

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Tracking progress

Highlights from the 2002 reporting round

UK Biodiversity Partnership

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Main results

- Biodiversity partnerships at both national and local levels are delivering direct action for national priority and locally important habitats and species.
- More than a third of the UK BAP species and nearly 60% of the habitats are beginning to show positive trends.
- 72% of the national action plans are showing progress on at least one target.
- Progress for some species and habitats is, however, slower than originally anticipated.
- There is more information available to assess trends since 1999, but there are still many gaps in knowledge; lack of research, survey and information is seen as the most significant constraint to plan progress.
- Habitat loss and degradation are still seen as the main causes of declines in BAP species and habitats.
- Local Biodiversity Action Plan partnerships are successfully raising awareness and engaging local communities, businesses and decision-makers in their work.
- There is a continuing need to improve the links between national and local partners; outcomes from the reporting round are already helping to address this.



Introduction

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan established a planned approach with clear biological targets for 391 species and 45 habitats. Monitoring and reporting are crucial to assess progress, evaluate priorities and address emerging issues. At the end of 2002 the Lead Partners of the national action plans and co-ordinators of local biodiversity action reported on their progress. This summary gives an overview of the results at a UK level. The full report including country level information is available at: www.ukbap.org.uk.

The 2002 reporting round was web-based and the first step towards fully web-based interactive reporting, supported by the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS). This new approach proved a success. A high response rate was achieved with reports received for all 45 Habitat Action Plans, 365 (93%) Species Action Plans and 123 (76%) Local Biodiversity Action Plans.



The silver spotted skipper is expanding in both range and abundance, benefiting from agri-environment schemes and better site management.

Trends for UK BAP species and habitats

An important measure of our success in conserving the UK's biodiversity is whether or not the status of UK BAP species and habitats is improving. The 2002 reporting results indicate that on the basis of current knowledge:

- Six habitats (13%) and 25 species (6%) are increasing;
- Six habitats (13%) and 76 species (20%) are stable;
- Seventeen habitats (38%) are in decline but the decline is slowing for 14 habitats (31%);
- Ninety-seven species (25%) are declining but this is slowing for 30 species (8%);

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- One species, the starry breck lichen, appears to have been lost since the UK BAP was published; and
- UK trend was unknown for 13 habitats (29%) and 110 species (28%), an improvement from the 1999 figures of 71% and 55% respectively.

There have already been notable successes...

Native pine woodlands, cereal field margins, the bittern, ladybird spider and field cricket are amongst those UK BAP species and habitats showing increases in extent or numbers, reflecting the success of hard work on the ground and effectively targeted incentive schemes.

But there is still much to do...

Limestone pavements, maritime cliffs and slopes, the dormouse, natterjack toad, sunset cup coral and silver-studded blue butterfly, among others, continue to decline.

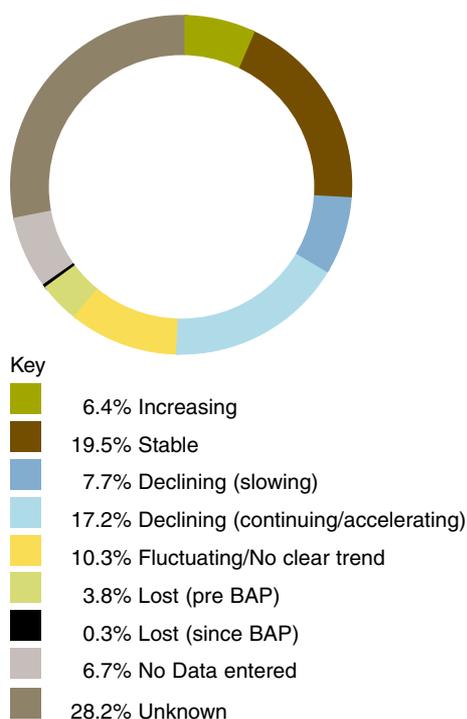


Figure 1. Trends for UK BAP species (N = 391).

