
COP15

WHAT IS THE UK DOING TO MEET THE
NEW GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY TARGETS?

BES POLICY



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SUMMARY

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 is bringing representatives from countries around the world to Montreal, Canada, to agree on a new deal to confront the growing biodiversity crisis: the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This is likely to include a range of targets to achieve by 2030, including protecting at least 30% of land and sea, halting and reversing biodiversity loss and reducing pollution.

We contacted government departments and eNGOs (environmental non-governmental organisations) from across the UK's four devolved nations in order to find out if the new targets can be met by 2030, what policies are in progress, how governments can be held to account and how more political and public interest in the biodiversity crisis can be encouraged. This briefing summarises the opinions of the five experts who were interviewed and the key policy developments related to the forthcoming targets from COP15.

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INTRODUCTION

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15 is taking place in Montreal, Canada, from 7 to 19 December 2022. It brings together representatives from countries around the world to agree on the 'Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework', which is a new set of targets and milestones to confront the growing biodiversity crisis. The 2011-2020 Strategic Framework for Biodiversity expired in 2020, but a replacement has been delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. None of the 20 Aichi targets associated with the 2011-2020 framework were achieved, and only six were partly achieved.

Each country attending COP15 is required to present NBSAPs (National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans). Environmental policy is devolved in the UK, therefore Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales each have their own policies around biodiversity. However, all four nations are being represented as one by the JNCC (Joint

Council for the Conservation of Nature) at COP15. At the time of writing, it is unclear what National Biodiversity Strategy the JNCC is presenting on behalf of the UK, but last month the JNCC, along with Natural England, NatureScot, Natural Resources Wales, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency published a rare joint statement, declaring the urgency of the situation and their mutual commitment to the ambitions of the new framework.

A draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework was published last year, which includes the targets that will most likely be agreed during COP15, though some details may change through negotiations in Montreal. With the UK currently ranking in the lowest 10% of the world's countries for the amount of biodiversity it has remaining, what are the UK's devolved nations doing to meet the targets proposed in the draft global framework?



THE 30X30 TARGET

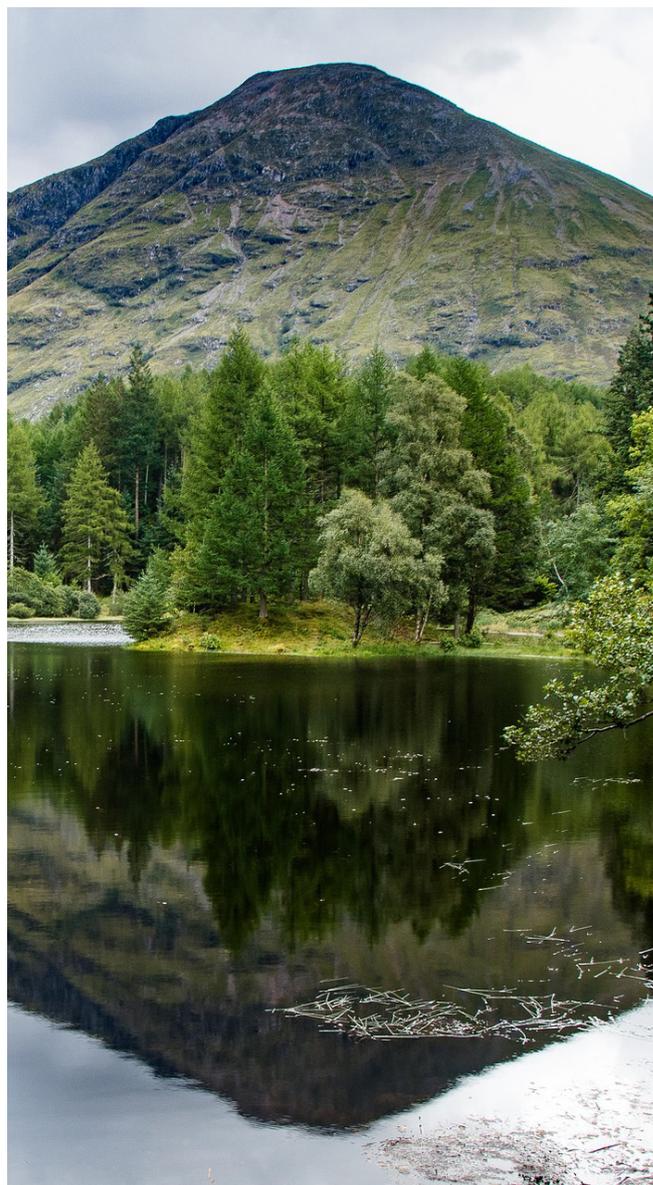
A key target in the draft framework is to **protect at least 30% of land and sea globally by 2030** (known as the 30x30 target). While this target may appear close to being achieved in the UK, with [27.8% of land and 38.2% of seas](#) under some kind of designation, many of these areas are not delivering for nature and are in poor ecological condition. For example, [data](#) shared by Global Fishing Watch and Oceana earlier this year found that 90% of the UK's Marine Protected Areas are still subject to damaging bottom-trawling.

