



Achieving harmony with nature

How to ensure COP15 helps restore nature
across the four countries of the UK

Summary report

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The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) will be the biggest biodiversity conference in a decade. Hosted by China, the first stage took place virtually in mid-October 2021 and the second will be an in-person meeting in 2022 in Kunming.

World leaders are expected to agree on a new post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework which contains a set of headline goals and targets. It is intended to set nature on a path to recovery by 2030 and achieve a 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature. Previous attempts to halt biodiversity loss under the Convention, such as the Aichi Targets set in 2010, have failed largely because high level goals have not been matched by national verifiable commitments and action plans. A Nature Positive future is possible, but only if governments act without delay to implement meaningful action across the UK to restore nature and tackle the causes of biodiversity loss.

Where are we starting from?

Without urgent and significant action, the world's wild species, habitats and ecosystems face a dire future. The [5th Global Biodiversity Outlook](#) released last year revealed that an average of around 25% of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened with extinction.

In the UK, the [2019 State of Nature report](#) highlighted long-term loss of wildlife across all parts of the nation. The analysis revealed that since 1970, 41% of species have decreased in abundance, and 15% of species are threatened with extinction from the UK. A [recent analysis](#) carried out by the Natural History Museum, in collaboration with the RSPB, reaffirms this picture. Using the Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII), the analysis reveals that the UK ranks 12th worst globally out of 240 countries and territories, and lowest out of all G7 nations, having retained only 50% of its biodiversity in face of human pressures.

What do we need?

At the beginning of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) and ahead of the forthcoming COP15, there are widespread calls both internationally and in the four countries of the UK to address the ecological crisis with transformative actions that go far beyond previous efforts. A new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition and commitment to a Nature Positive future. For each country, the credibility of negotiating positions is proportionate to the strength of domestic actions.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly declared the UK to be a global leader on the environment. To live up to this rhetoric and set the bar for the rest of the world at COP15, the four countries of the UK must demonstrate that they are taking action to protect and restore nature at home. There are five key actions that the four governments of the UK must take in order to raise ambition for global action on nature and ensure that the post-2020 framework is successfully implemented across the UK.

5 key actions



Set targets to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030



Implement measures to ensure success of national targets, including protecting 30% of land and seas



Implement a robust monitoring and reporting framework with regular stock takes of progress



Align nature policies with national climate policies



Co-ordinate action on nature and climate across the four countries of the UK

1 Set ambitious targets in law to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030

We are calling for an ambitious deal for nature and people in 2022, under the CBD, that includes a strong commitment from the global community to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030. The deal must result in meaningful action to prevent human-caused extinctions, recover the abundance and diversity of life, and retain and restore ecosystem integrity, so that all nature and people can thrive and nature can play a full role in climate action.

In order to ensure the global goal is widely recognised and acted upon by all sectors, a clear headline target for nature that works for both the global and the UK levels is needed. For example, the target of 'Net Zero' has been adopted by governments, business, and countless other groups in response to the Paris Agreement commitment to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. This useful framing for action on climate change should have an equivalent to tackle the nature crisis: the objective of halting and beginning to reverse decline by 2030 and of becoming 'Nature Positive'.

We propose a single Global Goal that comprises the following set of components: 1) species abundance; 2) species distribution; 3) species extinction risk; 4) habitat quality and extent. Securing progress or stability against all of these components will be the key to Goal attainment.

A new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition and action to deliver commitments. Ahead of next year's talks, all four countries of the UK should put in place robust targets in domestic legislation to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030 and create monitoring systems to track progress. As the UK will be represented as a single party at the talks, adopting a common approach across all four nations will be important to strengthen its negotiating position and for subsequent implementation, as well as setting the bar for the rest of the global community to follow suit.

For more information on nature recovery targets, please see the Environment Link UK's briefing [Global Goal for Nature and People](#).



2

Implement measures to ensure success of the post-2020 framework, including effectively protecting 30% of the UK's land and seas by 2030

A key target in the current draft of the post-2020 framework is the global target to protect 30% of the planet for nature by 2030 (known as '30 by 30' or '30x30'). If successfully delivered, 30x30 could significantly contribute to a Nature Positive world. Effectively protected areas are the front line of defence against growing pressures from human activity and climate change and are vital for securing the future of some of our most important species and habitats, particularly when integrated into wider landscapes and seascapes managed well for nature.

Parties to the CBD will be expected to contribute to this global goal through domestic action to increase the coverage and effectiveness of protected areas, and each of the UK countries has committed to this target. Although the UK will be expected to deliver 30x30 as a single party under the Convention, each of the four UK countries must play a part in its success with 30% met in each nation.

