequences of policies, plans and programmes are identified, assessed and minimised. The SEA should be an essential tool in achieving sustainable development and integrating environmental thinking across all

Government policies and operations. Under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the UK Government is committed to developing national strategies, plans and programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

The UK Government has put in place legislation, policy statements and guidance to progress international obligations and national aspirations. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the developing biodiversity strategies (in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland) and sustainable development strategies (in Wales) provide the framework to take these forward and important mechanisms for delivery.

'Just as every decision and action is targeted at closing the opportunity gaps, so too will all our work be judged against how well we conserve and sustain the environment that our children will inherit from us. Scotland is a land of many riches: our natural resources and the talents of our people. Our responsibility to future generations is to conserve, protect and harness all those resources.'

Jack McConnell MSP, Scotland's First Minister, April 2002.



► **Development that damages biodiversity is unsustainable. Conserving biodiversity is not an 'option', it is essential for our future well being.**

'We are extremely fortunate that [here] in Wales we still have an exceptional diversity of habitats and our flora and fauna include many distinctive species. Many of these are of European and international importance and we have a special responsibility to ensure that these habitats and species are handed on in a good condition for future generations to come. ... Delivery will not be achieved overnight but with concerted effort I am confident that real progress can be made.'

Carwyn Jones AM, Welsh Assembly Government Minister for Environment, Planning & Countryside, May 2003.

Housing development on heathland by Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

freshwater bryozoan *Lophopus crystallinus* © The Natural History Museum, London



▲ Interest in biodiversity is not confined to rainforests and pandas; it concerns looking after the full range of wildlife in the UK.

The Biodiversity Action Plan process

There are two interlocking aspects to the BAP process – plans and strategies. A total of 391 species action plans and 45 habitat action plans have been produced, identifying the requirements of the UK's highest biodiversity priorities. Consideration of the suite of plans has helped to identify policy areas where reforms are needed to enable better delivery of their objectives – for example in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, water and urban areas. It has highlighted the importance of policy integration to work towards a joined up approach to the conservation of biodiversity. Strategies are being prepared to develop and influence policies in areas that profoundly influence plan delivery.

Producing the Biodiversity Action Plans involves six key activities:

- 1 undertaking the **audit** to identify the state of biodiversity
- 2 establishing **priorities** – the species and habitats that are the highest priority for conservation action
- 3 setting clear, quantifiable **objectives and targets** for specific species and habitats with an end point against which progress can be measured
- 4 preparing **action plans** to set out the work required for each species and habitat
- 5 co-ordinating the **implementation** of action plans by allocating actions and ensuring clear lines of responsibility
- 6 **monitoring and reviewing** to provide information to assess progress on targets, action and deployment of resources.



Snowdonia National Park by David Woodfall (David Woodfall Images)

◀ Conservation begins at home – the UK has a wonderful wealth of important and, in some cases, endemic biodiversity. Up to 50% of all the world's bluebells are found in the UK.

'Even if we had done all we could to protect our most precious sites and rarest species, it would be insufficient to address modern society's pervasive influences on biodiversity. For that, we need fundamental shifts in policy and behaviour to integrate concern for biodiversity into every aspect of our lives.'

Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP, *Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at the launch of the Biodiversity Strategy for England, 24 October 2002.*

In England, 47 indicators have been developed to help monitor the implementation of the England Biodiversity Strategy. The most important is the status of BAP priority species and habitats because, ultimately, favourable conservation status of these species and habitats is what the strategy is trying to achieve.

It is vital that common standards are adopted across the UK. This includes using common criteria to select and review priority habitats and species, collecting common information, using compatible reporting systems and identifying shared research priorities. Besides helping to comply with international obligations, there are practical, conservation, and financial reasons for adopting common standards and continuing to report progress at a UK level.

▶ Some of our best wildlife sites, such as the Ouse Washes, are being damaged by activities outside the site boundary. We must address these issues by amending policies and programmes, including removing inappropriate financial support for damaging activities.

