



Achieving harmony with nature

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

February 2022



Introduction

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, and is intended to set nature on a path to recovery by 2030 and achieve a 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature. After the talks, Parties will draw up their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) which outline how they intend to achieve the targets in their own countries.

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 new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition and commitment to bend the curve of biodiversity loss. For each country, the credibility of negotiating positions is proportionate to the strength of domestic actions.

In this report we outline five key actions that the four governments in the UK must follow in order to raise the bar for global action on nature and ensure that the post-2020 framework is successfully implemented across the UK (figure 1). These are: 1) set ambitious targets in law to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030; 2) implement measures to ensure success of the post-2020 framework, including effectively protecting 30% of the UK's land and seas by 2030; 3) develop and implement a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework to allow measurement of progress towards targets and goals both in the UK and at a global level; 4) align nature policy with climate policy to maximise synergistic approaches to tackling the twin crises, and; 5) co-ordinate action on nature and climate across the four countries of the UK.

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. In this briefing, we set out the negotiating objectives the UK government should take to COP15, as well as the areas where each government within the UK needs to improve its domestic record.



Figure 1: Five key actions that the four governments in the UK must follow in order to raise the bar for global action on nature

The starting block

Without urgent and significant action, the world’s wildlife, habitats and ecosystems face a dire future. The 5th Global Biodiversity Outlook ⁱ released last year revealed the abject trajectories our planet’s species and habitats find themselves on as a result of human activities and the growing demand for resources. An average of around 25% of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened with extinction (around 1 million species in total).

The health of the biosphere and of humanity are inextricably linked.ⁱⁱ Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services are already undermining human health and wellbeing. As we recognise the importance of preventing diseaseⁱⁱⁱ and addressing inequalities,^{iv} we must also recognise the increasing importance of protecting and restoring the natural environment to support public health.

The 2019 State of Nature^v report highlighted long-term loss of wildlife across all parts of the UK. The analysis revealed that since 1970, 41% of species have decreased in abundance, and 15% of species are threatened with extinction from the UK. Agricultural management, climate change, pollution, invasive species, and urbanisation are among the most significant threats to biodiversity across the four nations.

A recent analysis carried out by the Natural History Museum, in collaboration with the RSPB, reaffirms this picture.^{vi} Using the Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII), the study compares the state of nature in 240 countries and territories. The analysis reveals that the UK ranks 12th worst globally, and lowest out of all G7 nations, having retained only 50% of its biodiversity in face of human pressures.

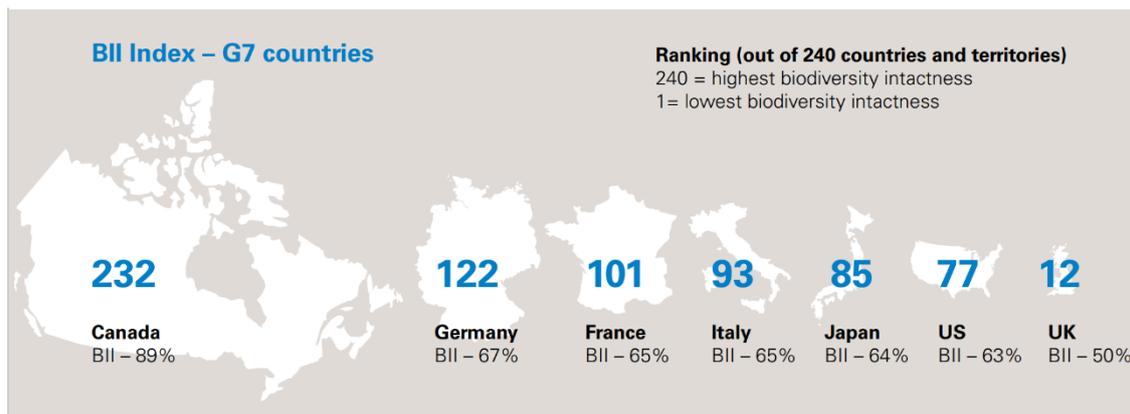


Figure 2: How does the UK fare on biodiversity? *Diagram from research by the Natural History Museum, in collaboration with the RSPB – read the report [here](#).*

Within the UK, some nations are doing better than others. Scotland for example has the highest BII score out of all four countries at 56%, decreasing to 47% in England. The BII scores for each country are shown in figure 3, including their overall ranking out of 240 countries and territories (ranging from the lowest biodiversity intactness of 1 to the highest score of 240).

