

# Targeting Nature's Recovery

## Progress on the 2010 targets for priority biodiversity species in England

### 1. Summary

An analysis by Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link)<sup>1</sup> of progress against 2010 targets for a sample of 69 priority species in England<sup>2</sup> suggests that:

- Populations or ranges were being maintained for 63% of species, but 30% are still declining (see section 5).
- Progress was mixed on targets to increase the numbers or distribution of priority species. All targets had been achieved or exceeded for 21% of the species assessed and 46% of species were making at least some progress against all their targets. However, there was no progress against the expansion targets for 25% of the species assessed (see section 6).
- This survey was based on a sample of species that Link members were able to report on and may not be representative of all priority species in England; overall progress may be less positive (see section 7).

### **The status of priority species should remain a key measure of nature's recovery.**

This report highlights the need for urgent implementation of the following recommendations from Link's response to the publication of the revised England Biodiversity Strategy – *Biodiversity 2020* – in 2011<sup>3</sup>:

1. The *Biodiversity 2020* implementation plan should include actions to secure or improve the status of *all* priority species.
2. Natural England and other statutory agencies must proactively adapt their programmes, projects, advice and partnerships to integrate the needs of priority species into site and habitat conservation activity.
3. A proper assessment should be undertaken of which priority species will be delivered through *all* landscape-scale conservation initiatives and Local Nature Partnerships.
4. A clear programme of species-specific action must be outlined for those priority species most likely to go extinct by 2020 and/or unlikely to be adequately conserved through a habitat or landscape focused approach.
5. Monitoring programmes, such as those on protected sites or in Nature Improvement Areas, should be modified or designed to measure progress on priority species.

<sup>1</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 37 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment ([www.wcl.org.uk](http://www.wcl.org.uk)).

<sup>2</sup> For this report, 'priority species' refers to the 303 species that were listed under the original UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) by 1999, for which a single species action plan was produced, a Lead Partner was appointed and where the species targets were relevant to England. Priority species identified in the review published in 2007 were not covered.

<sup>3</sup> *Implementing Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystems services* ([http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2011/Biodiversity\\_2020\\_critique\\_09Dec11.pdf](http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2011/Biodiversity_2020_critique_09Dec11.pdf)).

## 2. Background

In 2006, the Government agreed new targets for the species of plants and animals that had been identified as priority species for biodiversity conservation in the UK and in England in the late 1990s.

Targets were set for 2010, 2015 and in some cases for a longer timescale as well. Some of these species were rare and confined to a few key sites, others were more widespread but were threatened by rapid decline in recent decades. Maintenance targets ('holding the line') were aimed at sustaining the size and distribution of existing populations. Expansion targets ('restoring lost nature') were aimed at increasing numbers or range to help start restoration of former status, or make the populations more resilient to external factors e.g. climate change.

Measuring progress against the 2010 element of these targets (together with those on habitats) should have been a key way of assessing progress against the Government's international commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010; particularly as 2010 was identified as 'International Year of Biodiversity'. However, by 2010 it was clear that we were falling short of our overall biodiversity target and the Government showed no inclination to carry out an assessment of progress on individual species targets. This was particularly surprising and disappointing because a detailed assessment of progress against targets – including what had and had not been achieved and the reasons behind this – could have helped inform the revision of the England Biodiversity Strategy.<sup>4</sup>

To fill this gap a group of Link members decided to carry out an assessment of progress on targets for a selection of species that we were involved with.<sup>5</sup> The data presented and summarised in this report are the result of this exercise.

This work is pertinent as the Government considers the future of the existing targets and measures to help deliver species conservation as part of the delivery plan for the revised England Biodiversity Strategy.

## 3. Report

Our analysis looked at progress against 150 targets covering 69 priority species (24% of those that occur in England). A range of wildlife was covered – from the natterjack toad to the nail fungus – comprising 6 mammals, 16 birds, 12 vascular plants, 6 other plants, 15 moths, 5 butterflies, 5 other invertebrates and 4 amphibians/reptiles.