Within the UK there are many terrestrial and marine protected area designations (see Table 1), each with different objectives and protection levels. These comprise **statutory protected sites**, which are protected by law for nature conservation, and **protected landscapes**, which include National Parks and AONBs (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Whereas statutory protected sites are designed to protect biodiversity, protected landscapes do not have biodiversity protection as their primary objective, and were originally established to safeguard landscapes, natural heritage, and public access to nature.

		COVERAGE (%)		
SITES INCLUDED			LAND	SEA
Statutory protected sites	Marine Conservation Zones, Marine Protected Areas, Marine Nature Reserves, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protected Areas, Wetlands of International Importance, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves	UK	10.6	38.2
		England	6.5	40.3
		Scotland	17.6	36.9
		Wales	10.6	50.3
		Northern Ireland	9.8	35.6
Protected landscapes	National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Scenic Areas	UK	17.2	
		England	19.9	
		Scotland	12.0	
		Wales	18.8	
		Northern Ireland	18.6	

Table 1: Coverage of designated statutory protected sites and protected landscapes in the UK. Source: British Ecological Society's report on [Protected Areas and Nature Recovery](#).

The [Nature Recovery Green Paper](#) published by Defra (England's Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) suggested that only sites that are primarily protected for nature (statutory protected sites) should count towards the 30x30 target, and the UK government and the four nations are currently working to establish criteria to assess protected areas for the 30x30 target. As highlighted by a [recent BES report](#) on protected areas, protected landscapes have a great potential to contribute to nature recovery in the future, but to count towards the target they need to be adequately funded and undergo a transformational change to repurpose them and ensure nature's recovery.



Protected landscapes such as National Parks and AONBs (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) were not designated primarily for biodiversity. A repurposing is required for them to be included in 30x30.

Dr Joseph Bailey | Lead author of the BES report on protected areas

Where are each of the four nations at with progress towards the 30x30 target and what policies will help them to achieve it? As they develop their individual biodiversity strategies, common policies emerging are the designation of new National Parks with nature recovery objectives, the restoration of land outside of formally-designated areas, including the creation nature recovery networks, and a move to nature-friendly farming. Experts interviewed for this piece emphasised the need to increase funding for monitoring and enforcement for protected areas, as well as working with local authorities and communities to co-design new protected areas.



30x30 in Scotland

There was no mention of 30x30 in the draft of the new [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#), which is surprising given that well-managed protected areas will be vital for nature's recovery. However, the Scottish government have commissioned NatureScot to develop and publish a plan for the delivery of 30x30 on land. This is being developed alongside a [Nature Networks Framework](#), i.e. a plan to connect nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects through a series of habitat corridors and stepping stones. A NatureScot team is co-designing a 30x30 plan for Scotland with a range of stakeholders, from youth groups to landowners, with an aim to complete this during 2023. During her interview, Debbie Bassett (NatureScot) emphasised the importance of this collaborative approach.