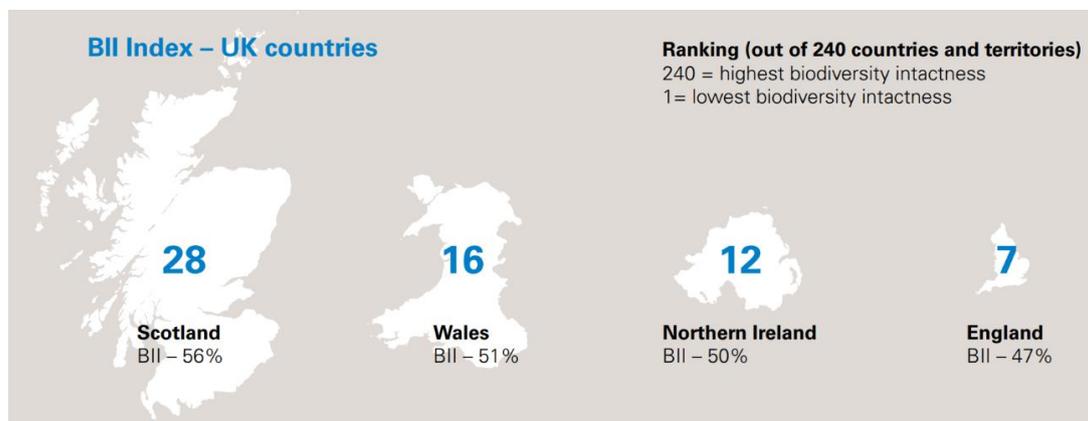


Figure 3: What does the BII tell us about nature across the UK? *Diagram from research by the Natural History Museum, in collaboration with the RSPB – read the report [here](#).*

At the beginning of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) and ahead of the forthcoming COP15, there are therefore 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. 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 it is taking action to protect and restore nature at home. A Nature Positive future is possible if governments act without delay to implement meaningful action across the UK to restore nature and tackle the causes of biodiversity loss.



1 | Setting Ambitious Targets

1.1 | A Global Goal for Nature and People

Setting out a clear vision for what we want to achieve for our natural world by 2030 will be key to guiding collective action by all groups and individuals over the next decade. We are calling for an ambitious deal for nature and people in 2022, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, 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.

To ensure the global goal for nature and people is widely recognised and understood, 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’.

What does Nature Positive mean?

Becoming Nature Positive by 2030 means that we will halt and begin to reverse nature loss by increasing the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species, populations, and ecosystems so that by 2030 nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery. This is an essential first step on the path to full nature recovery and critical to living in harmony with nature by 2050. ^{vii}

As with Net Zero, Nature Positive must not be used as a greenwashing tool for organisations to claim sustainable credentials without genuine good action on the ground. Furthermore, *positive* must be greater than a fractional improvement to the condition of nature. As set out in the definition above, businesses, governments and individuals can only claim that their actions are in line with a Nature Positive outcome if natural ecosystems are well on their way to being fully recovered.

In the current draft Global Biodiversity Framework, the 2030 Mission calls for Parties ‘To take urgent action across society to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetics resources, to put biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of the planet and people’. Stemming the systemic loss of nature by 2030 and putting it on a path to recovery will be a crucial part of achieving recovery, in line with the CBD’s 2050 Vision of ‘living in harmony with nature’.

A new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition and action to deliver commitments. 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. By adopting these goals in the UK ahead of the 2022 talks, the four governments can set the bar for the rest of the global community to follow suit.

Current target commitments from each of the four governments of the UK can be found in the [Appendix, section 1.1](#).

We propose a single Global Goal that comprises a set of components listed below – with securing progress or stability against all those components the key to Goal attainment.

1. **Species Abundance** – success will mean keeping common species common and recovering depleted species populations.
2. **Species Distribution** – success will mean recovering and/or maintaining species range, avoiding contraction and fragmentation.
3. **Species Extinction Risk** – success will mean ensuring that extinctions and the threat of extinctions as a result of human activity have ceased.
4. **Habitat Quality and Extent** – success will mean recovery and/or maintenance of the size and good ecological status of natural and semi-natural habitats (which are both particularly wildlife rich and carbon rich).

Setting legally binding targets to halt and begin to reverse the decline of species by 2030 will be essential to set the bar of ambition for the rest of the world and guide sectoral action. 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.

We recommend that the four governments of the UK:

- **Set legal targets to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030, raising ambition for the rest of the world ahead of COP15**
- **Implement species recovery programmes and integrate species conservation objectives into other conservation mechanisms to restore the abundance and distribution of species.**

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

1.2 | Meeting 30x30 on land and at sea

A key target in the current draft of the post-2020 framework, which if successfully delivered could make significant contributions to a Nature Positive world, is the global target to protect 30% of the planet for nature by 2030 (known as '30 by 30' or '30x30'). Effective protected areas are proven to be successful for safeguarding nature: they 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 that are also well managed 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.^{viii} England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have each already designated over 30% of their seas as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). However, the vast majority of MPAs remain in unfavourable condition. For the target of 30% to facilitate nature's restoration, attention must be focused on both the extent and effectiveness of protected sites networks. We outline in more detail the current state of affairs in each of the four UK nations in the table below.

Current 30x30 commitments from each of the four governments of the UK can be found in the [Appendix, section 1.2](#).