The idea has gained much political attention over recent months, but there has been less clarity about how governments intend to meet the target. The Prime Minister has claimed that 28% of UK land is protected for nature, however, recent research suggests that as little as 5% of this is effectively protected. 38.2% of UK seas are designated but according to the 2019 UK Marine Strategy assessment of progress towards achieving GES in full, only 4 out of 15 indicators for healthy seas are currently being met. For the target of 30% to facilitate nature's restoration, attention must be focused on both the extent and effectiveness of protected sites and networks.

For 30 by 30 to be truly meaningful for nature, we recommend that the four governments of the UK:

- Ensure that land, freshwater and marine areas counted towards the 30% are effectively protected for nature in the long-term, that they are well-managed and regularly monitored at appropriate intervals as part of a programme of active management and investment. This monitoring should show clear evidence of good management for nature and that the area is either in good condition for nature or is showing demonstrable signs of ecological recovery.
- Ensure that protected areas don't exclude people or communities and are managed in a way that benefits both people and nature.
- Ensure land, freshwater and marine areas protected for nature create large scale 'nature networks' which expand areas of good quality habitat while also enhancing ecological connectivity.
- Publish these conditions for the quality of site protection under 30x30 as part of its negotiating position for COP15.

For more information, please see the full briefing on 30 by 30: Land and Sea for Nature's Recovery.

3

Develop and implement a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework to measure progress towards targets and goals

Part of the blame for the abject failure of the UK to implement the post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and Aichi targets has been attributed to the lack of a robust, transparent and accountable monitoring and reporting framework, which would have ensured countries tracked nationally comparable progress towards the collective aim.

Robust and effective monitoring frameworks are essential at both the local and global level to understand the state of our natural world and the impact of damaging activities. Monitoring information can be used to direct policies and management interventions, to assess their effectiveness and to take the remedial action necessary to get, and stay, on course.

The UK is in a better position to succeed now than in the last decade owing to the vast array of digital surveying and data collection technologies available. However, monitoring of the state of the natural environment across the UK remains poor and patchy, even in the most important sites for wildlife, allowing deterioration to go unnoticed and unchecked.

Below we outline key elements of a strengthened monitoring and transparency framework that should be agreed at COP15, and how the four countries of the UK can put this in place at home to help turn the tide for nature:

- **Standardised reporting on a robust set of indicators:** The four UK nations must report on a unified set of SMART indicators to allow for aggregation and disaggregation of information to gain an understanding of progress at a UK level. These should align with a set of global indicators to allow for global stocktaking. Importantly, there has been more progress against Aichi targets that meet 'SMART' criteria, which is relevant for both target design and for domestic implementation and monitoring.
- **A strong global accountability framework:** Alongside targets, there must also be the prospect of repercussions if targets are not met. Setting a legal requirement domestically to meet targets should be the first step, and governments should be required to formally report progress and failure towards achieving targets, subject to full parliamentary scrutiny across all UK countries by independent enforcement bodies.
- **Review and ratcheting of ambition and actions:** the four UK governments must regularly update their ambition and strengthen their actions accordingly, following an assessment of progress towards targets. This should also be translated at a global level, similar to the ratchet mechanism under the UNFCCC process.
- **Better environmental data:** Reporting on the state of the natural environment and making changes to its management will only be possible if we are able to determine its health and track changes over time. Good quality environmental data is essential for such monitoring and demonstrating progress towards specific outcomes. Investment is needed in each of the UK nations for environmental data infrastructure and to identify data gaps in the provision of environmental data, followed by targeted collection of data to fill these gaps.

4 Align nature policy with climate policy to maximise synergistic approaches to tackling the twin crises

The climate and ecological crises are inextricably linked. At the same time as healthy ecosystems contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, climate change poses an existential threat to global biodiversity and limits its ability to provide these services. Creating intersectoral policies which fully embed the inseparability of climate, biodiversity and human quality of life will be crucial, not only as cost-effective solutions for governments that increase resilience to the effects of climate change, but to maximise beneficial outcomes and avoid unintended consequences.

