

# Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010

## Final Progress Assessment by Wildlife and Countryside Link

February 2011



## HALTING BIODIVERSITY LOSS BY 2010

### Wildlife and Countryside Link assessment of progress during 2010

In January 2006, Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) published a challenge to Government by setting out what we thought the 2010 biodiversity commitment meant and how progress should be measured. We agreed to look at progress on an annual basis, to highlight successes or failures around the turn of the year.

Presented below is our January 2011 assessment of progress. This year we are measuring overall progress against the performance indicators included in 2006. All assessments have been made at an England level, but in some cases, we have had to use broader information for the UK.

This is our final assessment carried out at the end of 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity. This is a year during which we have been encouraged by Government to celebrate progress and success, in delivering biodiversity conservation and in raising awareness on the need to do more. But it is also a year in which it is widely acknowledged that there has been a collective failure to halt the loss of biodiversity at both global and national levels. There are several reasons for this failure. Incomplete implementation of existing legislation, poor integration of biodiversity into sectoral policies, gaps in data and knowledge, insufficient funding and ineffective biodiversity governance and communication are all key issues. Underlying this has been a lack of political will to ensure that biodiversity conservation is something integral to good management of the country. For too long it has been seen as an optional add on, and one that usually has just not been added on!

2010 has been a significant year in which to reflect on progress and reset our goals and ambitions. In March, the Council of the EU agreed a new headline target of 'halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020 and restoring them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss'. In October, at Nagoya, a revised mission for the Convention on Biological Diversity and 20 sub targets (the 'Aichi targets') were agreed. Meanwhile the Coalition Government has consulted on a Natural Environment White Paper which will be published in spring 2011, together with a revised England Biodiversity Strategy. Our report below illustrates just how important it will be to get these right. The degradation of biodiversity is a crisis. We need nothing less than a transformation in our commitment to delivering nature conservation in England.

**In the assessments below - green indicates that good progress has been made, amber means moderate progress has taken place and red means progress has been poor.**

## 1. Protecting and enhancing threatened species and habitats (stop the rot).

### Performance indicator:

#### No BAP priority species and habitats 'still declining' by 2010.

In 2008, the fourth reporting round was carried out for the original Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species and habitats<sup>1</sup>. The data collected in this exercise show that in 2008 in England, 18 (45%) of BAP priority habitats were declining and 93 (29%) of priority species were declining or had been lost. This was a slight deterioration for habitats and a slight improvement for species since the previous reporting round in 2005. Therefore, the outcome to stop the decline of species and habitats has clearly not been met.

Some priority habitats, such as reedbeds and lowland heathlands are increasing in England and a number of species, e.g. stone-curlew, large blue butterfly, ladybird spider and stinking hawk's-beard have benefited from targeted species recovery measures. However, these success stories are too few and far between; there are still too many species and habitats in trouble.

In 2006, measurable targets were reset at a country level for the original BAP priority species and habitats. Milestones were set for 2010, 2015 and in some cases longer timescales. Limited reporting on progress against these targets was possible in 2008. The end of 2010 would be the most appropriate time to assess how much progress has been made. However, it is apparent that there are no plans from Government or its agencies for reporting on progress against the species targets in England and no clear timetable or mechanism for reporting against 2010 habitat targets in England has been announced.

The 2008 BAP reporting did not cover the species and habitats added to the UK BAP list in August 2007. This revision resulted in the identification of 943 species and 56 habitats of principle importance for biodiversity conservation under s41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. At present, there is apparently no clear baseline of the status of these species and habitats or timescale for reporting the trends in the future. Addressing this gap should be part of our preparation for delivering the EU 2020 biodiversity target.

In October 2007, Defra launched the new framework for delivering priority habitats and species through an ecosystem approach<sup>2</sup>. This was followed by a new framework for England in 2008<sup>3</sup>. One of the key elements of these frameworks is the aim to deliver a significant proportion of species conservation needs through habitat work. We appreciate that the significant increase in priority species and habitats necessitated a new approach. However, rather than simplifying processes and making communication more effective, the opposite has occurred. Rather than galvanising increased participation and action for biodiversity the changes appear to have resulted in disengagement at all levels in the biodiversity conservation community. We believe that progress on species and habitat conservation has stalled in recent years, the communication between national and local levels has deteriorated and we do not have an effective reporting system. These are issues that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=5398>

<sup>2</sup> Conserving Biodiversity – the UK Approach (2007) Defra on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Partnership.