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

- **Ensure the areas of land, freshwater and ocean counted towards the 30% are protected for nature in the long-term: the entirety of the 30% should be afforded long-term effective protection for nature which includes long-term protection against damage, for example, from pollution, overexploitation, invasive species, habitat destruction and development.**
- **Ensure that protected areas don't exclude people or communities and are managed in a way that benefits both people and nature.**
- **Ensure the areas of land, freshwater and ocean protected for nature are well-managed and regularly monitored at appropriate intervals as part of a programme of appropriate management and investment. This monitoring should show clear evidence both of good management for nature and that the land is either in good condition for nature or is showing demonstrable signs of ecological recovery.**
- **Create large scale 'nature networks' which expand areas of good quality habitat while also enhancing connections between them to enable species to move across the network.**
- **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](#).



2 | Monitoring and reporting progress to 2030

Part of the blame for the failure of the UK to implement the post-2010 Biodiversity Framework^x 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 both damaging activities and management efforts to protect and restore nature. This information can be used to direct policies and management interventions, as well as to assess their effectiveness. Without an accurate way for countries to gauge whether or not they are on track towards meeting the goals, there are no opportunities to take the remedial action necessary to get 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, but monitoring of the state of the natural environment across the UK remains poor and patchy.

There has been a real-term decrease of 42% in public funding for UK biodiversity since a peak in 2008/09, which has reduced capacity to monitor and assess the state of the natural environment. The UK will need to report on progress at the global level, but it will not be able to do this if there is no clear understanding of the situation at home. For example, there have been consistently low levels of protected site monitoring in Wales and Northern Ireland over the past 30 years, and in Scotland and England it has steadily decreased over time.

After a decade of cuts to the statutory nature conservation organisations who have responsibility for monitoring protected areas (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and NatureScot), funding for monitoring is grossly inadequate.^x

In sum, each country in the UK is failing to monitor the state of nature properly, even in the most important sites for wildlife. A lack of monitoring has contributed to a lack of public and political attention on the quality of the environment, allowing deterioration to go unnoticed and unchecked. Failing to implement such a system over the next decade risks creating a false sense of progress through erroneous reporting or absence of measuring progress at all. Given the urgency of the nature crisis, it is essential that global leaders and civil society are collectively able to track progress towards bending the curve of biodiversity loss so that we can take corrective action to get and stay on course.

With standardised reporting, informed by better-quality environmental data, and a robust process of global stocktaking and ratcheting of ambition and action, the four UK nations and wider global community have an opportunity to turn the tide for nature by 2030.

The state of monitoring and reporting capability of protected areas in each of the four UK nations in [section 2 of the Appendix](#).

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:

- **Standardised reporting on a robust set of indicators:** The four UK nations must report on a unified set of indicators to allow for aggregation and disaggregation of information to gain an understanding of progress at a UK level. These indicators should align with a set of global indicators, such as the headline indicators proposed in the global framework, to allow for global stocktaking and a comparison between countries. As well as being standardised across all countries, indicators should be SMART and clearly aligned with the targets under the main framework.
- **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. Enforcement bodies must not only be truly independent, but also have strong enforcement powers to hold the government to account for breaches of environmental standards across a wide range of issues.
- **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 in the form of a global stocktaking exercise whereby reports from each country are collated and used to establish an updated state of the world's progress towards the goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework. This process of assessment and ratcheting of ambition leading to enhanced implementation is a key part of the UNFCCC process, and a similar stocktaking and ratchet mechanism under the CBD framework would be an important and simple way to keep track of progress and ensure that we do not get closer to 2030 and discover that we have not achieved our goals again.
- **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. There are currently several shortfalls in how data is currently collected and used in the UK. In the first instance, investment in each of the UK nations must be directed towards identifying data gaps in the provision of environmental data. This should be followed by targeted collection of data to fill these key gaps. Data should be standardised and accessible, and available over appropriate timescales and spatial granularity to inform measures taken and allow accurate reporting on habitat and species trends.



3 | Linking nature and climate

The ecological crisis is far from the only challenge facing our natural world. As species and habitats continue their rapid decline, the Earth is also experiencing an unprecedented number of extreme weather events and the global temperature continues its seemingly inexorable rise towards 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. These crises are also linked. At the same time as healthy ecosystems offer benefits for climate change mitigation and adaptation, climate change poses an existential threat to global biodiversity and limits its ability to fulfil these functions. There is also the risk that solutions to one crisis exacerbate another, with some proposed climate solutions potentially causing further damage to species and habitats across the world, worsening climate change further.