It is important to note that this is not a random sample. It was based on species for which information was readily available to Link members. Assessments were available for all priority amphibians and a high proportion of mammals and birds. Fungi, lichens and invertebrates (other than butterflies and moths) were relatively under-represented in this sample.

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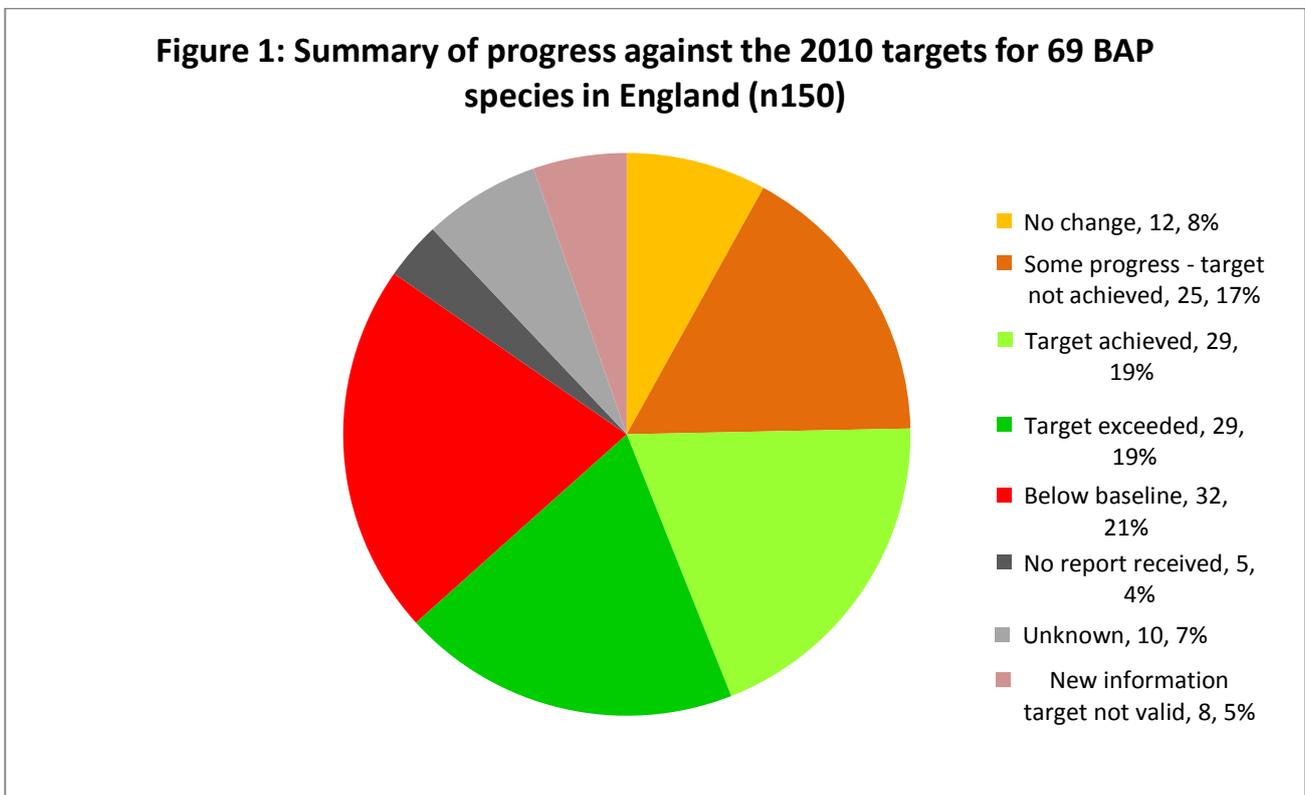
<sup>4</sup> Defra (2011) *Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystems services*, London, Defra.

<sup>5</sup> The following organisations contributed assessments to this analysis: Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species, Plantlife, RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts.

For 58 of these 69 species the Link group providing the data was the designated 'Lead Partner' under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the species. For the remaining 11 species the Link group did not include the Lead Partner but were still able to report on progress against the species targets.

#### 4. Overall progress against targets

A summary of progress for all 150 targets is shown in Figure 1. Overall, at least some progress had been made on 55% of these targets, with 19% of them being exceeded. However, there had been no progress or a decline against 29% of the targets.