<sup>3</sup> Securing Biodiversity – A new framework for delivering priority habitats and species in England (2008). Natural England.

must be addressed by the Natural Environment White Paper and the review of the England Biodiversity Strategy.

Assessment – **Red**

## **2. Protecting and managing our finest wildlife sites (Protect the best)**

### **a). Marine**

#### **Performance indicator:**

**A complete Marine Protected Area network (including Natura 2000 sites, OSPAR MPAs, nationally important marine sites and highly protected sites) identified and notified by 2010.**

Site protection in the marine environment continues to lag decades behind that on land. The Marine & Coastal Access Act received Royal Assent in November 2009 and, given proper implementation provides the legal tools to better deliver marine protection. The Act provides for Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to be designated to contribute to a representative and ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which will also include Natura 2000 sites.

Regional site selection projects have been set up to identify MCZs in our seas and are due to deliver final proposals by August 2011, for public consultation and approval by the Secretary of State in 2012. Separately, some additional marine Natura 2000 sites are also being considered. Final recommendations for 10 new Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and two new Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were submitted to the EC in 2010, two further SACs are undergoing formal consultation, and one additional SAC will be brought forward during 2011. However, progress is still slow and for SPAs in particular, coverage remains woefully inadequate. In addition, the harbour porpoise still remains completely unprotected. Recent work programme forecasts from the statutory agencies suggest that completion of the marine SPA network in English waters might be delayed until at least 2016 on current timelines.

The Government's aim is still for the MPA network to be substantially established by 2012, which we welcome and believe the Government should stick to, but it does mean the original 2010 target above has been missed. The Government will also need to ensure comprehensive and effective application of management measures to existing and future MPAs, including MCZs and Natura 2000 sites.

Assessment – **Red**

### **b). Terrestrial and freshwater sites**

#### **Performance indicator:**

**95% of UK SSSIs in favourable condition by 2010.**

As of 1 December 2010, 95.8% of SSSIs in England were in 'target' (i.e. favourable or unfavourable recovering) condition, indicating that the (now abolished) Public Service Agreement (PSA) target in England (95% of SSSIs by area in 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition by December 2010) has been met. This reflects the very real efforts made by Government and its agencies to improve the condition

of England's SSSIs in response to this target, and the effective way in which they have worked with stakeholders to focus attention on its delivery.

It is important to note that most progress towards the PSA target has been made in the transition of large areas from 'unfavourable' to 'unfavourable recovering' condition. This has been triggered by funding from schemes such as HLS and the management that this supports which is intended to address the causes of unfavourable condition. While such management and funding can be seen as a proxy for the recovery of biodiversity, it will take time to see whether or not this is effective, and even where it is; the biodiversity on some sites will take many years to recover. Over the life of the target there has, in fact, been a slight decline in the area achieving 'favourable' condition. In the last year alone, the area in favourable (as opposed to unfavourable recovering) condition has declined – from 43.8% (November 2009) to 41.0% (December 2010). This means that the commendable progress to date is very vulnerable to cuts in public sector spending. We are concerned that the progress to date may not be sustained, and may not therefore lead to real improvements in the condition of SSSIs on the ground. For example, the lack of improvement in the condition of open water SSSIs is of particular concern.

As we move through 2010 and beyond, the emphasis must now shift to delivery of favourable condition to ensure that the good work to date is sustained and not wasted. Sound scientific understanding of the causes of unfavourable condition, and of the efficacy of management measures, will be key to assessing the extent to which measures now in place will deliver the desired results. It is clear that greater investment in science to 'crack' particular issues (e.g. the effects and management of diffuse pollution in fresh water ecosystems) will be necessary along the way.

Assessment: **Green**

### **3. Making space for biodiversity (Restore the rest)**

#### **a) Wider countryside**

##### **Performance Indicator:**

**By 2010, there should be a positive trend in the indices for farmland and woodland bird populations, for bats and for butterflies.**

The latest annual England natural environment indicator on farmland bird populations was published in January 2011<sup>4</sup>. The smoothed index for **farmland birds** (19 species) in England was 54% lower in 2009 than its 1970 level. The index is now at its lowest level. Twelve of the 19 species on the indicator declined between 2008 and 2009 and for six of these (including lapwing, grey partridge and skylark) the decline was significant.<sup>5</sup> For many of these species the decline in the year is a continuation of the trend over the last four or five years. Seven species of farmland birds increased between 2008 and 2009. The increase was significant for only two, whitethroat and goldfinch.