Finding joint solutions to the climate and nature crises that consider all aspects of sustainability will be crucial, not only as a cost-effective option for governments, but to maximise good outcomes and avoid unintended consequences. Solutions must also reflect the climate-nature-people nexus, recognising that the twin crises and solutions to them will not affect everyone in the same way. Intersectoral policies which fully embed the inseparability of climate, biodiversity and human quality of life will be the only way to achieve sustainable, positive outcomes. A recent peer-reviewed report co-produced by the IPCC and IPBES, the scientific advisory bodies to the UNFCCC and CBD, highlights how addressing the synergies between mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change, while considering their social impacts, offers the opportunity to maximise benefits and meet global Sustainable Development Goals.^{xi}

The good news is that we already have many, if not most, of the solutions. Restoring natural ecosystems is an immediately implementable climate mitigation measure, whilst simultaneously providing ecosystem services to people and increasing resilience to the effects of climate change.^{xii} CO₂ emissions from drained and burned peatlands equate to 10% of all annual fossil fuel emissions, our oceans absorb 25–35% of human-made carbon emissions every year,^{xiii} and a hectare of UK seagrass can store almost a tonne of carbon a year.^{xiv}

Of course this does not mean that we can carry on business as usual elsewhere in the economy; rapid and deep emissions cuts across all sectors must be the priority in the short term and minimise the risk of exceeding planetary tipping points. Proper protection, conservation and restoration is also needed at pace and scale. Also, used in the right way and to high standards, nature-based solutions^{xv} are an essential part of simultaneously tackling the twin crises, but they must not be used as a greenwashing tool to delay mitigation efforts.

Despite the climate mitigation and adaptation potential of our natural ecosystems, Governments to date have largely tackled the climate and ecological crises as separate problems. Although the Rio Conventions,^{xvi} which derive directly from the 1992 Earth Summit, were established to consider these problems as distinct but related aspects of a wider environment problem, climate change has gained far more attention in both the political and public eye in the decades since.

However, at the recent UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow, the role of nature in tackling and adapting to the effects of climate change was significantly elevated. Through a dedicated ‘Nature Day’ at the talks, the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests, and announcements on sustainable supply chains, it is clear that nature is now much higher on the climate agenda. Importantly, the final Glasgow Climate Pact recognised nature’s role in meeting the 1.5C target and the impact that climate change has had and will continue to have on natural ecosystems unless urgent action is taken. Text in the final cover decision also recognised the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and the need to protect and restore nature in order to deliver ecosystem services and

sustainable livelihoods. Finally, the Pact encouraged countries to better integrate natural ecosystems into their national policy and planning decisions. There appears to be some progress on this front already, with a recent report released by WWF showing that there has been an increase in the number of Nationally Determined Contributions - reports required by each Party to the UNFCCC to outline how their country will contribute to the goals of the Paris Agreement - including the role of natural ecosystems.^{xvii}

Whilst these statements and pledges are welcome, their implementation will be key and the UK will need to demonstrate for the rest of its COP26 Presidency that it is serious about joining up efforts on the nature and climate crises. The UK has an opportunity to continue the momentum from COP26 and champion ambition in the CBD process at COP15, highlighting the synergies of acting on the climate and nature crises simultaneously. It should sustain this role through domestic action to pursue more integrated solutions, and by encouraging decision makers across the world to consider synergistic solutions to both challenges as they draw up their plans following COP26 and COP15 for the next decade and beyond.

The current situation in each country with regards to climate and nature policy coherence is outlined in [section 3 of the Appendix](#).

How can the four countries of the UK demonstrate greater coherence between nature and climate policies?

- Recognising the role that natural ecosystems can and do play in climate change mitigation and adaptation, ensure that nature is embedded 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 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.
- Ensure that nature-based solutions for climate also deliver for nature by agreeing core standards for the certification and measurement of nature-based solutions.
- Following the Committee on Climate Change's recommendations in the 6th Carbon Budget:
 - Increase forest restoration rates - including natural regeneration - up to 30,000 ha per annum by 2025 rising to 50,000 ha per annum by 2035
 - Achieve full restoration of upland peatlands by 2045 (or stabilisation if degradation is too severe to restore) and re-wetting and sustainable management of 60% of lowland peatlands by 2050
 - End peat extraction and the sale of peat for horticulture by 2023
 - Develop agro-forestry standards and extend the length of hedgerows by 40% by 2050, as well as improving both woodland and hedgerow management.
- Publish stronger quality standards for nature-based carbon removals that guarantee added benefits for biodiversity and other aspects of the natural environment as well as safeguarding human rights.



4 | Coordinating action on nature to 2030 and beyond

Halting and reversing the decline of nature by 2030 will require cooperation 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. We have illustrated the interlinkages between each of the stages in implementing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework in the diagram below:



What does this mean in the UK?

1. Global agreements must boost domestic ambition and vice versa

The post-2020 GBF 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. We need ambitious national and sub-national action that will result in the significant improvement of biodiversity across the four countries of the UK. 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.

2. A collaborative agreement to deliver UK wide commitments

The UK and devolved administrations have set out that they ‘want to work together, where appropriate, on matters of mutual interest,’ and that ‘the administrations recognise the importance of cooperation across a range of areas.’^{xviii} While the environment is a devolved area, there must be a strategic, joined up approach, ensuring that sub-national and national actions will meet shared challenges and achieve common goals. Notwithstanding the devolved nature of many decisions in this area, and the particularly distinctive conditions in each of the four countries, it will be important to realise how an integrated UK approach, including sharing knowledge and learning from each other, can ratchet ambition.