Throughout England, Scotland and Wales, Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) have been developed. The LBAP process aims to 'focus resources to conserve and enhance the biodiversity resource through local partnerships, taking account of both national and local priorities'. LBAPs provide an important way of involving local people and local organisations,



Ouse Washes by Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Planting reeds and corncrake by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)



▲ **Volunteers planting new reedbed – biodiversity conservation is about more than preventing extinctions, it is also about putting back some of what we have lost.**

including Local Authorities, in biodiversity conservation. They are important strategic documents that identify national and local priority species and habitats that need to be considered as part of community planning. They help to focus practical delivery of biodiversity conservation at a local level. The process of developing an LBAP follows the same key activities outlined above.

The BAP process is a key way for the UK Government, devolved administrations and local government to co-ordinate their policies to deliver a healthy natural environment. In particular, it sets out to conserve and enhance:

- the range and numbers of wildlife species and the quality and extent of wildlife habitats
- species that are internationally important or characteristic of local areas
- species and habitats that have declined significantly over recent decades.

The BAP process provides the framework for the devolved administrations to work with non-government organisations (including voluntary conservation bodies, industry and other stakeholders) to further biodiversity conservation. It allows a shared understanding and ownership of conservation priorities. This common agenda ensures cost-effective action.

What has been achieved?

Massive change in the countryside over the last century has resulted in large-scale habitat loss and degradation. It would be unrealistic to expect significant improvement in the status of our most important and threatened habitats and species immediately on the introduction of the BAP process. However, in the last 10 years it has helped to focus resources and effort on biodiversity priorities through a partnership of national and local government, business and the voluntary sector. By 2002, 72% of plans were making progress on at least one target, although this also means that 28% of plans had still to make progress on any of their targets.

◀ **Delivering action plans for species such as the corncrake involves full consideration of the socio-economic needs of crofters, farmers and land managers. Co-ordinated conservation action is working. In 2003, 820 calling corncrakes were recorded, the highest figure since at least 1977.**

In interpreting these charts, it is important to appreciate that the species and habitats included are the highest priority for conservation action in the UK. In many cases, they are listed because of significant declines over many years, eg skylarks, water voles and native oysters. This means that it will often take a great deal to turn their fortunes around and achieve favourable conservation status. Therefore, while some of the species and habitat trends are given as 'stable' this is not necessarily satisfactory. A species or habitat may

have suffered a massive decline and the challenge is, therefore, restoration to former levels. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that 13% of habitats and 6% of species were assessed as 'increasing'. In addition, some species have started to meet their initial targets, which indicates that we are making progress towards their favourable conservation status.

Much remains to be achieved. A significant proportion of habitats (38%) and species (25%)

Figure 1 The UK trends of UK BAP Priority Habitats (N= 45)