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<sup>4</sup> Wild Bird Populations in England. Defra Statistical Release , 20 January 2011  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/environment/wildlife/download/pdf/110120-stats-wild-bird-populations-eng.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Wild Bird Populations: Farmland Birds in England 2009. Defra Statistical Release , 29 July 2010  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/environment/wildlife/download/pdf/100729farmland-birds-release.pdf>

The updated index for **woodland birds** showed that the smoothed woodland birds index for England (35 species) was 25% lower in 2009 than its 1970 level. The greatest decline took place between the mid 1980s and mid 1990s. There has been little change in recent years. The decline in woodland birds has been driven by declines in specialist woodland birds. Nine species have declined by more than half since 1970 and six (wood warbler, willow tit, tree pipit, spotted flycatcher, lesser redpoll and lesser spotted woodpecker) have declined by more than 70% in this time. Generalist woodland birds have fared better.

Assessment: **Amber/Red**

In the twentieth century there were significant declines in **bat populations** which affected conservation status. There are currently 17 species of bat breeding in the UK. Trends for 11 of these species have been assessed using data from 1997-2010 from a number of different surveys as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP). To 2010, seven species (greater horseshoe bat, lesser horseshoe bat, Natterer's bat, common pipistrelle, whiskered/Brandt's bat and noctule), showed statistically significant increases in population trends in at least one survey type. The four remaining species are considered to be stable. However, not all survey results confirm these trends (for example, colony counts for Natterer's bat are showing declines in numbers) and other species still need more data. It is for this reason that any trend should be treated with caution.

These are early indications that some species are starting to show signs of recovery thanks to the significant conservation efforts in the last decade. More information is required to ensure that these trends are true reflections of the status of bats and that bat populations recover to the full capacity of the landscape.

Assessment: **Amber/Green**

For **butterflies**, composite indices of abundance have been produced (covering 49 species) at a UK level using data collected at 1777 sites since 1976, with measures for species strongly associated with semi natural habitats (specialists) and for those found in the wider countryside (generalists). Large fluctuations in numbers between years are typical features of butterfly populations therefore assessments are based upon analysis of the underlying smoothed trends.

The smoothed trend for generalist species shows little or no overall change since 1976, although some species including speckled wood and comma have expanded northward responding positively to climate change, whilst others including wall brown and small heath have declined in their core range. The situation for specialist butterfly species is less positive, with the smoothed index significantly lower than the period 1976-79 and an overall decline of 28%. The decline in specialist species is considered to have been triggered by the 1976 drought and their subsequent failure to recover appears linked to a range of factors including intensification of land management, abandonment/habitat neglect, inappropriate conservation management, climate change and habitat fragmentation.

Assessment: **Amber**

**b) Education Performance Indicator:**

**By 2010, all school children should have gained experience of the natural world through out-of-classroom learning as an integral part of school education.**

Despite a positive report in April from the then Children, Schools and Families Select Committee following their inquiry about 'Transforming Education Outside the Classroom', the subsequent response from the Coalition Government has signalled a significant withdrawal of support and backwards step for outdoor learning. The onus for ensuring all children regularly experience nature has firmly be transferred to the organisations providing these opportunities (including many members of Link), with little apparent consideration of the considerable contribution they already make (or the recommendations of the Select Committee). These changes are also reflected in revisions to the HLS scheme by Defra, which have withdrawn funding to new entrant farmers for hosting educational visits.

In March, as part of the England Biodiversity Strategy, and in support of the International Year of Biodiversity, Defra and DCSF produced a booklet for schools to introduce various ways to engage with biodiversity, and the diverse benefits associated with doing so. This was in support of the DCSF's National Framework for Sustainable Schools, and was a welcome step in acknowledging the critical role of the natural environment in delivering this framework. However, the Coalition Government has indicated that it will no longer be promoting Sustainable Schools, which will greatly diminish the potential impacts of this booklet for benefitting biodiversity and children.

The Government has announced that it will review the Qualified Teacher Status standards – the professional requirements for teachers. This offers a decisive opportunity for the Government to ensure that every teacher is trained to be confident, competent and committed to thoroughly engage with learning outside the classroom and environmental sustainability.