We welcome the five Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies' recent Nature Positive 2030 Evidence Report which focuses on the implementation of those commitments made in the Leaders' Pledge for Nature that require action within the UK.^{xix} The report proposes a three-pronged approach to meet these commitments: mainstreaming nature recovery, so that it becomes a core part of decision-making, including for the finance sector; effectively protecting and enhancing nature, underpinned by science-based targets; and transitioning to a more sustainable use of our land, freshwater and seas by tackling the main drivers of biodiversity loss. The emphasis is on the need to act now and on the need for coordination across all four UK countries to meet and demonstrate progress domestically and towards international commitments. The UK Biodiversity Framework is stated as the key mechanism for setting out how these commitments will be delivered.

Standardisation of NBSAPs and national reports will be essential to increase transparency and accountability, as well as allowing a global stocktake process to take place where progress towards overall global targets can be assessed to inform further action. Standardised approaches to monitoring and reporting will also be essential across the four countries so that assessments are comparable, and to ensure data can be effectively aggregated for UK reporting towards international targets. There are already established monitoring and reporting processes in place. The UK has contributed to the six yearly reporting cycle under the two Nature Directives (Article 12 Birds Directive, Article 17 Habitats Directive); consideration should be given to continuing this approach and in particular as there will be equivalent reporting needs through other international agreements (e.g. Bern Convention).

Other statutory monitoring programmes, for example those for designated sites, should be developed to ensure that they contribute to an integrated monitoring programme. There should also be effective engagement with national survey and monitoring schemes to provide data and to expert interpretation, including those managed by Non-Government Organisations and research bodies. For example, the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) Countryside Survey (CS) of Great Britain has provided an extensive set of repeated, standardised ecological measurements at a national scale since 1978. CS surveys several different aspects of the environment including soils, vegetation, habitats and landscape features, ponds, and headwater streams.^{xx}

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, developed following COP15. This must 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.

Joined-up working within each of the four country's administrations is also essential. Joining up country-specific conservation efforts as part of networks like the Nature Recovery Network in England and Northern Ireland (not formally adopted), and the Scottish Nature Network, will be key to protecting and restoring habitats and species populations across the four nations. Ensuring ecological connectivity between protected areas on or near 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 co-operation with neighbouring countries to other Parties of the CBD.

Delivery of commitments made within sub-national Biodiversity Strategies must not be seen as the sole responsibility of lead environment departments and Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies. Sub-national governments must demonstrate strong leadership by ensuring it is a priority across all departments in each devolved administration to become Nature Positive by 2030, with committed cross-departmental effort and resourcing. The four Links welcome the Edinburgh Declaration on post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, which has called for a collective commitment from subnational Governments, cities, and local authorities to raise ambition for nature's recovery.^{xxi}

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. Where local communities will be affected by any measures, policies must be developed with participation of local communities to tailor them to the specific context and needs of local conditions, economies and livelihoods. For example, Scotland's Regional Land Use Partnerships are being piloted to help develop Scotland's approach to land use as well as highlight that decisions and action should be driven at the regional scale. Local statutory plans designed to deliver biodiversity improvements, for example the Area Statements in Wales and Local Nature Recovery Strategies in England should be developed with a view to contributing to the achievement of the UK target. A consistent framework and comparable metrics should be developed for defining local targets / success measures as this would clarify local level responsibilities to the UK objectives and serves to promote the implementation of conservation action at a local level.

Recognition of collective responsibility for meeting national targets can also be harnessed to inspire local action on nature. Interventions at a small scale can contribute to climate mitigation and biodiversity restoration, and greatly improve human quality of life. Collectively they can amount to a national contribution towards global action on nature and climate. Engagement at a local level increases understanding, awareness and appreciation of biodiversity values, flags the importance of meeting targets and demonstrates that biodiversity loss can be halted and put on a path to recovery. This will both encourage public support for larger scale action taken by government and others and empower grass roots action for nature.

Sub-national governments must engage local authorities in the full implementation of their duty to protect, conserve and restore biodiversity whilst carrying out their functions. Increasing funding at the local authority level will be important to implement measures to protect and restore nature, and to support the monitoring frameworks necessary to ensure progress is being made.

What four country cooperation must deliver:

- Flexibility for individual country strategy and actions 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.
- The agreement of complementary targets, indicators, and principles, setting out a standardised monitoring and reporting framework.
- Transboundary co-operation for ecosystem and landscape management, ensuring ecological connectivity between protected areas on national borders, set within a UK-wide network for nature's restoration.
- Knowledge sharing and dialogue at all levels of governance, demonstrating transparency, best practice, showcasing successes and ensuring the effective engagement and use of expertise from research organisations and non-governmental organisations to identify approaches that yield best results.



Conclusion

As species and habitats continue to decline, COP15 this year 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. Nature was a prominent part of discussions at the COP26 in Glasgow, and through the UK's continuing presidency, there is a key opportunity to carry forward this momentum and translate it into an ambitious agreement in Kunming.