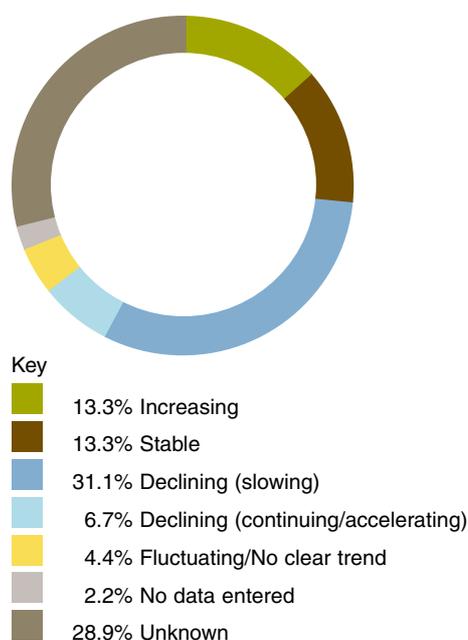


Figure 2. Trends for UK BAP habitats (N = 45).

The 2002 reporting round showed that more information is available compared to 1999, enabling clearer judgements to be made about trends, including more detailed assessments about the rates of decline. Five species (including song thrush, narrow headed ant and the fiery clearwing moth) were showing a more positive trend than in 1999. However, 13 are now showing a worse trend than in 1999 (including the Cotswold pennycress, the starfruit and the Twaite and Allis shads).

Progress on targets for UK BAP species and habitats

By 2002, 72% of plans (71% of habitats and 72% of species) were making progress on at least one target. This is a significant increase on the 54% reporting progress in 1999.

Delivering national targets

Both Lead Partners and Local Biodiversity Action Plan partnerships reported successes towards delivery of biodiversity targets, including:

- 100 ha of native woodland planted in Edinburgh;
- Creation or rehabilitation started at three significant reedbeds in Wales on Gwent Levels, Malltraeth and Penclacwydd;
- 377 ha of sand dune habitat restored in North Merseyside, breeding ranges of natterjack toad and sand lizard maintained or expanded;
- Number of records of toothed fungi increased by survey of Scottish Pinewoods; and
- Condition of all southern damselfly sites assessed and management recommendations produced.

Are we on schedule?

Thirteen Species Action Plan targets and seven Habitat Action Plan targets were due to be achieved by 2002. Of these, eight of the species targets (including targets for bittern, corncrake, song thrush and sand lizard) had been achieved or exceeded and two thirds of the remainder have made at least some progress.



Creation targets for reedbeds are progressing ahead of schedule, and this habitat is set to benefit further by the recent identification of a Habitat Champion.

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More sites for red-tipped cudweed are now known than at any time since the beginning of the 20th Century, probably due to recent beneficial changes in farming practices.

Causes of biodiversity loss or decline

Lead Partners reassessed the factors causing loss or decline of their species or habitats and ranked them according to their significance, giving a good indication of the key factors impacting on biodiversity.

Habitat loss and degradation emerge as the issues that affect most UK BAP species and habitats, with pollution a distant second (Figure 3). Looking in more detail at the underlying causes of habitat loss and degradation it is clear that agriculture is most important, followed by changing management practice and infrastructure developments.