Assessment: **Amber/Red**

This is the fifth and final assessment made by Wildlife and Countryside Link since the publication of our challenge to Government in 2006. The table below summarises progress overall from 2006 to the end of 2010.

Indicators	Assessment area	Final 2010 assessment
<b>1. Protecting and enhancing threatened species and habitats</b>		<b>Red</b>
<b>2. Protecting and managing our finest wildlife sites</b>	a) Marine b) Terrestrial and freshwater	<b>Red</b> <b>Green</b>
<b>3. Making space for biodiversity</b>	a) Birds Bats Butterflies b) Education	<b>Amber/Red</b> <b>Amber/Green</b> <b>Amber</b> <b>Amber/Red</b>

## The 2010 Challenge for Government

At the start of 2010, International Year of Biodiversity, Link set out eight key areas where we wanted to see progress in the year. This recognised that the 2010 biodiversity target was going to be missed but rather than give up these were areas that needed to be addressed if we were to 'hit the ground running' towards the 2020 target. These 'asks' are outlined below together with our assessment of progress achieved in 2010.

- 1. An effective surveillance strategy.** *The 2002, 2005 and 2008 BAP reporting rounds highlighted glaring gaps in the ability to monitor the trends of priority species and habitats. A clear strategy is required which sets out these gaps and by the end of 2010 a prioritised timetable for filling them. The current UK strategy fails to do this. The revised strategy and timetable needs to be signed off by Government.*

Several of the NGOs within Link are actively contributing to monitoring and surveillance, often through the engagement of significant numbers of volunteers. The monitoring of some priority species needs specialist input and the monitoring of habitats needs co-ordination at an England or UK level. We need to utilise modern technology (such as satellite imagery) more effectively.

As noted under 1 above there is no clear 2010 baseline for UKBAP priority species and habitats at either a UK or England level. Neither is there a clear timetable for reporting on progress for either the original priorities or the revised list agreed in 2007. In addition, the network of UK Lead Partners that provided cost effective high level reporting for the previous BAP reporting rounds has been allowed to wither and die and this has yet to be replaced at an England level. UK biodiversity indicators are now due to be discussed until March 2011. A UK surveillance strategy has been under development since 2006. It is still being described as 'still under preparation'.<sup>6</sup>

In 2010 a partnership led by Plantlife, including the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI), British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and The Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH), completed a research project<sup>7</sup> funded by JNCC to design the ideal plant surveillance scheme. The project aimed to develop a methodology for use by volunteers to enable the collation of information on the status of plants across the wider countryside, which would complement other species and habitat surveillance, to provide an understanding of the overall state of the UK environment. The need for such a scheme was identified in the developing UK Terrestrial Biodiversity Surveillance Strategy (UKTBSS) and we now need a commitment from Government to enable implementation.

We are not asking for all conservation resources to be spent on counting things. But we do need a better, more efficient, informative system of surveillance and reporting so that we can track progress towards the 2020 target and amend/redirect conservation action in a timely fashion as necessary.

Assessment – **Red**

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<sup>6</sup> UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee Minutes, 4 October 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, K., Dines, T., Hutchinson, N., Freeman, S., (2010), Designing a new plant surveillance scheme for the UK, JNCC Report 440, ISSN 0963 8901

- 2. Resources to deliver species and habitat conservation.** *Although funding for biodiversity conservation has increased since 2006, there is still a significant gap in resources for delivering species and habitats in both terrestrial and the marine environment. This gap is currently being quantified by the England Biodiversity Strategy Economics Implementation Group with the results expected in March 2010. The Government should make a commitment during the International Year of Biodiversity to find innovative solutions to fill the resource gap and begin immediately deploying them. Recent studies suggest that the returns from investing in biodiversity far outweigh the costs.*

The funding gap in England, between current biodiversity spend and what is needed, was estimated at £173 m per annum<sup>8</sup>. There have been no clear moves to address this shortfall.

A substantial reduction in public sector spending is taking place. This is likely to have a significant effect on the ability of all organisations to meet the 2020 EU and Nagoya targets.

The protection given to the Environmental Stewardship budget in the spending review was welcome. However, HLS will not now increase at the same rate as was projected under the previous administration.

Private landowners without HLS or SSSIs are being encouraged to manage biodiversity through ELS, but ELS is poorly targeted for Biodiversity. Financial pressures in the livestock sector are likely to continue to restrict the capacity of pastoral landowners to contribute towards projects focussed on biodiversity. Very high crop prices are driving further intensification on arable land.