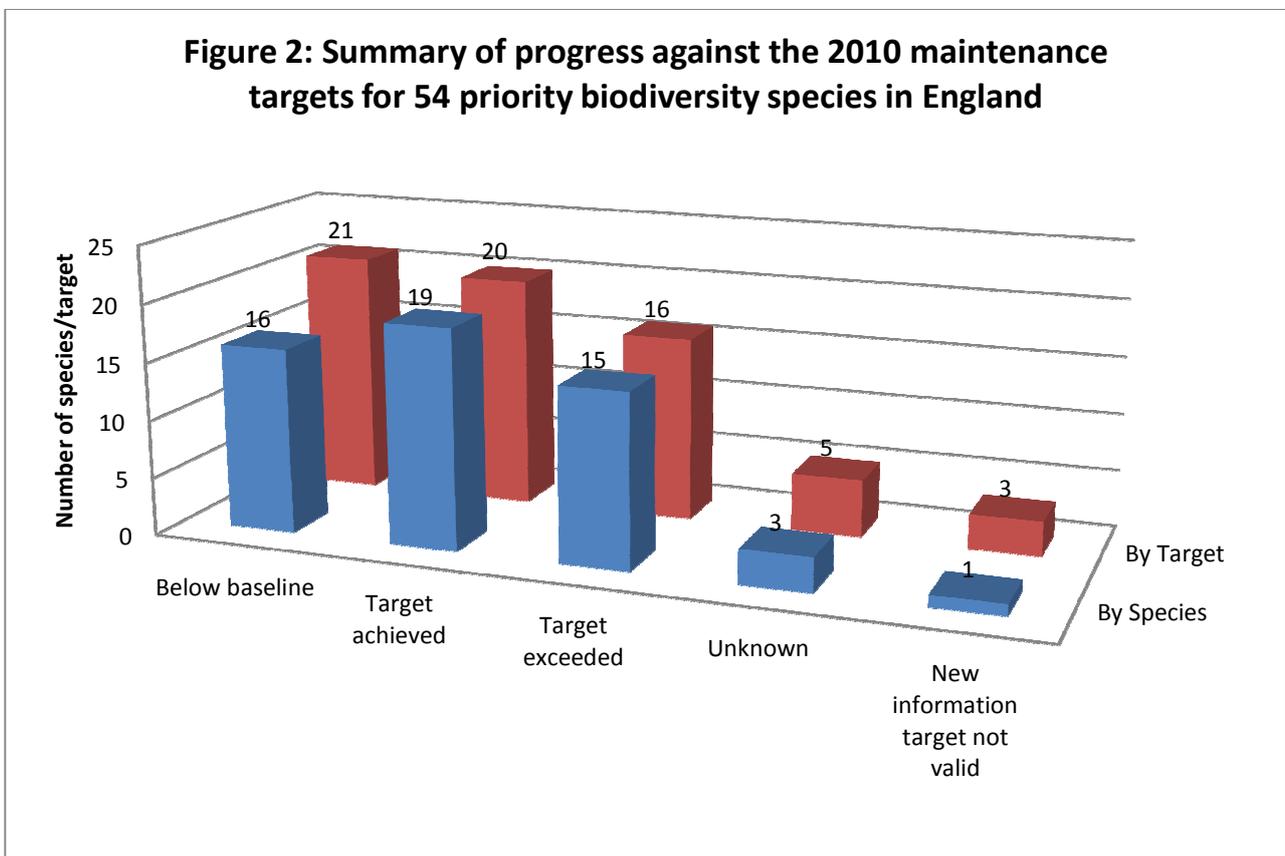
#### 5. Are we holding the line?

Sixty-five of the targets were aimed at maintaining either the population or range of the species in question. Some species had both range and population targets and there were a total of 54 species that had maintenance targets. 'Maintain the current range (68 occupied 10km<sup>2</sup>) of greater horseshoe bats in England' and 'maintain 3 fen sites in England for the fen orchid' are examples of this type of target and achieving these targets represents holding the line. For those species that have been in steep decline this would represent a good achievement, for others, e.g. those that have always been

scarce or restricted, it may be maintaining the status quo. Figure 2 shows a summary of progress against these targets.