Formal designation and protected areas is one way of doing it [i.e. achieving the 30x30 target], but it is not the only way. We do a lot of co-design with local communities anyway, but not on such a big scale, for such a big policy – this is quite a new venture for NatureScot. This innovative process gives us an opportunity to think about how we develop policy going forward.

Debbie Bassett | NatureScot

The Scottish government has also committed to establishing at least one new National Park by 2026 and has launched a public consultation on what the aims of the new protected landscape should be. The supporting document states that the overarching purpose of the new park should be 'to lead nature recovery and a just transition to net zero'.

Though ~37% of Scottish seas lie in MPAs (Marine Protected Areas), the coverage of effective protection is much lower, as is the case with MPAs in the other devolved nations. Debbie Bassett (NatureScot) stated that there is a major challenge around the monitoring and management of MPAs, though the [National Marine Plan](#), [Future Fisheries Strategy](#) and draft [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) set out plans for dealing with some of the issues. ScotLINK have recently released [a briefing](#) just ahead of the CBD negotiations in Montreal, which provides a helpful summary of 30x30 on land and sea in Scotland.

30x30 in Northern Ireland

[Nature Recovery Networks](#) are also being developed in Northern Ireland, which will be designed to connect existing and future protected areas. A partnership between Ulster Wildlife, RSPB NI, National Trust and Woodland Trust is developing opportunity maps for more, bigger, better and more joined up spaces for nature.

Northern Ireland's former Environment Minister Edwin Poots [publicly endorsed](#) 30x30. A 2021 briefing by NI Environment Link outlined [what is needed to meet the target](#) and they have recently called for the 30x30 target [to have a legal underpinning](#).

However, eNGOs are concerned about the insufficient funding allocated to the management and monitoring of protected areas. For example, Dr Jane Clarke (RSPB NI) thinks that protected areas are suffering due to a history of under-investment. During her interview, she explained that even though SPAs (Special Protected Areas) have been subject to three decadal reviews by JNCC so far, many of the reviews' recommendations have not been implemented yet. Clarke gave an example where RSPB NI is working with farmers to protect curlew in the Antrim Hills, one of the last breeding hotspots: "That area still isn't designated for curlews, despite the UK reviews identifying the lack of sufficient sites for curlew as a significant issue."

Northern Ireland currently has 48 MPAs occupying 38% of Northern Ireland's inshore region, but [only 4.48% of these MPAs](#) are considered to be 'under favourable management'. DAERA (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) consulted on two new marine SPAs in 2016, the East Coast Marine SPA and the Carlingford Lough SPA, but neither of them has been designated so far.



30x30 in Wales

The Welsh government organised a set of expert workshops called a ['Biodiversity Deep Dive'](#) in the summer of 2022 to develop a suite of recommendations to 'meaningfully deliver' the 30x30 target. The resulting recommendations call for immediate action for a 'better, bigger and more effectively connected' portfolio of protected sites in Wales. Similar to the other nations, plans to achieve this include scaling up their [Nature Networks Fund](#), which also works to actively involve local communities, creating networks of key stakeholder groups, in addition to improving ecological networks.

The Welsh government is waiting for the outcomes of COP15 before developing primary legislation to set binding nature recovery targets. However, they have set up a taskforce to develop the key objectives that emerged from the Deep Dive process. A key objective is to unlock the potential of protected landscapes by supporting their authorities to develop action plans for nature recovery to meaningfully contribute to 30x30.

Earlier this year, the National Park Authority for the Brecon Beacons National Park consulted on [Future Beacons](#), a new management plan which defined a 25-year vision for the park, including a goal to reverse biodiversity decline. The final shape of this plan is unclear because it is undergoing major changes in light of the responses to a consultation. A new National Park has also been proposed for northeast Wales in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, with nature recovery and climate mitigation stated as its key priorities.

The Deep Dive outcomes included a recommendation to complete the MPA network to address shortfalls in protection and improve its connectedness and ecological coherence.