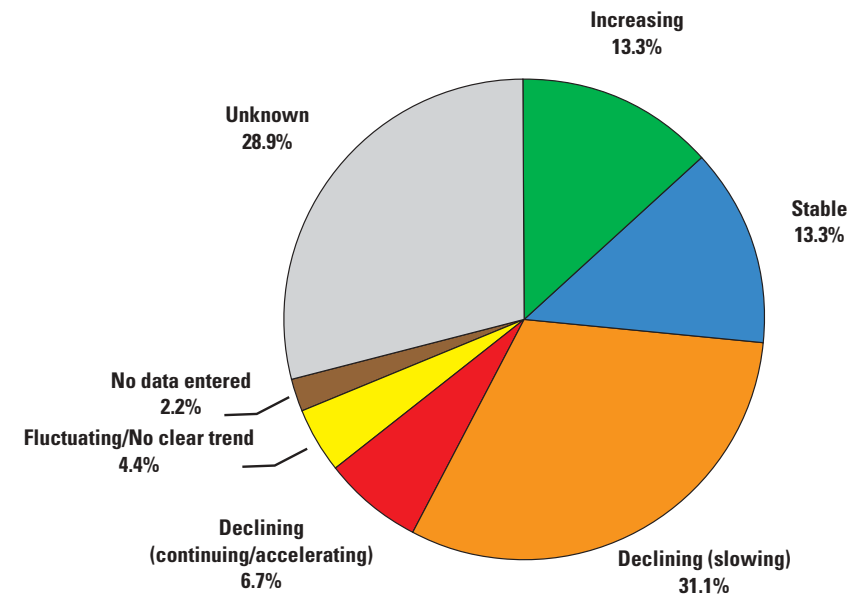
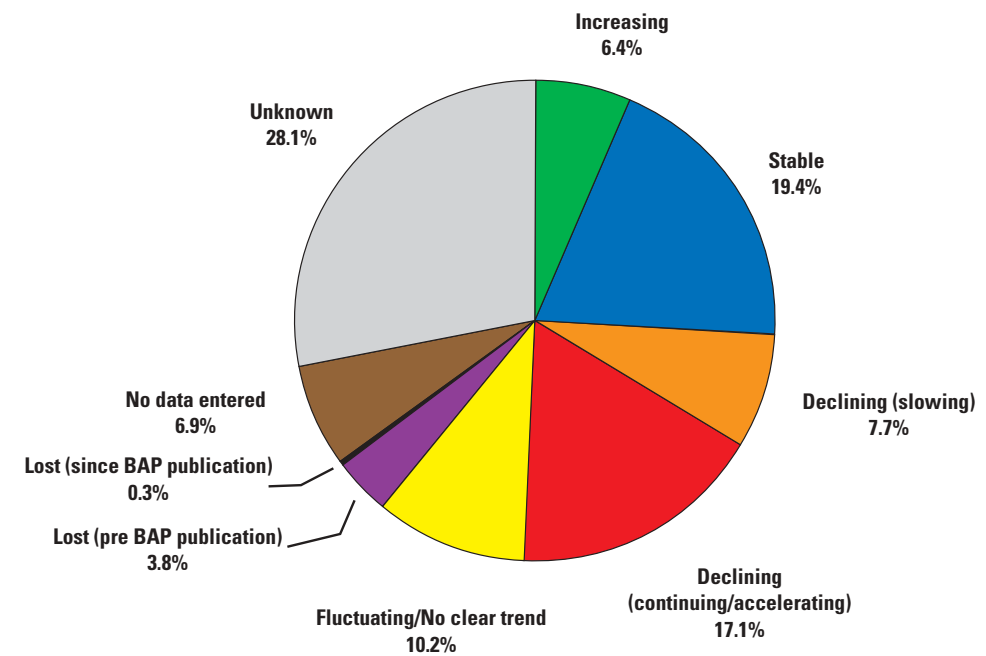


Figure 2 The UK trends of UK BAP Priority Species (N= 391)



Data for pie charts courtesy of 2002 UK Biodiversity Reporting. (www.ukbap.org.uk/2002onlinereport/2002report.htm)



▲ For widespread farmland species such as the brown hare we must farm the countryside in an environmentally responsible way. Proposed reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy need to be adopted and further developed.

Brown hare by Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

are still declining and the trend is unknown for 31% of habitats and 35% of species. The results of the 2002 report highlighted the groups of plans where relatively little progress has been made. For example, progress on targets for marine BAPs and for re-creating terrestrial habitats has been very limited. This underlines the need to re-invigorate the way marine and habitat BAPs are implemented, including developing a greater survey and monitoring effort to gather adequate baseline and monitoring data.

The BAP process needs to be adopted as a key driver of environmental policy. In England and Wales, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) gives Ministers, Government departments and the National Assembly of Wales a duty to conserve biological diversity in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Secretary of State (for England) and the National Assembly of Wales (for Wales) have duties to produce lists of species and habitats of principal importance for their respective countries and to further the conservation of these priorities. In addition, the England Biodiversity Strategy has been adopted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as one of its key projects and programmes. This is a welcome step.