The maintenance target for the greater horseshoe bat was exceeded, with 86 occupied 10 km<sup>2</sup> in 2010, and the fen orchid target was achieved. Other examples of success are the maintenance of the range of the song thrush and an increase in the number of sites/populations for the netted carpet moth. In contrast, the continued decline in the turtle dove and the decrease in the dingy mocha moth (from 31 to 22 sites) are examples where maintenance targets have not been met.

**Overall we have held the line for 63% of priority species assessed, but 30% are still slipping backwards.**

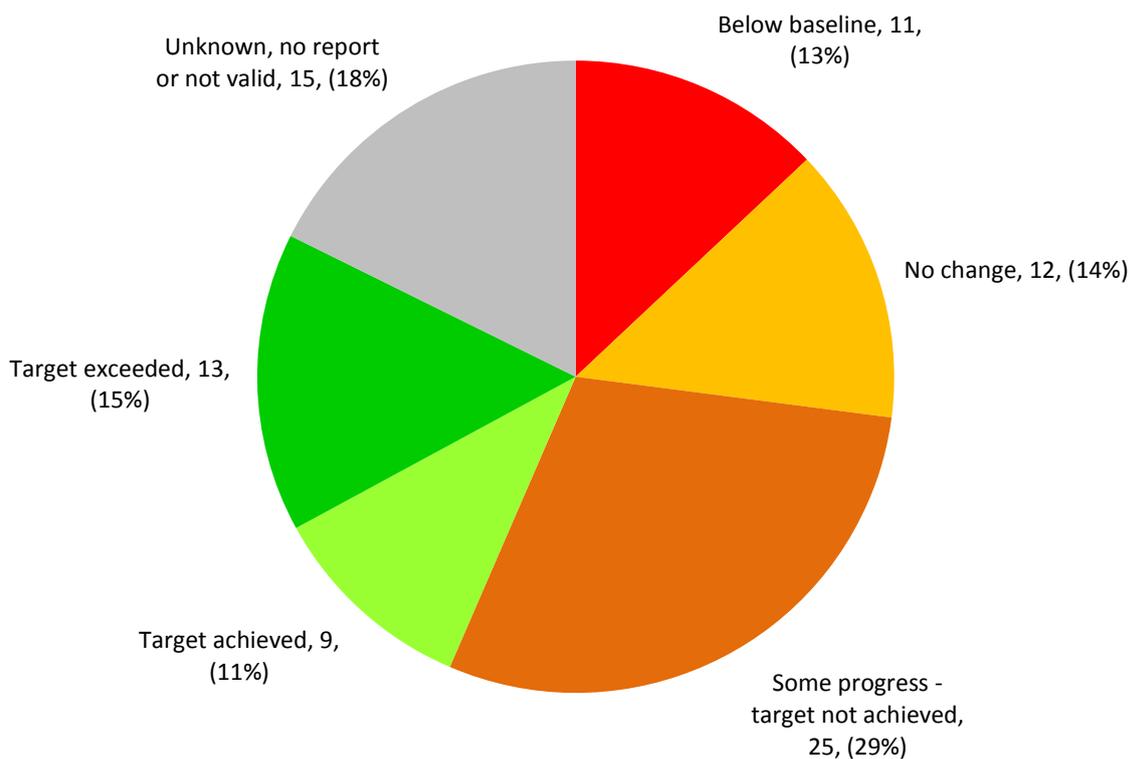


## 6. Are we restoring lost nature?

In addition to maintenance targets, the assessments looked at progress on enhancement targets, which were aimed at restoring a species. These targets were often trying to increase numbers or expand range, and sometimes both. There were 85 enhancement targets for 56 species covered in this assessment. For many of these species the target for 2010 represented a milestone towards recovery rather than the ultimate goal. Many of the species also have further milestones or targets for 2015 or 2020 as well as 2010. Figure 3 below shows a summary of progress against these targets.