Another recommendation called for better monitoring of protected areas to measure progress towards 30x30. According to Welsh eNGOs, a key barrier to sufficient monitoring is a lack of funding for NRW (Natural Resources Wales).



Not enough monitoring is happening to establish the condition of the current sites, let alone funding for effective protection.

Tim Birch | Wildlife Trusts Wales

In fact, in their 2020 [assessment of protected sites](#), NRW had insufficient evidence to determine the condition of around half of the features in these sites.

Tim Birch (Wildlife Trusts Wales) believes that there is an opportunity for local authorities to do more, and this was recognised in the document summarising the results of the Deep Dive process. It included a recommendation to invest more in [Local Nature Partnerships](#), which bring together organisations, businesses and communities to address local priorities. With over 85% of land in Wales being farmed, allowing nature to recover in areas outside of formally-designated protected areas will be essential to meeting 30x30. While Birch thinks that things are heading in the right direction, he is less optimistic about them moving fast enough for targets to be met by 2030. For example, the Sustainable Farming Scheme is due to be launched in 2025 and won't be fully implemented until 2029, "so there's this question of how we are going to reach the 30x30 target if farmers don't join the scheme until the late 2020s."



30x30 in England

According to the recent [30x30 progress report](#) by Wildlife and Countryside LINK, two years on from the UK government's 30x30 commitment, only 3.2% of England's land is in protected sites that are in 'good' or 'recovering' condition and a maximum of 8% of English waters are in Marine Protected Areas with implemented management measures and monitoring.

In the [green paper on Nature Recovery](#) published in May, Defra proposed different options for reforms to the English system of protected sites in an attempt to streamline the designation and governance of the different types of protected sites. For now, it remains uncertain how protected areas will be reformed, and concern is growing with the UK Parliament currently considering the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill which, if passed in its current form, will revoke EU laws carried over when the UK left the European Union at the end of 2023, unless they are 'saved' by secondary legislation. This could result in the loss of species and habitat protections, as well as loss of the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) designations, which cover vital wildlife sites in the UK.

A positive development in England is Defra's plan to pilot [Highly Protected Marine Areas](#), i.e. sites where fishing is prohibited and only non-damaging activities are allowed. On land, England's [Nature Recovery Networks](#) plan establishes the creation of a 'national network of wildlife-rich spaces', which will involve the restoration of 75% of protected sites on land to favourable condition, along with the creation of 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites. This target was also proposed in Defra's draft [environmental targets](#), which was consulted on early this year. In the consultation on these targets, 'wildlife-rich' was defined as 'priority habitats, which are habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, as well as other habitat types of particular value for biodiversity'.

HALT AND REVERSE BIODIVERSITY LOSS BY 2030

Another key target in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is to **halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030**. As with 30x30, this requires urgent action both inside and outside of protected areas. All governmental departments across the four UK nations are considering ways to embed nature protection in agricultural and other policies.

The draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy does include halting biodiversity loss by 2030 among its targets, but it does not provide details on how this target can be achieved and how appropriate monitoring and evaluation can measure progress towards the target¹. Despite this, Debbie Bassett (NatureScot) is optimistic that biodiversity loss in Scotland can be halted by 2030. Bassett pointed out that the Biodiversity Strategy must be supported by other legislation and strategies, such as the Environment Bill, the Forestry Strategy and the proposed [Agriculture Bill](#), especially as around 80% of land in Scotland is used for agriculture.



This isn't a solo pursuit of the environmental sector, this must involve everyone. We need to see nature reflected in all policy areas, whether it's growing our food or keeping us healthy.

Debbie Bassett | NatureScot

In Northern Ireland, the Environment Act 2021, which includes a requirement for Environmental Improvement Plans to 'significantly improve the natural environment', was approved by the Assembly in February, but it is a framework agreement and requires further legislation to be implemented. Dr Jane Clarke (RSPB NI) said she thinks the target is possible, but it is made more difficult by the current lack of an Executive.