The UK has repeatedly claimed its world-leading efforts on the environment, but the reality continues to suggest otherwise. In the UK, 41% of species have decreased in abundance since 1970, 15% of species are threatened with extinction, and the UK ranks lowest out of all G7 nations on an index of biodiversity intactness. Despite numerous pledges to address the joint nature and climate crises, we are yet to see these translated into concrete measures. And even where action is taken, there is little join up between the four UK nations. This is despite the sharing of sea and land borders and despite the fact that the four nations are represented as a single Party in global negotiations.

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 and turn warm words into real action. Legally binding targets for nature in each of the four countries and proper delivery of 30x30, supported by a robust monitoring and reporting framework and ambitious finance would set us well on the way to making sure that the next decade is truly one of ecosystem restoration. By taking these domestically, 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 more information or if you have any questions, please contact Imogen Cripps at Wildlife and Countryside Link (imogen@wcl.org.uk).

For queries related to Northern Ireland Environment Link, please contact Jill Eagleson (jill@nienvironmentlink.org).

For queries related to Scotland Environment Link, please contact Juliet Caldwell (juliet@scotlink.org).

For queries related to Wales Environment Link, please contact ().

Acronyms Glossary

Term	Definition
Aichi Targets	Named after the Japanese region which hosted the UN CBD meeting at which they were agreed, the Aichi biodiversity targets consist of 20 specific, measurable, timebound targets to save biodiversity and enhance its benefits for people, which were to be met by 2020.
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, formal landscape designation effected under varying legislation in each UK country.
ASSI	Area of Special Scientific Interest, formal conservation designation in NI only. ASSIs include both natural environments and man-made structures.
BII	Biodiversity Intactness Index summarises the change in ecological communities in response to human pressures.
CBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.
COP15	Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity: Part 1 held virtually in October 2021, Part 2 to be held in Kunming, China in 2022.
COP26	Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Glasgow in November 2021.
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework.
GHG	Greenhouse Gas.
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.
IPCC	The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
Nature-Positive	To halt and begin to reverse nature loss measured from a baseline of 2020, through increasing the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species, populations and ecosystems so that by 2030 nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery.
NBSAPs	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.
Net Zero	Greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere are balanced by removal out of the atmosphere. The Paris Agreement requires parties to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century.
MPA	Marine Protected Areas are clearly defined geographical areas managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.
NAP	National Adaptation Plan.
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions.

Paris Agreement	Legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by 196 Parties at UNFCCC COP21 held in Paris in 2015. The Agreements' goal is to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels.
Rio Conventions	The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, resulted in agreement to three Conventions as mechanisms to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Each is governed by the respective Conference of the Parties (COP).
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound.
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest, formal conservation designation in Scotland, England and Wales.
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

APPENDIX

1 | Setting Ambitious Targets

1.1 | A Global Goal for Nature and People

Country	Target setting
England	The Government has included a legally-binding target in the Environment Act 2021 to halt the decline of the abundance of species by 2030. The Act includes further interim targets, however these are not legally binding. Implementation of the Act will be key, and ambition must be increased to secure holistic action on protection and restoration of species and habitats.
Wales	The Senedd passed a resolution in June 2021 declaring a nature emergency, flagging up the CBD COP15 and calling on the Welsh Government to introduce a legally binding requirement to begin to reverse biodiversity loss through statutory targets. The Programme for Government includes a commitment to “work towards the establishment of an Environmental Governance Body, a statutory duty and targets to protect and restore biodiversity”, but there is as yet no clear timetable for introducing the legislation needed.
Scotland	The Scottish Government’s Programme for Government sets out a new Natural Environment Bill setting targets for nature restoration on land and seas, and with a new statutory monitoring, enforcing and reporting framework. However, this legislation will not be brought forward until year three of the Parliament.
Northern Ireland	The Environment Act 2021, subject to NI Assembly approval, creates a duty on the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to create environmental improvement plans (EIPs). These are not, however, underpinned by binding interim or long-term targets. A proposed private members bill - the Environment and Nature Restoration Bill seeks to create a target setting, monitoring, and reporting framework for EIPs. This bill is expected to be laid either in this Assembly mandate, or early in the next (elections May 2022).

1.2 | Meeting 30x30 on land and at sea

	30x30 on land	30x30 at sea
<p>England</p> <p>For more information on Wildlife and Countryside Link’s position on 30 by 30 at land and at sea, please</p>	The Government has repeated the claim that 26% of England’s land already meets the 30x30 standard. However, this includes large areas that are neither primarily protected for nature nor in good ecological condition.	<p>The Government has suggested that 40% of the seas around England are already protected for nature in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).</p> <p>However, of the 40% of English seas designated as MPAs, a recent assessment of the UK network found that management</p>