The good news is that we already have many, if not most, of the solutions. It was positive to see the role of nature in tackling and adapting to the effects of climate change significantly elevated at the recent COP26 in Glasgow, such as through the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests, announcements on sustainable supply chains, as well as in the Glasgow Climate Pact itself. However, the UK will need to demonstrate that it is serious about joining up efforts and implementing actions on the twin crises, building on the momentum from COP26 and championing ambition in the CBD process at COP15. The four UK governments should continue this role through domestic action to pursue more integrated solutions, including:

- Recognising the role that natural ecosystems can and do play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. This means embedding nature in future NDCs and NAPs submitted to the UNFCCC, with clear and separate accounting for industrial emissions, land use emissions, and nature-based carbon removals.
- Ensure join-up between national climate policy and nature policy as each country develops its NBSAP following COP15 talks in 2022.
- Assess the storage and sequestration potential of a range of habitat types, including permanent grasslands and coastal and marine ecosystems such as saltmarshes, seagrass beds and carbon stored in the ocean floor. Ensure that these areas are protected and properly managed to maximise their carbon and nature potential.
- Ensure that nature-based solutions for climate also deliver for nature by agreeing core standards for the certification and measurement of nature-based solutions, and that they are not used as greenwashing tools for polluters to carry on with business as usual.
- Ensure that impacts of climate change on species and habitats are understood so that targets are developed that can address, for example, changes in range or location; this could require provision for increased transboundary cooperation.





5 Co-ordinate action on nature and climate across the four countries of the UK.

Halting and reversing the decline of nature by 2030 will require co-operation at all levels. Biodiversity loss is driven by local, subnational, national, and global factors, so responses are also needed at all scales and across all sectors. What does this mean in the UK?

1. Global agreements must boost domestic ambition and vice versa

The post-2020 framework and global targets form the overarching framework for national ambition. Whilst the UK will be expected to deliver commitments to the post-2020 GBF as a single party under the Convention, each of the four UK countries must play a full part in its success. As some of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, we have a responsibility to be leading nature recovery ambitions. This commitment and action towards achieving high domestic ambitions can then be utilised as a mechanism to influence global negotiations and actions.

2. A collaborative agreement to deliver UK wide commitments

Flexibility for individual country strategy and actions will need to reflect respective circumstances, while ensuring that UK-wide commitments demonstrably and measurably add up to achieving national and global commitments. This must be shown by the explicit connection and reporting between national and sub-national targets, NBSAPs and global commitments.

3. Joined up, ambitious subnational action

A commitment to policy coherence between government departments and Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies in each of the four nations must be included in their NBSAPs, and reflect that both on land and at sea, transboundary cooperation is essential across the UK countries, the island of Ireland, and the broader global community. Nature and the environment are global assets, benefiting us all, but affected and managed by the laws, policies and actions (or inactions) of individual jurisdictions.

Ensuring ecological connectivity between protected areas or close to national borders, will be essential to creating a UK-wide network for nature's restoration, especially as climate change forces species beyond their existing ranges. In addition to supporting the UK's efforts to meet the 30x30 target and other targets under the post-2020 framework, this would demonstrate the importance of cooperation with neighbouring countries to other Parties of the CBD. Importantly, this should not limit ambition or progress in any individual country, but instead elevate standards.

4. Local engagement and empowerment

At a local authority scale, although projects will have regional objectives specific to an area's ecology, local biodiversity action plans should be required to align and refer explicitly to national targets resulting from the post-2020 GBF. The role of local authorities in achieving the targets set should be clearly referenced in the UK Biodiversity Framework and NBSAPs. Policies must be developed with participation of local communities in order to tailor them to their specific circumstances. A consistent framework and comparable metrics should be developed for defining local targets and success measures to clarify local authority responsibilities to UK objectives.

Engagement at a local scale increases understanding, awareness and appreciation of biodiversity values, flags the importance of meeting targets and demonstrates that biodiversity loss can be halted. This will both encourage public support for larger scale action taken by government and others and empower grass roots action for nature.





Conclusion

COP15 in 2022 will be a crucial moment for world leaders to agree to a global deal that will truly turn the tide for nature and bend the curve of biodiversity loss over the coming decade. Through the UK's continuing COP26 presidency, there is a key opportunity to carry forward the prominence of nature and translate this momentum into an ambitious agreement in Kunming.

At the moment, none of the four governments are ambitious enough across all five action areas: targets are not comprehensive; 30x30 claims are beset with hyperbole; monitoring is poor and patchy; links between nature and climate are poorly developed; and four-country coordination is unsystematic and uncertain. In order for the UK to play its part in securing a strong global deal for nature, improvements in all four countries are needed before COP15 takes place.

The good news is that it's not too late to turn things around. Bending the curve of biodiversity loss by 2030 is still within reach if the four UK governments step up their ambition to address the joint nature and climate crises and turn warm words into real action. By addressing the five main points outlined above in domestic policy, the UK would not only begin to create a nature-positive future across the four nations, but also demonstrate what is possible on a global scale and set an example for world leaders to follow suit.

For further details on each of these asks and an assessment of the starting point in each UK nation, please see the full version of the 'Achieving harmony with nature' report [here](#).