We just need immediate action. I think there is a real groundswell of public support for action. We have a draft Environment Strategy, and we are supposed to be consulting on a Biodiversity Strategy, but without ministers, our departments can only do so much, which means eNGOs have to step up to do more.

Dr Jane Clarke | RSPB NI

The Senedd (Welsh Parliament) [declared a 'nature emergency'](#) in 2021, recognising the scale of the crisis highlighted in the [Welsh State of Nature report](#), which found that 17% of species in Wales were threatened with extinction. Wales is currently operating under its Nature Recovery Action Plan 2020-2021, but it is understood that the government is committed to publishing targets and refreshing its approach after COP15.



Some people in Wales are sceptical about the targets because they think they just can't be met. But the question is why they aren't meeting them. You can't just throw away targets because you think you can't meet them.

Tim Birch | Wildlife Trusts Wales

In England, the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) set out objectives to 'leave our environment in a better place than we found it', but requires legislation to detail how they can be achieved. The [Environment Act 2021](#) helps to fill in some of these details, and includes a requirement for the government to set at least one long-term, legally-binding target in each of the key themes of air quality, water, biodiversity, resource efficiency and waste reduction, fine particulate matter and species abundance. The government has not published yet the final version of the targets.

The Environment Act also includes a 10% 'biodiversity net gain' requirement for new developments – they must leave wildlife habitats in a measurably better state – to try and solve the conflict between nature conservation and developments. Earlier this year, Sophus zu Ermgassen, who is researching biodiversity net gain at the University of Kent, [told the BES](#) "our database shows that the vast majority of the benefits of net gain, as it stands, are being delivered through promises of small, high-quality habitats many years in the future... if these promises do not materialise in reality, then net gain might be associated with a considerable loss of greenspace, which might actually harm nature overall." It is therefore essential that enforcement is in place so that developers are held accountable if they fail to deliver their commitments.



¹ This was highlighted in the consultation response prepared by the BES Scottish Policy Group.



NUTRIENT LOSS, PESTICIDE USE AND HARMFUL BIODIVERSITY INCENTIVES

The draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework includes targets to **reduce nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, pesticides by at least two thirds, and eliminate incentives that are harmful for biodiversity.**

The UK nations are each developing their own agri-environment schemes after leaving the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, but there were concerns among those interviewed for this briefing that the transition to more nature-friendly farming is not happening fast enough.

The Scottish government's [Vision for Agriculture](#) sets a course for Scotland to become a global leader in regenerative agriculture, and they recently consulted on their [proposals for a new Agriculture Bill](#), which will create the legal framework for the vision. The proposal includes a tiered financial support for farmers based on their contribution to biodiversity restoration and climate mitigation. However, this system [has been accused](#) of still rewarding large landowners simply for owning land. The BES Scottish Policy Group responded to the consultation calling for tailored government support to farmers taking on the risk of uncertain outcomes in the transition to more regenerative agricultural practices.



Agriculture has a huge role to play, not just in halting the loss of biodiversity but also in helping us meet our carbon targets.

Debbie Bassett | NatureScot

NatureScot is running a project called [Farming with Nature](#), a farmer-led pilot program with 40 farmers and crofters, which aims to understand how farming with nature can help different farming systems to continue producing products in a sustainable way. "The project means farmers have breathing space to try things that are too risky from a business perspective, testing these approaches in a real setting and then sharing the information across the farming community," said Bassett. This will feed into how the new Rural Support Payment will work for Scotland.

Bassett also pointed out that the departure from the EU is an opportunity to develop bespoke policies that work for farmers in Scotland, but that it is important to maintain standards similar to those in place in the EU.

Wales recently consulted on their new [Agriculture \(Wales\) Bill](#), which would provide ministers with the powers necessary to implement the [Sustainable Farming Scheme proposals](#), which list environmental actions that farmers would be paid for. The 'universal' actions, which farmers will need to do to qualify for the baseline payments, include creating tree cover on 10% of their land and managing semi-natural habitats across a further 10%. Farmers can receive additional payments for collaborative actions such as creating habitat networks at a landscape scale through collaboration across farms.