In Scotland, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill 2004, places a duty on every public body and office holder to further the conservation of biodiversity and for Ministers to designate a Scottish Biodiversity Strategy with regular reporting on progress to parliament. A duty to produce lists of priority species and habitats is also being considered. Northern Ireland published its Biodiversity Strategy in 2002 and a steering group has now been appointed to oversee its implementation, while Wales is addressing the need for policy reform to help biodiversity through its revised sustainable development strategy.

Challenges for the future

Long term conservation of biodiversity will be most effective if it is conducted on the most appropriate scale. The health and wealth of our biodiversity, and its ability to cope with the competing pressures placed upon it, has been severely compromised by past fragmentation of habitats and species populations and will be compromised in the future by the impacts of climate change. Fragmentation means that species and habitats have become critically disconnected from much of the natural order



Traffic by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

essential for them to survive. Management that re-establishes those connections at all scales (eg local, ecosystem or landscape) is essential for the long-term protection and enhancement of biodiversity resources, from conserving and protecting genetic variability to conserving landscape-scale systems in order to adapt to the pressures that climate change will create. Such management can be achieved in two ways:

- 1 through the actions and targets within individual Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans
- 2 through individual biodiversity and/or sustainable development strategies and their influence on wider policy areas, such as water and agriculture, which affect plan delivery.

An important part of the BAP process is monitoring progress and learning from findings. Progress on Biodiversity Action Plans up to 2002 was reported in 2003. The external world is changing fast, so we need to refresh and refocus the plan so it is fit for future challenges. We need to reassert its relevance and take account of new Government institutions, major policy reforms and climate change.

▲ Human-induced climate change is a major threat to the UK's biodiversity. It is vital that we take steps both to reduce emissions to lessen climate change, and to reduce the impacts of the changes that will occur, by adapting our conservation efforts.

In this manifesto, we outline our shared priorities for reviewing the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and detail 26 recommendations for improving the content of the plan and its delivery.

Revitalising biodiversity

To meet our international commitments to halt the loss of biodiversity in the UK by 2010 we need to revitalise the BAP process. Key to this will be ensuring biodiversity is at the heart of all Government policies on sustainable development and that the plans are refreshed and refocused.

'We want a Scotland that delivers sustainable development; that puts environmental concerns at the heart of public policy and secures environmental justice for all of Scotland's communities.'

Jack McConnell MSP (*Scotland's First Minister*) and **Jim Wallace MSP** (*Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats*) in support of the 'Partnership for a better Scotland' agreement. 15 May 2003

Getting biodiversity into the heart of policy

Major infrastructure developments, urban expansion, water pollution/abstraction, air pollution, agricultural intensification, and inappropriate forestry and fisheries management can cause major problems for biodiversity. These



Housing by Andy Hay (rsph-images.com)

▲ Development must avoid the most important sites for wildlife – where it does go ahead biodiversity must be 'built' in to it from the outset.

policy areas need to become part of the solution, as new opportunities for more environmentally sensitive and integrated policies arise – such as through the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, the development of agri-environment schemes, the Water Framework Directive, tighter legislation to protect environmental resources and prevention of pollution, and sustainable forestry practices. Biodiversity considerations should be incorporated into all appropriate policies and programmes, not just those relating to agriculture, forestry, water and fisheries but also policies for energy, transport, planning and taxation.

The biodiversity and sustainable development strategies provide the overall administrative and policy framework for the BAP process to operate and through which the collective objectives of the action plans can be delivered. In particular, these strategies have attempted to identify and propose actions to address cross-department policy issues that affect biodiversity.

The key test of these strategies will be how effective they are at ensuring that biodiversity is fully considered in all appropriate policies.

Recommendations

- 1 Frequent reporting of progress on biodiversity or sustainable development strategies by the devolved administrations is needed. The reporting mechanisms need to be clear and objective to demonstrate how biodiversity has been taken into account in all appropriate policy areas.
- 2 The UK Government needs to consider how it can take the opportunity to use the BAP process to help implement the requirements of EU Directives – particularly the achievement of favourable conservation status for species and habitats listed on both the EU Birds and Habitats and Species directives.
- 3 Funding programmes linked to all policy/legislative initiatives should be assessed and guided by appropriate Government departments to maximise delivery of BAP (eg Forestry Grant Schemes, Water Framework Directive and agri-environment schemes)

► We need to consider ways in which the BAP can help to deliver European conservation obligations, including favourable conservation status, for species such as the great crested newt.