Funding from local authorities, for supporting biodiversity work on their own estates, or for Local Biodiversity Partnerships, is likely to be severely cut. Other major public sector landowners, such as the MoD and Forestry Commission are already facing substantial cuts in their budgets which will have significant knock-on effects on biodiversity programmes. Added to this is the uncertain future of the FC estate, some of which is of great biodiversity value and some of which has great potential for biodiversity. In any forest sales we need to see protection of existing wildlife interests and measures to ensure that the potential of this land is fulfilled.

Voluntary organisations that own and manage a significant proportion of the land with the best biodiversity, are likely to see a substantial drop in the funding they have received from the Government and its agencies. For example, severe pressure on Natural England project spend will profoundly affect Species Recovery programmes. Public support for voluntary sector action for biodiversity may also be put under strain, as disposable income comes under further pressure.

It is hoped that the White Paper on the Natural Environment will consider innovative ways of funding nature conservation and that steps can be taken to free up existing sources of funding, e.g. national lottery money, by the adoption of a less restrictive approach to funding biodiversity work.

Assessment - **Red**

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<sup>8</sup> GHK (2010) Costs of implementing the UK Biodiversity Action Plan – 2010 Update. Final report to Defra, 27 May 2010.

- 3. Support for local authorities.** *The review of the implementation of the biodiversity duty for public authorities (NERC Act 2006) will be completed in early 2010. Implementation by local authorities has been very patchy. Having staff dedicated to biodiversity work appears to be key to successful implementation. The Government should ensure that local authorities appoint biodiversity champions and resource them appropriately.*

The review of the biodiversity duty was published in June 2010<sup>9</sup>. The review recommended that all local authorities should develop a corporate biodiversity strategy, identify council member biodiversity champions and ensure they employ sufficient ecologists to carry out their duty. The Government was also encouraged to produce a framework to enable local authorities to review their implementation of the duty. The Coalition Government has yet to respond to these recommendations. The squeeze on local authority budgets in the absence of any clear prioritisation for biodiversity work from central government is of great concern. There are also considerable changes happening to the planning system. It is vital that the links between planning and biodiversity are fully recognised and the conservation of the latter is enhanced rather than diminished. Once again there is a lot resting on the outcome of the Government's Natural Environment White Paper and the review of the England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS).

Assessment - **Red**

- 4. Marine sites designated.** *Marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which have previously been, or are currently subject to, consultation should be designated and conservation objectives finalised in 2010. Remaining sites (SACs and SPAs) required to complete the MPA network should be brought forward for consultation.*

Ten marine SACs and two marine SPAs were consulted on and submitted to the EC during 2010. However, the fact that the area of six of these SACs was substantially reduced between the end of the consultation and submission to the EC is a cause for concern. Three more SACs are either under formal consultation or awaiting submission to the EC. However, progress has been slow and the SPA network in particular is a long way from completion. There is a process and timetable in place for the designation of MCZs which should see an ecologically coherent network of MPAs 'substantially complete' by the end of 2012.

Assessment - **Amber**

- 5. Delivering sustained recovery of SSSIs/ASSIs.** *To realise the benefits of the work to deliver 95% of England's SSSIs by area into 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition by December 2010, it will be essential that effort and investment be maintained to ensure that measures now in place deliver on the ground. Over the life of the target, while huge areas have moved from unfavourable condition to 'unfavourable recovering' condition, the area actually in good favourable condition has declined. The start of a new decade requires a new target focussed on finishing what has been started by*

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<sup>9</sup> Entec (2010) Defra CTX0811:Review of the Biodiversity Duty contained in section 40 of the NERC Act 2006. Final Report. May 2010.  
[http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=WC0788\\_9135\\_FRP.pdf](http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=WC0788_9135_FRP.pdf)

*delivering truly favourable condition for our most important wildlife sites and keeping them that way.*

Natural England has undertaken some work to assess SSSI recovery timescales, but to date there is neither a new target in place, nor any clear commitment to set one.