A Sustainable Farming Scheme that rewards nature-friendly farming will be crucial to recovering nature in Wales.

Meriel Harrison | RSPB Cymru

Tim Birch (Wildlife Trusts Wales) thinks the landscape-scale actions have the potential to bend the curve on nature's recovery, but his concern is how much funding will be available for these big, transformative actions. Wildlife Trusts Wales is also pushing for the Sustainable Farming Schemes to include clear minimum standards for every farm, even if they don't join the schemes. "That's really critical, I think, for example with fixing river pollution – we have so many Welsh rivers that are way above ecologically safe phosphate levels, even within Special Areas of Conservation."

In England, the [Agriculture Act 2020](#) establishes that area-based payments to farmers are to be phased out and replaced by a new system called [ELMS](#) (Environment Land Management Schemes), which will pay farmers for environmental land management action, including improving soil quality, air quality and water quality. Defra has been trialling three ELMS: the Sustainable Farming Incentive, which will pay farmers for actions for biodiversity and climate mitigation above the level set out in regulation; the Local Nature Recovery Programme, which will pay farmers for actions that restore nature in their local environment; and the Landscape Recovery Scheme which will fund long-term projects at the landscape scale.

However, the Sustainable Farming Incentive [has been accused by eNGOs](#) of lacking ambition, and confusion around ELMS, including rumours that the schemes would be scrapped under the Truss government and substantially reworked under the Sunak government, has [caused fewer farmers to sign up than hoped](#). The government is still revising ELMS, and the latest

declarations indicate that the three tiers will remain but the Local Nature Recovery Scheme will be replaced by a scheme called 'Countryside Stewardship'. Whether this is more than a change of name is yet to be seen, and crucially the division of funding between the three tiers is also still to be revealed.

Northern Ireland's draft [Environment Strategy](#) recognises that 'our environmental challenges can only be addressed if agriculture and farmers are part of the solution'. The nation has operated [agri-environment schemes](#) since 2014, and earlier this year announced these will be replaced with the [Future Agricultural Policy](#), including a 'Farming with Nature' package which will initially focus on creating and restoring habitats that are important for species diversity. Dr Jane Clarke (RSPB NI) stated that the original Future Agricultural Policy consulted on included a requirement for 10% of a farm's land within the new environmental scheme being set aside for biodiversity, but this was removed in the final version, a point of frustration for eNGOs. Several other promising policies appear to be in development, but have been delayed by the ongoing lack of an Executive.

RSPB NI works closely with the [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) and Clarke said there are many farmers who want to make a difference, but that the transition to sector-wide sustainability is slower than needed. "The most obvious piece of evidence for that is the [Climate Change Act 2022](#) that passed this year, The Act sets the net zero target for 2050, but one of the exemptions is for methane from agriculture, with a target 47% reduction."



NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Another key target in the post-2020 framework is to **use ecosystem-based approaches to contribute to mitigation and adaptation to climate change**, and there is growing recognition among the four nations that the biodiversity and climate crises need to be solved together, and that trade-offs must be minimised.



There is a recognition in Wales that solving the two crises are two sides of the same coin.

Tim Birch | Wildlife Trusts Wales

During her interview, Meriel Harrison (RSPB Cymru) highlighted that it will be important to make informed choices about trade-offs. She highlighted that a significant [increase in renewable energy developments](#) in Welsh seas is anticipated to contribute to decarbonisation in the coming years, and it is vital that developments are carefully planned and take place in such a way that integrates marine recovery and resilience for seabirds.

Across the devolved nations, there does seem to be progress towards confronting both crises with the same actions. For example, the [Wales Biodiversity Deep Dive](#) includes a recommendation to triple the area of peatland to be restored through the [National Peatland Action Programme](#), with potential benefits for both biodiversity and climate mitigation. During COP27 in November, Defra secretary Thérèse Coffey said that restoring nature must be at the heart of tackling climate change and announced a pledge of £30 million to the [Big Nature Impact Fund](#), a joint public/private fund to support carbon capture through nature protection and restoration projects.



