

## Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

### Annex UK.2. UK Biodiversity Strategies and Targets for 2020

Graham Tucker, Wyn Jones, Susan Davies and Joan Edwards

The UK Government White Paper, *The Natural Choice* (HM Government, 2011), aimed to develop a new vision for nature conservation in England, taking into account the CBD's 2010 Aichi targets, and the *EU's 2011 Biodiversity Strategy to 2020* (European Commission, 2011). Reflecting its influences, the White Paper made a strong case for nature conservation and ecosystem restoration, largely based on the need to maintain natural capital. Although some were troubled by this utilitarian rationale (Marren, 2011; Hopkins, 2013), it appeared to move nature conservation towards the political mainstream and emboldened DEFRA to set out an ambitious 2020 mission 'to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people'. However, such ambitions were not matched by bold implementation measures, as these were constrained by an antipathy towards new regulation and additional expenditure (Tucker and Baldock, 2011). As a result only £10 million of additional expenditure was allocated, and the proposed actions were dominated by local initiatives, monitoring, voluntary and enabling measures.

Later in 2011, *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* was published (DEFRA, 2011a), which aimed to achieve the biodiversity objectives set out in the Natural Environment White Paper. Not surprisingly, this built on the rationale and approach set out in the White Paper, promoting four broad themes: a more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea; 'putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy'; reducing environmental pressures; and improving knowledge. The shift to an integrated landscape-scale approach was the biggest change— and was accompanied by a real shift away from single species and habitat action plans, and local BAPs.

Perhaps as a result of NGO pressure, the strategy did include some ambitious and clearly defined measurable outcome targets, such as getting 90% of BAP priority habitats into favourable or recovering condition and at least 50% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) into favourable condition, while maintaining at least 95% in favourable or recovering condition. Whilst some other outcome targets were weak or ill-defined, it did establish performance indicators to track progress.

In Scotland, to contribute to the CBD Aichi targets, the 25 year biodiversity strategy produced in 2004 (Scottish Executive, 2004) was supplemented by the publication of *Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity* (Scottish Government, 2013) and then by *Scotland's biodiversity: a route map to 2020* (Scottish Government, 2015). The route map set out six key steps for nature (ecosystem restoration, investment in natural capital, quality greenspace, conserving wildlife in Scotland, and sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems). A *Land Use Strategy for 2016-2021* was also produced (Scottish Government, 2016) with a strategic vision on how to realise the full potential of Scotland's land for multiple benefits for the economy, environment and communities. This was considered pioneering at the time, but lost momentum due to limited adoption from key parts of government. Strategic leadership of the biodiversity process in Scotland also lost impetus, although the Scottish Government committed to producing a new biodiversity strategy within one year of the CBD COP for the post-2020 framework, and a 5-year delivery plan thereafter.

In Wales there is a package of legislation implementing the sustainability principles set out in the CBD, including the Environment Wales Act 2016, the Planning (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015. As well as establishing a more ambitious and clearer requirement to 'maintain and enhance biodiversity', the Environment (Wales) Act establishes that the purpose of Natural Resources Wales, as the Welsh Government's statutory agency for environmental matters, including nature conservation, is to pursue 'sustainable management of natural resources'.

Meanwhile the *Nature Recovery Plan for Wales*<sup>1</sup> published by Welsh Government in 2015 aims to address the causes of biodiversity loss, by increasing ecosystem resilience and taking specific actions for habitats and species. With the publication of the *Natural Resources Policy* in 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017), which effectively replaced the 2006 Environment Strategy, the strategic direction of Welsh Government policy towards biodiversity is now set firmly within the context of sustainability, economic and social well-being, and an integrated ‘whole environment’ approach to the use, management and valuation of natural resources.

Building on its first biodiversity strategy in 2002, *Valuing Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020* (DOENI, 2015) responds to the CBD and EU biodiversity targets, and also adopts a more ecosystem services approach.

In 2012 a *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework* was produced (JNCC and DEFRA, 2012). It identified 23 areas of work which the SNCBs agreed to contribute to with a UK focus. These were in relation to the following two objectives and action areas:

- Objective 1. Work together to enable the UK to demonstrate leadership in international MEAs, through delivering and reporting on international goals and targets, and informing UK negotiating positions
  1. UK Biodiversity Indicators
  2. Reporting and communicating
  3. Sharing international information
- Objective 2. Add value to country delivery through the sharing of best practice and the development of common standards
  1. Common standards monitoring approach
  2. Research engagement
  3. Monitoring and evidence
  4. Knowledge exchange, best practice and mainstreaming

Apart from these agreed work areas, the framework showed a further shift away from a coordinated and overarching UKBAP towards country level priorities and approaches that vary from place to place.

## References

- DEFRA (2011) *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services*. London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- DoENI (2015) *Valuing Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020*. Belfast: Department of the Environment Northern Ireland.
- European Commission (2011) *Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020*. COM(2011) 244 final.
- HMG (2011) *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*. London: HM Government, the Stationery Office.
- Hopkins, J. (2013) Nature conservation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century: all change? *British Wildlife*, **24**, 183–189.
- JNCC and Defra (on behalf of the Four Countries' Biodiversity Group) (2012) *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework*. Peterborough, UK: Joint Nature Conservation Committee.
- Marren, P. (2011) Comment: The 2011 Environmental Revolution. *British Wildlife*, **23**, 2–6.
- Scottish Government (2013) *Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity: A Strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2015) *Scotland's biodiversity: a route map to 2020*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2016) *Getting the best from our land: A Land Use Strategy for Scotland 2016-2021*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.
- Tucker, G.M. & Baldock, D. (2018) The 25-Year Environment Plan – what promises for nature? *British Wildlife*, **29**, 245–250.
- Welsh Government (2017) *Natural Resources Policy*. Welsh Government.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/nature-recovery-action-plan-2015.pdf>

***Recommended citation***

Tucker, G., Jones, W., Davies, S. & Edwards, J. (2023) UK Biodiversity Strategies and Targets for 2020. In *Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons*, ed. G. Tucker, online Annex UK.2. Cambridge, UK / New York: Cambridge University Press. [www.cambridge.org/natureconservation](http://www.cambridge.org/natureconservation)