Assessment - **Amber/red**

- 6. Agri-Environment Schemes.** *It is crucial to ensure that agri-environment schemes maximise the benefits for all farmland biodiversity, and specifically priority species and habitats, in 2010. This can be achieved through improving delivery of the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) to ensure it is able to deliver biodiversity interests, and that monitoring is adequate to show that this is happening. ELS needs improving by addressing the imbalance in option uptake and ensuring that ELS renewals in 2010 include the range of options necessary to deliver BAP targets. The Government should also target high quality classic scheme renewals into Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) in 2010 to avoid the benefits to biodiversity of habitat restoration projects from being lost. The Government should support implementation, and monitor delivery, of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment in such a way that it will also provide tangible biodiversity benefits for all farmland species and habitats.*

Funds for agri-environment schemes were largely protected from cuts during the spending review. HLS will continue to grow, albeit at a slower rate than planned before the review. ELS funds remain unaffected.

Natural England and Defra are attempting to improve the capacity for ELS to deliver more outcomes beneficial for biodiversity, through the ELS Training and Information Project (ETIP) and through support for the industry led Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE).

Defra recognise more work needs to be done, and have initiated the Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective review to identify ways to improve both ELS and HLS for biodiversity.

Renewal of expiring classic agri-environment agreements into HLS were under 50% overall in 2010, though nearer 80% went into Environmental Stewardship, including ELS agreements. However, it is not known to what extent the renewals into HLS/ELS have effectively protected the existing biodiversity resource, or the habitat restoration projects which were contributing towards BAP targets.

Assessment - **Amber**

- 7. Water policy delivers for biodiversity.** *Gains for priority species and habitats are integral to delivery of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Current River Basin Management Plans propose limited action to address water quality and additional measures will be needed if the improvement targets agreed at EU level are to be met. New legislation relating to floods and water management must maximize environmental gains, particularly through the use of natural processes within flood risk management, including supporting biodiversity delivery.*

No additional measures have been brought forward in 2010 to address concerns relating to WFD delivery. Gains for priority species and habitats continue to be

constrained by the narrow and unambitious approach to WFD delivery that most current actions foster.

The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 cited maintaining or restoring natural processes as one of the ways in which flood risk could be managed and placed a sustainable development duty on Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) authorities. Consultations issued in November 2010 on the National FCERM Risk Management Strategy, on the Sustainable Development Duty for FCERM authorities and on funding for FCERM do not clearly state how biodiversity gains will be maximized. Working with natural processes remains poorly articulated and the draft national strategy fails to give clarity about how FCERM investment should deliver on wider environmental objectives, including biodiversity, climate change adaptation/mitigation etc. As a result there does not appear to be any obvious mechanism that will encourage local FCERM authorities to work with natural processes and to maximise biodiversity gains. Examples of good practice are sadly lacking in all of the documents produced to date.

The new funding proposals suggest habitat improvements related to WFD delivery will attract funding in a set of new Outcome Measures but given that such schemes will be required to meet legal obligations it is not clear what will happen if funding falls short or if new Regional Flood and Coastal Committees do not prioritise these works. The proposals also see the loss of Outcome Measures for SSSI and BAP habitat creation. Under the current system BAP and SSSI outcome measures have played a key role in driving Environment Agency investment in habitat creation and enhancement, often in partnership with landowners and the third sector.

Assessment – **Amber**

- 8. Resources for out of classroom learning.** *The Government should make a commitment to provide £40 million per annum to ensure that all children who qualify for school meals in England have contact with the natural world through formal education.*

This has not happened. On the positive side, the Government has introduced Pupil Premium funding for every child on free school meals in England. It is expected that schools will spend this on activities to raise educational attainment, and out of classroom learning could be one such approach chosen. To help schools decide how to spend this money, the Department for Education will shortly (expected March 2011) make available evidence of the impacts of various approaches, and we strongly believe that this should include out of classroom learning. We would strongly encourage Defra and the Department for Education to make this happen.

On the down side, recent changes to the Higher Level Agri Environment Scheme mean that new entrants to the scheme will no longer be able to claim funding for each school visit they host on their farm. Overall, although funding for capital items such as toilet facilities or classrooms remains, this represents a cut in funding for out of classroom learning.

Assessment - **Amber**.

**Wildlife and Countryside Link  
February 2011**

This document is supported by the following 21 organisations;

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Association of Rivers Trusts
- Badger Trust
- Bat Conservation Trust
- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Butterfly Conservation
- Friends of the Earth England
- The Grasslands Trust
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- The Mammal Society
- Marine Conservation Society
- National Trust
- People’s Trust for Endangered Species
- Plantlife
- Pond Conservation
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Salmon & Trout Association
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Woodland Trust