We've got to make sure that there aren't any trade-offs.

Debbie Bassett | NatureScot

"50% of Scottish emissions come from land and sea...the better condition nature is in, the better it is at storing carbon." Around [£13 billion worth](#) of property, roads, railways and other types of infrastructure are protected from climate change-induced flooding and coastal erosion by natural features on Scotland's coastline. "This is just one example of a habitat type that is doing an immense job to help us." said Debbie Bassett (NatureScot).

Other experts highlighted that biodiversity improvements often contribute to climate change mitigation, but the contrary is not always true. During his interview, Tim Birch (Wildlife Trusts Wales) pointed to the important concept of 'right tree, right place' when it comes to tree planting and the [National Forest](#) proposed for Wales, described as 'a network of woodland running the length and breadth of Wales'. This approach will be key to ensure that climate mitigation actions will not have adverse impacts on biodiversity. "There is massive potential to restore the Temperate Celtic Rainforest across parts of Wales, but we need to work with landowners to work out where that should be."





HOLDING GOVERNMENTS TO ACCOUNT

Given that the UK did not meet any of the targets in the previous global biodiversity framework, how will governments be held to account this time? Key elements that are needed to ensure targets are met include independent environmental bodies that hold governments and other public authorities to account, legally-binding targets, robust monitoring processes, and collaborations among all relevant stakeholder groups.

Since leaving the EU, the UK and devolved nation governments are no longer held to account by the EU Commission. For this reason, England and Northern Ireland have created a new independent public body, the [Office of Environmental Protection](#) (OEP), which aims to hold government to account on environmental law.

Scotland has also set up a new oversight body, [Environmental Standards Scotland](#), but Wales still lacks one. Tim Birch (Wildlife Trusts Wales) said “Welsh government needs to step up and set up an Office of Environmental Protection as soon as possible,” adding that NRW (Natural Resources Wales) is currently responsible for enforcement of environmental policy, but in their latest enforcement assessment they reported that there had been no enforcement around wildlife legislation.

The outcomes of Wales’ Biodiversity Deep Dive process contains an objective to establish an environmental governance body as early as possible in this parliament term, and Wales’ Climate Change Minister Julie James has announced that they will set up an independent working group to monitor Wales’ progress towards 30x30 and wider nature recovery targets.



This time we need to see the global framework implemented through a suite of SMART [i.e. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound] and legally-binding domestic targets, with a duty on Ministers to achieve the targets.

Meriel Harrison | RSPB Cymru

Tim Birch (Wildlife Trusts Wales) added that there is a need to form partnerships with land managers, farmers and local authorities along the way. “This needs to be an all-Wales effort, spearheaded by clarity from Welsh government.”

BARRIERS TO MEETING BIODIVERSITY TARGETS



What are the main barriers to the UK meeting the targets agreed at COP15? Public and political concern for the biodiversity crisis is growing, but representatives of the eNGOs we talked to remain concerned that available funding and political will are still insufficient. There is hope that blended finance, with investment from the private sector, will help fund nature-positive projects throughout the devolved nations, but it will be important to ensure actions are taken to prevent greenwashing.

Insufficient funding is a significant barrier to biodiversity restoration, and experts interviewed for this briefing acknowledged the need to harness private finance in addition to governmental funding.



We need blended finance models; we need the businesses that have been benefitting from natural resources from around the world to step up, and the environmental sector has a role to play in making sure that the projects are there for businesses to fund. We've got to get better at coming up with big, landscape-scale projects that they can buy into. This could be a major way to leverage money if we get it right – but there are risks like greenwashing.

Debbie Bassett | NatureScot

Dr Max Bodmer from [rePLANET Wildlife](#), a company developing biodiversity credits that the private sector can buy alongside carbon credits, explained that the company is receiving a large amount of interest from the ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) departments of big corporations and banks, but some farmers are worried about the potential reputational damage resulting from collaboration with private companies.