Making the necessary resources available

The 2002 BAP reporting round showed that we have made significant progress in meeting some biodiversity targets. This has been most successful for those species that have been subject to targeted, specific recovery programmes, eg corncrakes, bitterns and large blue butterflies. However, we are currently behind schedule for a large proportion of species and habitats. It is also apparent that there is a considerable gap in our knowledge on the status and trends for many species and habitats (for example, those in the marine environment). In some cases, this may be because conservation measures have not yet had time to take effect, but resource constraints and perverse subsidies (for example, grants for restocking conifers on ancient woodland sites or on important open ground habitats such as lowland heathland) undoubtedly continue to hamper progress.

The scale of the action required to achieve favourable conservation status for BAP species and habitats means that more resources are likely to be needed. The cost of this work has yet to be properly assessed. Some of the cost will relate to bringing notified Areas or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs/SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) into favourable condition. A huge amount can also be achieved by incorporating the needs of species and habitats in, for example, forestry management and agri-environment schemes (see above).

Finally, we can make better use of resources, for example through better targeting of grants for biodiversity work and by encouraging volunteers for conservation action and monitoring. Volunteers already make a great contribution to our work towards BAP targets. Efforts should be made to develop and increase this.



Great crested newt by Roger Wilmshurst (rsph-images.com)

Recommendations

- 4 Statutory nature conservation agencies should review and update their recovery programmes for all 'conservation dependent' BAP species and habitats (ie those that require specific action that is unlikely to be met by policy reform alone), to ensure that they provide adequate support by 2005.
- 5 Government departments should identify, for review and revision, any subsidies, incentives or policies that are preventing the achievement of biodiversity targets. These should be revised where they are contrary to obligations under EU Directives and statutory designations. Revision should require integration with complementary objectives of other environmental subsidies and policies.
- 6 From 2005, revised species and habitat BAPs (at UK level or, where these do not exist, country or devolved administration level) and strategies should be used to help determine resource allocation at national, regional and local levels.
- 7 The UK Government should negotiate research funding with the Natural Environment Research Council with a view to increasing levels of funding to biodiversity priorities.

Grizzled skipper by Alan Barnes (Butterfly Conservation)



▲ It is vital that we revise our UK list of priority species to ensure that those in most need of conservation action get it. The grizzled skipper, which was once common throughout England, has declined by 48% in the last 20 years.

Redefining our conservation activities

To deliver biodiversity conservation throughout the UK, the approach to species and habitat conservation needs to be revised. We look forward to contributing to the review of priority species and habitats, which is being undertaken in 2005, and working to ensure that UK targets are incorporated into any subsequent national, regional and local plans. This should ensure that we have:

- revised lists of priority species and habitats at UK, national, regional and/or local levels
- clear, measurable targets that will achieve favourable conservation status for these top priority species and habitats
- updated action plans with a clearly defined role at each geographical level and allocation of responsibility to ensure effective and co-ordinated delivery
- improved monitoring of biodiversity to assess progress
- clear reporting that identifies gaps in knowledge and blockages to progress.

Refreshing priorities

Conserving biodiversity is a big challenge. Time and resources are short, so choices have to be made on where effort should be expended. One of the strengths of the UK approach is that it provides the framework for setting clear priorities for action. The species and habitats considered to be most in need of conservation action were identified in 1995. In Wales, additional national priorities have been agreed, reflecting species and habitats of particular interest at this level.

However, with new information available and with changes in status of some species and habitats it is time to re-assess these priorities. In a devolved UK, priorities to target action and meet international obligations need to be set at devolved level and UK priorities must be identified. This needs to be considered in the light of the role of the BAP and recognising that different priority species and habitats may require different conservation approaches. While a number of plans will undoubtedly require significant proactive measures, the inclusion of a species or habitat in a priority list may simply require a monitoring programme to ensure the current status is maintained, or that it is recognised in protection policies. It is important that key habitats or species are not excluded from any lists simply because insufficient data are available or people are currently unsure what to do.