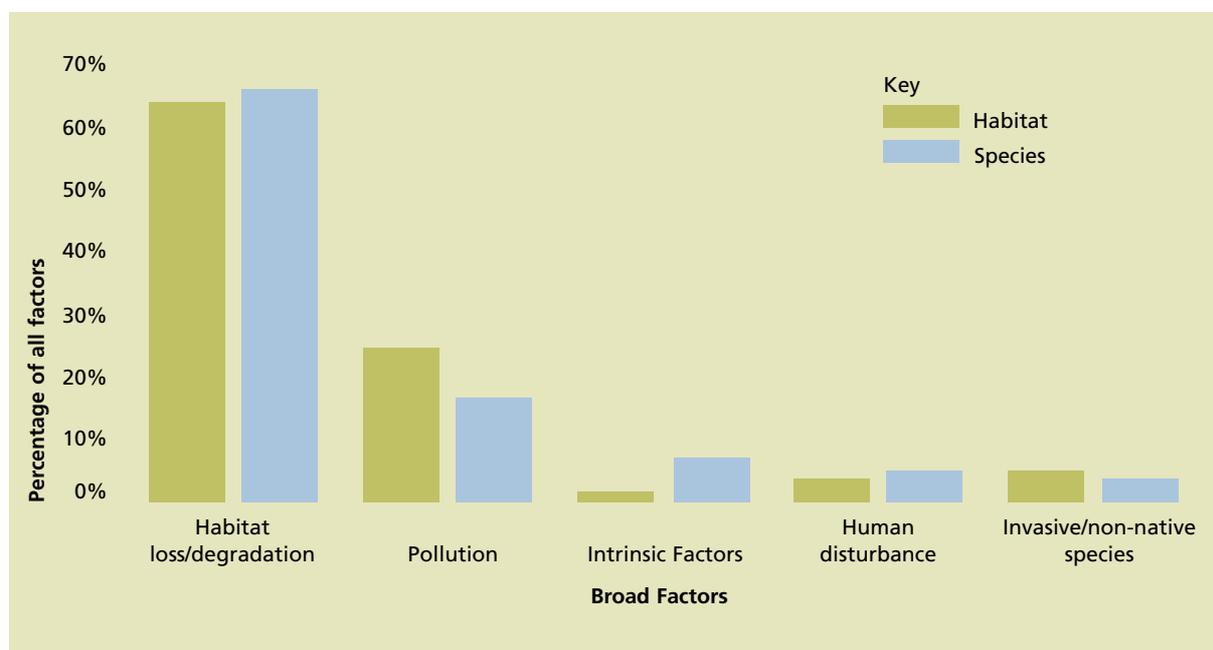


Figure 3. The causes of losses and declines in UK BAP species and habitats.

Links between Lead Partners and Local Biodiversity Action Plans

Work carried out under Local Biodiversity Action Plans is an important complement to the work carried out or co-ordinated by Lead Partners.

257 (66%) UK BAP species and 41 (91%) UK BAP habitats are included in at least one Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Local Biodiversity Partnerships have also prepared action plans for a large number of other species and habitats to reflect their important role in the conservation of biodiversity of local significance and resonance.

Lead Partners were asked to assess the importance of Local Biodiversity Action Plans in achieving national priority targets. A huge majority (83%) of Lead Partners felt that Local Biodiversity Action Plans were important to some extent in achieving national plan targets. The 64 Lead Partners (17%) that considered Local Biodiversity Action Plans unimportant to attaining national targets were in most cases leads for marine species or species with a highly restricted range.

Though over 80% of Lead Partners believed Local Biodiversity Action Plans were important to some extent in achieving national targets, 60% had made little or no contact. Further work is clearly needed to improve this. However, a valuable outcome of this reporting round has already been the exchange of relevant information and knowledge between Lead Partners and Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Widening communication and involvement

Local Biodiversity Action Plans are a vital component of the UK BAP process in terms of delivering biodiversity actions, raising awareness and gaining popular support to make this delivery sustainable in the long term...

- In the Western Isles, local school groups have been involved in collecting wild flower seeds to establish a seed bank of local provenance for use in new road projects;
- The Rhondda Cynon Taff LBAP partnership organised a Great Spider Hunt in 2001, raising awareness of spiders, the importance of recording, and of biodiversity as a whole; and
- The Purbeck LBAP partnership has organised habitat management events which have attracted over 200 local land managers, contractors and advisors.

Reported obstacles to progress

Lead Partners identified research and survey, management, and funding as the main constraints to achieving plan targets. Local Biodiversity Action Plan officers identified funding, research and survey as the main obstacles to overall progress with their plans. The Biodiversity Research Action Group and the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group will need to take account of the findings on research and survey in their work programmes.

Acknowledgements

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Page 3: Mike Hammett/English Nature – silver spotted skipper butterfly

Page 5: Geoff Harris/RSPB – reedbed

Page 6: Bob Hobbs – red-tipped cudweed

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Nobel House
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