Examples of enhancement targets are, to 'achieve an increase in the range of water voles by 23 new 10 km<sup>2</sup> by 2010' and to 're-establish populations of the large blue butterfly at a further 3 former sites in landscape areas by 2010'.

**Figure 3: Summary of progress against the 2010 enhancement targets (n 85) for 56 priority species in England (shown by target)**

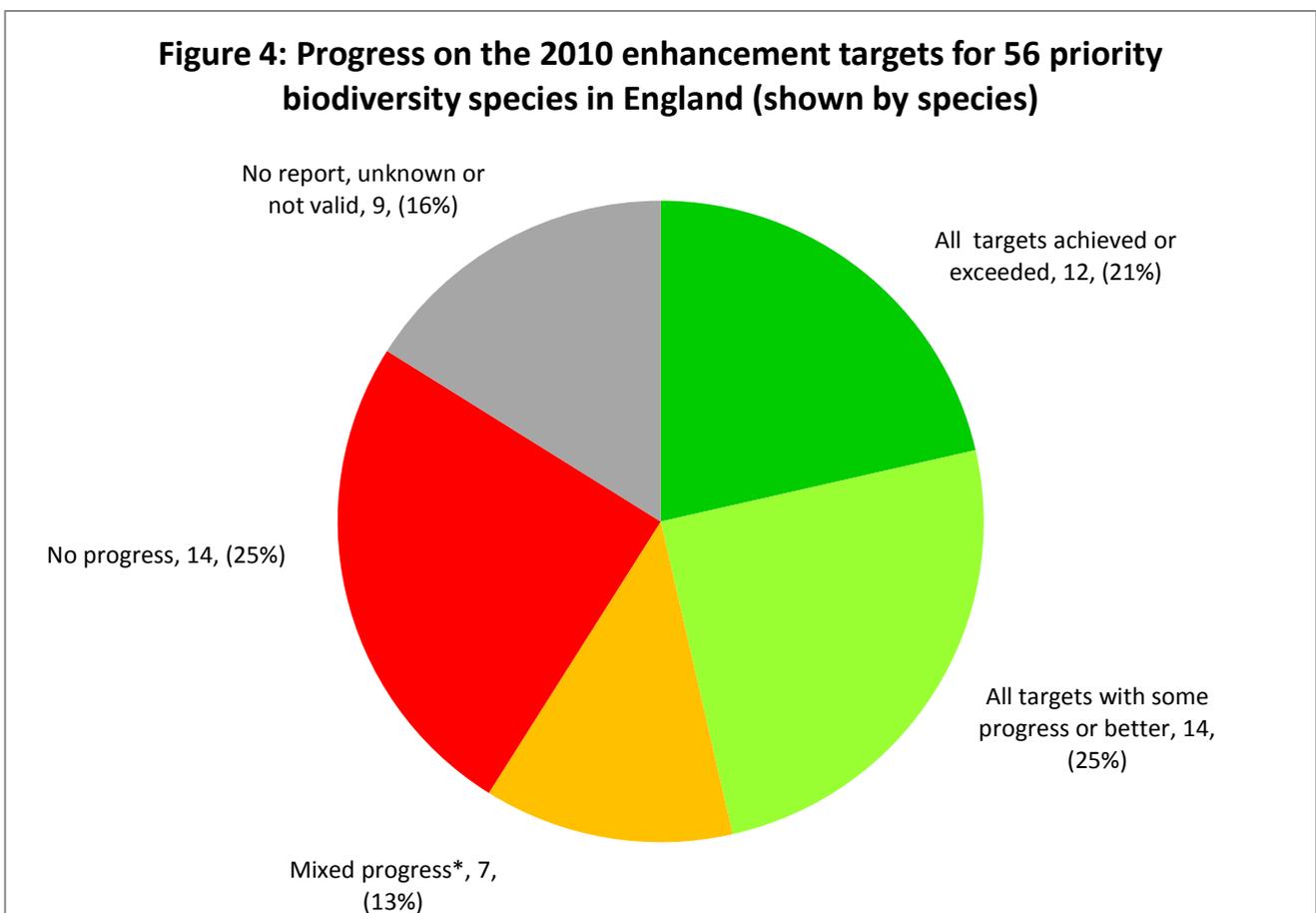


When considered on a species by species basis (see Figure 4, page 6) the assessments show that 26 species (46%) were making at least some progress against all of their targets, with 12 of these (21% overall) achieving or exceeding all of their enhancement targets. For example, the number of new 10km<sup>2</sup> occupied by water vole had increased by 88 and the large blue had re-established populations at three former sites. For bitterns, the number of booming males, the number of breeding sites and the

number inland away from vulnerable coastal sites (a target helping to build resilience to the impact of climate change) had all increased by 2010, and thus their enhancement targets had been exceeded.