The UK list of priority species was based on those globally threatened or rapidly declining in the UK (more than 50% in 25 years). For habitats, the selection criteria were international importance, risk (due to decline or rarity) and functional significance.

- Recommendations**
- 8 Biodiversity groups in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales should identify (or update) national priority lists in partnership with relevant taxonomic experts and Lead Partners.
 - 9 In preparation for the 2005 review, the original criteria for selecting priorities should be re-applied to UK species and habitats by the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group in collaboration with relevant taxonomic experts and Lead Partners, using the latest information.
 - 10 Any species or habitat that now meets the criteria should be added to the UK priority list.
 - 11 Following implementation of recommendation 9, current BAP species and habitats should only be removed from the priority list if there is convincing evidence that they have favourable conservation status and conservation action is not required to sustain that status.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) vary in the way they deal with UK priorities. They should aim to reflect national priorities and contribute towards national targets, nesting within and informing the national process. In addition to helping encourage local action for national priorities, they identify and deliver action for local priorities.

- Recommendations**
- 12 Regional/Local BAP partnerships and Lead Partners should work together to ensure that all appropriate UK and national priority species and habitats are identified in plans at the regional/local level, in addition to species or habitats of local importance.



Juniper by Bob Gibbons (Natural Image)

▲ Juniper, a UK priority species, is featured in 16 LBAP species action plans and occurs in many more LBAP areas where other appropriate action has been undertaken. It is vital that LBAPs clearly identify all UK priority species and habitats that occur in their area in an audit or list, even if they do not produce local plans for all of them.

Updating targets

Targets in Biodiversity Action Plans serve several purposes by:

- providing agreed objectives for all partners to work towards
- enabling progress to be measured
- enabling success to be celebrated; and most importantly
- providing the correct focus on real biological outcomes rather than conservation activity.

Targets for species and habitats can be divided into two broad categories:

Maintaining a species population or the extent of a habitat at, or above, a minimum figure. These targets are effectively saying this is the bottom line, below which we really cannot let things slip.

Restoring/enhancing biodiversity. This may refer to increasing a population or its range, increasing the extent, or improving the condition of a habitat. These targets often aim to reverse, or at least start to reverse, known declines.

The targets may be set at a pragmatic milestone towards favourable conservation status (an interim or milestone target) or at what is considered to be favourable conservation status (an end point target).

Kinder Scout, Derbyshire, by Joe Cornish (National Trust Photographic Library)



▲ For habitats, including upland heathland, the first priority is ensuring that existing areas are managed appropriately.

Reedbed by David Broadbent (rspb-images.com)



▲ We also need clear, ambitious targets for re-creating vibrant habitats, such as reedbeds. This will help stimulate conservation action on the ground.

Many of the existing targets were set in 1995 or 1998 with dates for completion of 2005 or earlier, and we now have the opportunity to review them based on better knowledge. Good targets should be specific, measurable and time limited.

For example

Target one (milestone) increase the extent of habitat x from 2,600 hectares to 3,200 hectares by 2010,

Target two (end) increase the extent to 6,000 hectares (believed to represent favourable conservation status) by 2025.

Targets need to be reviewed and reset if they are to remain relevant and challenging.

Recommendations

13 By the end of 2004, the UK Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group should develop guidelines for producing realistic but ambitious biological targets.

14 The Lead Partners that have been tasked with co-ordinating the implementation of species and habitat plans should be involved in producing the revised targets in 2005. These should represent favourable conservation status or milestone targets for all priority species and habitats at a devolved level. These targets should be agreed by the respective biodiversity groups and amalgamated to produce UK targets.

15 A timetable and mechanism for future target review is needed from the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee by 2006.