Not all private investors aim to make a return on their investment: "We are seeing lots of good will and philanthropy among our funders," said Bodmer, who also highlighted the need for the UK government to support blended finance initiatives. "There are currently a large number of legislative obstacles obstructing the development of the biodiversity credit market in the UK, and it is therefore essential that government agencies start to work closely with landowners, investors, and conservation managers to overcome these difficulties so that biodiversity benefits can be maximised. The establishment of a biodiversity equivalent of the Woodland Carbon Code would be a good start."

The experts we talked to also highlighted concerns about companies buying land to plant trees, driving up the price of land and planting monocultures that are not beneficial for biodiversity.



Locals go up in arms about it and it's not very good for biodiversity. But we think that financial models can be developed where you bring in outside finance and engage with local communities. That's one of the things that we feel Welsh government needs to more actively engage with.

Tim Birch | Wildlife Trusts Wales

Across all four nations, other issues are dominating politics including war in Ukraine, food and fuel security and the cost of living crisis, as well as political instability in Northern Ireland. These priorities may compete with biodiversity conservation, so it is vital that governments stay motivated to set strong policies to meet the environmental targets agreed at COP15.

While divergence due to the devolution of environmental policy can help ensure bespoke frameworks are developed for different national environments and issues, this can be problematic given that pollution, species and landscapes cross national borders. Several experts spoken to for this article highlighted that the UK shares land and sea borders with the EU, and therefore enhanced national and international cooperation on biodiversity conservation is needed.





SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THE BIODIVERSITY CRISIS

With the climate COPs (most recently COP27 in Egypt) rightly receiving significant media attention, how can we encourage more public and political interest in the biodiversity crisis?

There is a need to promote awareness about the connection between the two crises, the interlinked nature of their solutions and the social and economic value of nature. An interesting project to engage policy makers is being carried out by eNGOs in Scotland and Wales asking MSPs/MPs to each champion a different species. Linking the biodiversity crisis to human health is also helpful; RSPB NI are collaborating with Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation NI to ask members of the Executive and Assembly to pledge their support for nature restoration and better environmental standards.



The public doesn't always realise what nature does for us – people know it makes us feel happy, helped us cope with lockdown – but do people know that nature stops flooding, filters drinking water, could de-heat our cities? We've got to get better at communicating that.

Debbie Bassett | NatureScot

Ensuring access to nature is key to encourage public interest in conservation, as acknowledged for example in the [draft Northern Ireland Environment Strategy](#), which includes a vision for 'a national greenways network linking population centres and our best landscapes and habitats'. This will require the creation of public pathways and making sure that nature reserves become accessible to the public.

Promoting the voices of young people is also important. Young people in Wales have published a [Climate and Nature Manifesto for Wales](#), detailing an action plan to address the environmental crisis. The 2015 Welsh [Future Generations and Wellbeing Act](#) aims to ensure all public bodies work in a way that doesn't compromise future generations and their wellbeing. "Whether or not that is working all the time is another question, but it is a very progressive piece of legislation," said Tim Birch (Wildlife Trusts Wales).



CONCLUSION

COP15 is a key opportunity for countries to address the growing biodiversity crisis. While the UK's devolved nations are already developing policies in line with the new targets, bold and urgent action is required to meet them by 2030. Public and political interest can be encouraged by raising awareness on the social and financial value of nature and the significant overlap between actions needed to address the climate and biodiversity crises.

The format of the Aichi Targets of the previous framework made progress hard to measure, so hopefully the new Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework will contain targets that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART). This will help nations to design and implement effective policies to address the crises.

Improving the monitoring, funding and enforcement of protected areas will be vital to reversing biodiversity loss in the UK, as will the protection and restoration of nature-rich habitats connecting them. Engagement of local communities will be essential to ensure buy-in and synergies. Biodiversity outside of protected areas must also be restored using nature-friendly farming schemes and cross-sectoral collaboration, as well as harnessing private sector finance to ensure funding at a time when there is great pressure on public financing.



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