In contrast, 14 species (25%) made no progress on their enhancement targets and in some cases have slipped backwards. For example, the starfruit was disappearing from existing sites against a target of re-establishing two populations at historic sites, and the black grouse population and range was declining.

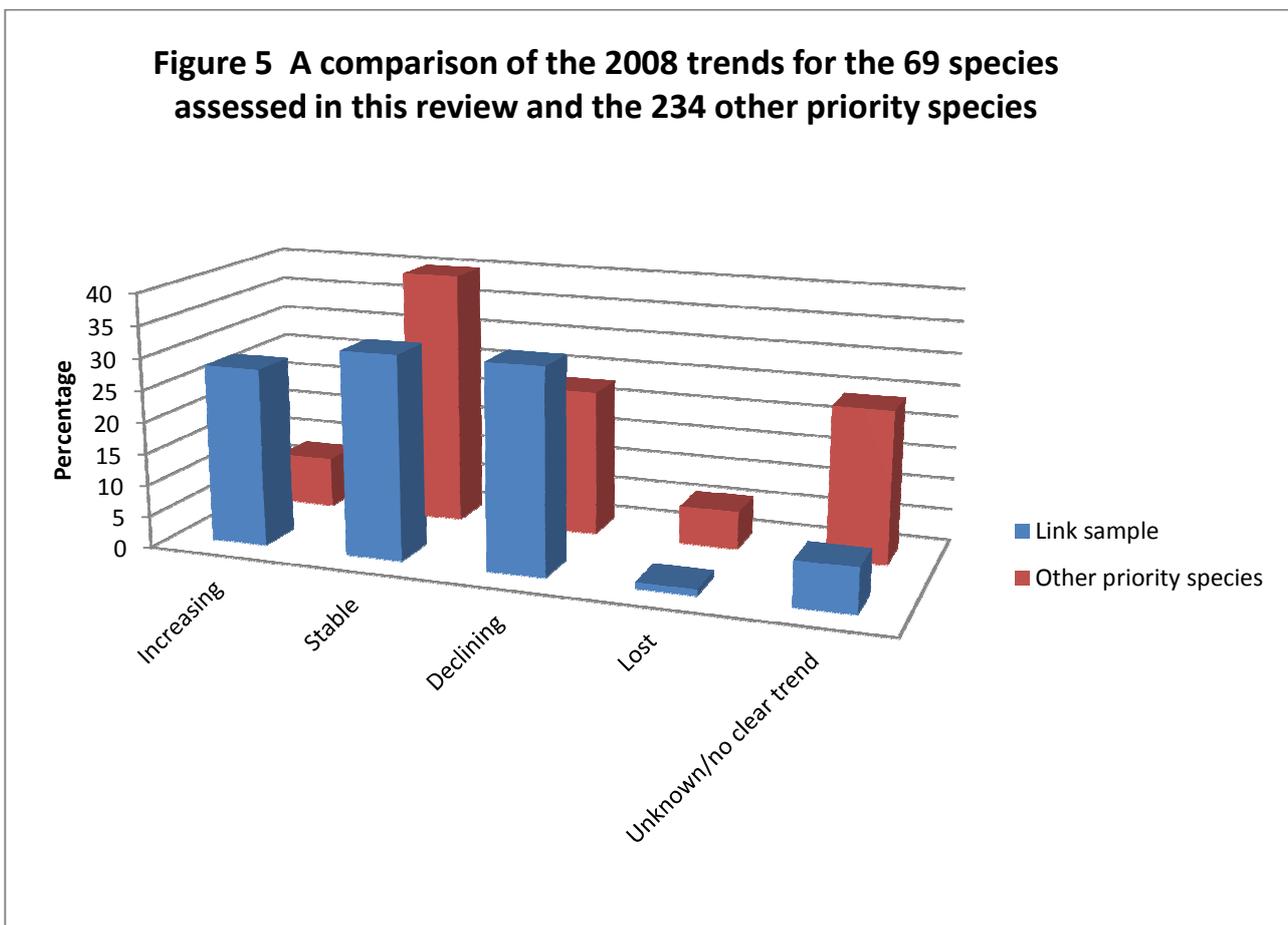
**Progress on targets to restore species has been mixed, but 21% of species assessed have met all their targets.**