Dead man's fingers by Paul Naylor (Marine Conservation Society)



▲ One effective way of enhancing biodiversity in the marine environment is to create 'no take zones' or 'wildlife sanctuaries'. These can provide long-term benefits for sustainable fisheries as well as biodiversity.

Improving plans

Plans are important to identify the action needed to conserve priority species and habitats effectively. The plans include targets, actions and timeframes. Lead Partners co-ordinate efforts, encourage action and report on delivery. New plans will need to be prepared and new Lead Partners identified for new priorities. This should be done quickly and efficiently, once the priority lists are agreed. However, plans exist at many levels – from the parish up to Government level – and resources are allocated at all of these levels. To ensure that resources are used optimally and that plans at each level work together to reach UK targets, the role of each plan must be defined and all partnerships must receive sufficient support, training and resources to develop and deliver plans effectively.

Lead Partners play a vital role in protecting and restoring biodiversity at national and local levels. They must be given the necessary support, resources and training to do the job well.

Action towards BAP targets should be designed and conducted at the most appropriate spatial scale, working towards restoring and maintaining healthy, fully functioning ecosystems. Action therefore needs to be based on partnership and long-term vision.

Recommendations

16 Following the review of species and habitat priorities, new and appropriate UK biodiversity action plans need to be produced for priority species.

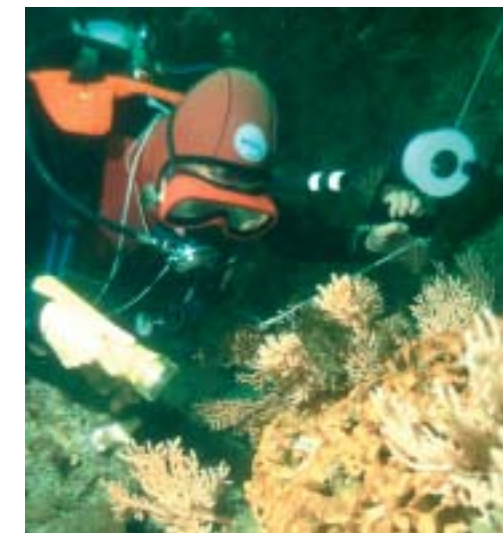
17 The slow progress on targets for some groups of plans requires investigation by the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee. By the end of 2005, measures need to be introduced to improve the delivery of these plans.

18 Habitat Action Plans need to be implemented with ambition and imagination to ensure that conservation is delivered at a landscape scale. Habitat Action Plan Steering Groups should focus on the development of collaborative site or area based projects to maintain or restore healthy ecosystems.

Enhancing survey and monitoring

Where progress on achieving BAP targets has been limited – for example with marine BAPs – this is often due to a lack of data on the species and habitats concerned. We need to know what the trends are for our most threatened species and habitats and take the appropriate action accordingly. The information also needs to be interpreted in local, regional, national, UK and European contexts.

There is a strong tradition of recording in the UK, particularly by volunteer naturalists – for example more than a quarter of a million hours of volunteer time were invested in fieldwork for the production of the *New Atlas of the Flora of Britain and Ireland (2002)*. National Recording Schemes for a number of groups, eg birds and butterflies, have provided very valuable information on the status of our biodiversity. Indeed, birds are used as a key biodiversity indicator. Yet, one of the most significant findings of the 1999 and 2002 reporting rounds was the huge gaps in our knowledge of both distribution and trends. In 2002, the trend for 29% of habitats and 28% of species was given as unknown. In addition, even where trends were given, in a high proportion of cases this was based on best or informed guesses rather than on some form of survey. For example, only eight out of the 28 habitats (where an estimate



Diving by Joe Jamieson (Marine Conservation Society)

▲ Volunteers, such as this diver carrying out Seasearch (www.seasearch.org.uk), are making a huge contribution to monitoring and surveys, but important gaps in coverage remain.

of trend was given) were based on full or sample survey results.