<p>see: Achieving 30x30 in England on land and sea.</p>	<p>A recent WCL report suggests that only 3% of land could be said to be genuinely protected for nature in England.</p>	<p>measures had only been fully implemented in 10% of sites. Taking this into account, a maximum of 4% of England’s marine environment could be said to be effectively protected for nature.</p>
<p>Wales</p> <p>For more information on Wales Environment Link’s position on 30 by 30 at land and at sea, please see: 30 by 30: Land and sea for nature’s recovery in Wales.</p>	<p>During phase 1 of the CBD COP 15, the Climate Change Minister Julie James announced that the Welsh Government is committing to support the 30x30 target. With the wider landscape designations such as National Parks and AONBs included, 29.4% of land in Wales is reported as being within protected areas. However, only a part of this land is protected for nature and when those areas not covered by a specific nature conservation designation are excluded, the percentage cover of land protected for nature in Wales currently stands at just 10.6%. Within this area only 20% of site features are assessed as being in favourable condition.</p>	<p>The Climate Change Minister’s 30x30 announcement on 12 October referred to both land and sea. Wales has MPAs covering 69% of inshore waters (up to 12 nautical miles). It is also understood that 50% of all Welsh waters are within MPAs but this figure is less well-documented. However, there have been significant concerns raised over the management of these sites. Despite a high percentage of Welsh seas existing within Marine Protection Areas, many of these remain in unfavourable or unknown condition.</p>
<p>Scotland</p> <p>For more information on Scottish Environment LINK’s position on 30 by 30 on land: 30 by 30: Protecting Scotland’s Land, Restoring Scotland’s Nature and at sea: Ocean Recovery Plan for Scotland.</p>	<p>In December 2020 the Scottish Government published a Statement of Intent on Biodiversity which sets out plans to protect at least 30% of Scotland’s land for nature by 2030.</p> <p>There are currently over 1,800 protected areas in Scotland, representing some of the best places for nature and covering 18% of land. Around 65% of the species, habitats and geological features protected by these sites are in a good condition – this has dropped since 2007. Not enough progress has been made on ensuring these protected areas are in a healthy state and connected.</p>	<p>Whilst MPAs now cover 37% of Scotland’s marine area, management measures are currently very limited and are unlikely to enable significant ecosystem recovery.</p> <p>In the 2021-22 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government commits to "a step change in marine protection", and to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deliver fisheries management measures for existing MPAs where these are not already in place by March 2024 at the latest; - add to the existing MPA network by designating a suite of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) covering at least 10% of our seas, providing additional environmental protection over and above the existing MPA network.
<p>Northern Ireland</p> <p>For more information on Northern Ireland Environment Link’s position on 30 by 30 on land, please see: 30 x 30: Land for Nature’s</p>	<p>In May 2021, Edwin Poots, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Minister, publicly endorsed the 30x30 target.</p> <p>In Nov. 21, DAERA launched a public consultation on a draft Environment Strategy. This includes the 30x30 target and commitment to ‘Develop and implement new legislation and measures to support delivery of 30x30 and other</p>	<p>The DAERA Minister’s 30x30 endorsement referred to both land and sea, and the 30x30 target for land and sea is included in the draft Environment Strategy.</p> <p>Currently, the Northern Ireland marine area has 48 MPAs, occupying 38% of NI’s inshore region. However, only 4.48% of these MPAs are considered to be ‘under favourable management’, a reflection of</p>

<p>Recovery in Northern Ireland and at sea: Nature Targets for NI Seas.</p>	<p>CBD target'. The final version of the strategy will be adopted as NI's first environmental improvement plan (EIP) under the UK Environment Bill.</p> <p>Including AONB landscape designation, 28.4% of land is currently designated in NI. However, excluding AONBs, just 9.8% of land is designated for nature's protection, with only 53% of biological ASSI features in favourable condition.</p>	<p>the general poor health of Northern Ireland's seas.</p>
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2 | Monitoring and reporting progress to 2030

Country	Monitoring and reporting capability
<p>UK</p>	<p>Implementation approaches vary in each country where monitoring is the responsibility of the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations, with common standards set by the JNCC.</p> <p>In England, condition is reported based on mapped management units whereas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is reported against the unmapped 'features' (i.e. habitats or species) for which a site is designated. In reporting to the CBD, JNCC combines these condition assessments using an area-weighted method to give overall figures for the UK.</p> <p>Resourcing - All four governments should urgently scale up funding for protected areas to support the robust monitoring systems that are needed to restore and sustain their wildlife.</p>
<p>England</p>	<p>Frequency - Some 78% of English SSSIs have not had a site visit to monitor their condition in the past six years (since 2015).</p> <p>Resourcing - in England spending on protected area monitoring on land has fallen from around £2 million at the start of the decade to £700,000 in 2019.</p> <p>Enforcement - Natural England has only brought two prosecutions under laws to protect SSSIs in the past six years and, as far as we know, has only used its powers to enforce appropriate SSSI management once in the past 20 years.</p>
<p>Wales</p>	<p>Frequency - In recent years Wales has had no national SSSI monitoring programme and monitoring of SPAs and SACs has also been severely curtailed. We understand a new terrestrial monitoring programme will include SSSIs, however this will be a prioritised programme limited by the resource available.</p> <p>Resourcing - NRW's budget was cut in real terms by 30% from 2013-2020, and insufficient staff resource is identified as a reason for insufficient evidence in 30% of the SSSI features where the baseline evaluation was 'unknown'. The most recent State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)³ for Wales was published in 2020/21. It highlights the need for sufficient monitoring data, stating <i>"These data are vital for tracking biodiversity change, determining the effectiveness of biodiversity policy, delivering strategic outcomes, and providing alerts of changes to the environment."</i></p>
<p>Scotland</p>	<p>Frequency - 52% of Scottish SSSI features had not been monitored in the six year period between 2013 and 2019.</p> <p>Resourcing - in Scotland spending on protected area monitoring on land has fallen from £1.1 million in 2010 to £265,000 in 2019.</p>