\*mixed progress is where species had more than one enhancement target, and although some progress had been made on one of the targets, no progress had been made on the others. The 'No progress' category can include where numbers or range have declined (i.e. the species is below baseline).

### 7. Are these results representative of other BAP priority species?

As explained above, the species that were covered by our survey were not a random sample of the UK BAP species in England. They were mostly ones that had Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as Lead Partners. It is possible that the results for this subset of species are not representative of progress on priority species in England overall. For example, it is possible that they were given more or less attention than other species on the BAP list. In 2008, as part of a BAP report trend assessments were made for all priority species in England. Therefore, to test whether 69 species included in this target assessment were representative of priority species not covered the distribution of trends of these two groups was compared. The result of this comparison is shown in Figure 5 below.



This shows significant differences between the subset of priority species which we have reported target progress for and those that we have not. For example, a much higher proportion of the species in the subset covered by this assessment was reported to be increasing in 2008.

**It is therefore likely our analysis of progress against targets is more positive than if target assessments had been available for all priority species.**

## 8. Concluding comments

Experience suggests that clear targets can help encourage conservation action and the recovery of threatened wildlife. Some conservation NGOs have found targets helpful in focusing their work in the past and funding bodies have used targets to justify and prioritise spending on nature conservation. Unfortunately, specific targets for species (and habitats) are out of fashion and the revised England Biodiversity Strategy includes a broad outcome for species, rather than specific measurable targets.<sup>6</sup> However, the status of priority species and habitats should remain a key measure of nature's recovery.

Following the publication of the revised England Biodiversity Strategy, Link produced a response detailing suggestions for making progress.<sup>7</sup> It is critically important that those actions recommended by Link to conserve our most vulnerable species are now implemented with a sense of urgency:

- The *Biodiversity 2020* implementation plan should include actions to secure or improve the status of *all* priority species.
- Natural England and other statutory agencies must proactively adapt their programmes, projects, advice and partnerships to integrate the needs of priority species into site and habitat conservation activity.
- A proper assessment should be undertaken of which priority species will be delivered through *all* landscape-scale conservation initiatives and Local Nature Partnerships.
- A clear programme of species-specific action must be outlined for those priority species most likely to go extinct by 2020 and/or unlikely to be adequately conserved through a habitat or landscape focused approach.
- Monitoring programmes, such as those on protected sites or in Nature Improvement Areas, should be modified or designed to measure progress on priority species.

This report is supported by the following 13 Link members:

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| • Amphibian and Reptile Conservation    | • Pond Conservation                         |
| • Badger Trust                          | • The Wildlife Trusts                       |
| • Bat Conservation Trust                | • Royal Society for the Protection of Birds |
| • Butterfly Conservation                | • Woodland Trust                            |
| • The Grasslands Trust                  | • Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust                 |
| • People's Trust for Endangered Species | • WWF-UK                                    |
| • Plantlife                             |   |

**Wildlife and Countryside Link**  
**April 2012**



Wildlife and Countryside Link  
89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP  
W: [www.wcl.org.uk](http://www.wcl.org.uk)

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<sup>6</sup> 'By 2020, we will see an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife and will have prevented further human induced extinctions of known threatened species.'

<sup>7</sup> *Implementing Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystems services*  
([http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2011/Biodiversity\\_2020\\_critique\\_09Dec11.pdf](http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2011/Biodiversity_2020_critique_09Dec11.pdf)).