It is important to build on and develop the biological recording work already being undertaken and to integrate the voluntary and statutory efforts where possible to maximise the benefit to nature conservation. Consideration needs to be given to extending national recording schemes to further groups of species and how this data collection can be used most effectively at a local level, for example in local plans and by Local Records Centres. The development of the National Biodiversity Network should continue to be supported and encouraged by Government to ensure the best use and exchange of data and the integration of national schemes and local recording initiatives.

Government-funded schemes should make the best use of monitoring and survey work that has taken place or is planned, and ensure that there is coherence behind the objectives of these programmes. For example, the UK Countryside Survey provides an assessment of the quality and extent of the UK's terrestrial habitats. It does, however, have the potential to be of greater use, specifically in monitoring trends in BAP habitats and will need revision to address the needs of the four respective administrations. Likewise, many public bodies, such as the Forestry Commission, undertake substantial monitoring on their land that could be used to monitor BAP woodland species and habitats. There is no escaping the pressing need for more co-ordinated, systematic surveying of terrestrial, freshwater and marine species and, particularly, habitats.

Recommendations

- 19** The UK Countryside Survey 2006 should be revised by Defra and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and refined to ensure it provides trend information on quality and extent of BAP habitats in a statistically robust way for both devolved and UK-level assessment.
- 20** Monitoring and surveillance of priority species and habitats should be improved urgently with adequate resources supplied by statutory nature conservation agencies and public bodies to include support for updating of habitat inventories where necessary. This is vital if we are to determine trends and assess whether targets have been met.
- 21** By the end of 2004, Statutory Nature Conservation Agencies (in partnership with non-governmental conservation organisations) should agree common definitions and common standards for habitats and produce a timetable for a monitoring programme that will enable reporting on trends and targets.
- 22** The existing expertise and enthusiasm of volunteers should be targeted by the appropriate Government agencies and voluntary organisations to support BAP monitoring and delivery. A concerted effort is needed from these agencies and the education system to produce the next generation of field naturalists and deliver adequate monitoring in the future.
- 23** The role of National Recording Schemes (NRSs) and Local Records Centres (LRCs) in supplying and maintaining biological records must be recognised, as well as in increasing volunteer contributions to biodiversity conservation. Appropriate funding mechanisms need to be in place to support a network of NRSs and LRCs to fulfil this role and fully interface with the National Biodiversity Network.

◀ **As part of the Fife LBAP River Enhancement Project, records of water voles have been used to target habitat enhancement and other conservation measures for this species.**



Sand dunes in Northumberland by Joe Cornish (National Trust Photographic Library)

Objective reporting

Reporting is a vital cog in the biodiversity conservation machine. We need to know the main threats and constraints to delivering biodiversity conservation on the ground if we are to alter damaging policies and design positive ones. We also need to report openly and objectively on progress on the conservation status of species and habitats and on getting biodiversity taken properly into account in all policies and programmes (see above). We also need to ensure that all progress is reported and to avoid double counting between the UK and local levels. The emerging Biodiversity Action and Reporting System will help this.

The next round of reporting on progress with the BAPs is due to be carried out in 2005. However, we need to ensure that reporting aids and assists biodiversity conservation and does not become a time or resource burden. It is vital that we report quickly, simply and efficiently on the issues that really matter to ensure that resources are focused on action as far as possible.

The Biodiversity Action Plan process works. However, it is vital that it is regularly reviewed and updated and therefore remains a dynamic system.

▲ **Knowledge of the extent and condition of many of our habitats, including coastal sand dunes, remains poor. There is an urgent need for Government agencies to fill this gap.**

Recommendations

- 24** The 2005 reporting round led by the UK Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group needs to focus on what progress is being made against species and habitat targets. Reporting should be holistic, incorporating appropriate feedback from all levels (local, regional and national) in one system.
- 25** By the end of 2004, clear feedback from the biodiversity groups and the statutory nature conservation agencies throughout the UK is needed on how the 2002 reporting information has been used to support and improve the delivery of biodiversity conservation.
- 26** A timetable for future BAP review is urgently needed from the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee with a clear outline of how stakeholders can contribute, to ensure that we have a new, improved BAP process.



Water vole by Terry Whitaker