Northern Ireland	<p>Frequency - In 2019, 74% of ASSIs had not been monitored in the past six years.</p> <p>Availability - Full review of designated site condition has not been published since initial report in 2008. Lack of publicly available data means that the overall protected area in favourable condition is unknown.</p> <p>Resourcing - the NI environmental budget has fallen by approximately 20% since 2009/10.</p>
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3 | Linking nature and climate

Country	Nature-climate policy coherence
England	<p>The Net Zero Strategy did not set a clear trajectory for decarbonising land use and incentivising nature-based removals of carbon. An effective strategy should have nature firmly embedded, with safeguards to prevent nature being used to offset business-as-usual elsewhere.</p> <p>The Nature for Climate Fund is a positive development, dedicating over £700m to nature-based solutions in the Spending Review period. It remains mainly focused on trees with some action on peatlands, and would benefit from a broader view of different habitat options including restoration of permanent species-rich grasslands.</p> <p>Initiatives such as the Woodland Carbon Code are positive, but have yet to fully incorporate nature’s needs alongside carbon sequestration.</p>
Wales	<p>The Nature Recovery Action Plan published in 2020, after the Senedd declared a climate emergency, identifies “Aligning the responses to the climate emergency with the biodiversity crisis” as one of five immediate priorities for further action. The Plan makes clear that nature based solutions are key to addressing both issues.</p> <p>The Welsh Government’s plan for a zero carbon Wales “Net zero Wales: carbon budget 2 2021-25”, published in October 2021, aims to show how the Government “will act decisively to tackle the climate and nature emergency so that people can go on treasuring Wales’ rich natural resources for generations to come.”</p> <p>The document states explicitly, for example: “The interconnectedness of the nature and climate emergencies has never been clearer: by limiting changes to the climate by reducing emissions we will support biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems, which in turn provide natural solutions and build resilience to climate risk.”</p> <p>It goes on to say: “The Programme for Government states that Welsh Ministers will act decisively to tackle the climate and nature emergency, embedding the response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do. This includes ensuring that nature and the climate are on the agenda of every public service and private sector business, and integrating positive action for nature into more of our economic activity.”</p>
Scotland	<p>The Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024 highlights the importance of biodiversity for climate change resilience, most explicitly in Outcome 5: "Our natural environment is valued, enjoyed, protected and enhanced and has increased resilience to climate change". The Environment Strategy for Scotland similarly recognises the linkages between the nature and climate crises.</p> <p>On 6 November 2021 the Scottish Government announced an increase in funding to restore and protect nature. The Nature Restoration Fund will commit to at least £13.5 million annually. From restoring Scotland’s wetlands, marine habitats and species and iconic habitats on land, including</p>

	<p>native woodlands and mountain areas, this commitment to a 5-year Nature Restoration Fund will help drive momentum towards halting the loss and restoring Scotland’s nature by 2030.</p> <p>Scotland’s Climate Change Plan (CCP) does not currently contain policies or proposals for blue carbon nature-based solutions (NbS), but contains policies for forestry and peatland NbS.</p>
<p>Northern Ireland</p>	<p>Despite a climate emergency being declared in 2020, NI remains the only UK country with no climate change legislation in place. Two bills are currently progressing through Stormont:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Private Members Bill with cross party support, which includes (1) a net zero GHG emissions target for NI, to be achieved by 2045, (2) a requirement to produce sectoral Climate Action Plans and Carbon Budgets (3) provision for independent scrutiny of the progress towards targets by establishing a Climate Office and a Climate Commissioner, independent of the NI Assembly and the NI Executive and (4) provisions for a just transition. Provision for annual targets for biodiversity are included within the climate action plan requirement. • The less ambitious Climate Change Bill being taken forward by DAERA on behalf of the AERA Minister, does not include the above provisions, proposing an 82% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050. <p>The draft Environment Strategy and a draft Green Growth Strategy are currently being consulted on, with a draft Biodiversity strategy currently under development.</p> <p>The absence of national climate change legislation, coupled with a backlog in policy due to the three year absence of the NI Assembly, means that nature-climate policy coherence in NI is at present lacking.</p>

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