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Standard and target setting for nature conservation

JNCC plays a leading role in setting the standards and targets that provide a consistent framework for UK nature conservation

Nature conservation targets arise from a wide range of initiatives, some from the international sphere, such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and others from the domestic, such as the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).

For the UK BAP priority habitats and species, targets provide milestones against which progress can be measured towards achieving their long-term viability – when special conservation action will no longer be necessary. To remain effective the targets need to be updated periodically; the first full review of the targets since their publication between 1995 and 1999 was completed in 2006 for all terrestrial, freshwater and coastal habitats, and for most species. A notable exception was most marine habitats and species. The revision of these targets will await completion of the ongoing review of the priority species and habitats list.

The review of targets was co-ordinated by the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group, supported by JNCC, on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee. The targets recognise that biodiversity conservation is the responsibility of the devolved administrations. Nearly all the targets are quantified and allocated to standard categories – they have a ‘monitoring’ section that shows how progress towards the target will be assessed. JNCC has also played an important role in supporting a review of the priority species

and habitats list. The next stage of this review will develop proposals for signposting conservation actions to the most appropriate delivery mechanisms, and for identifying success criteria which indicate when a species can be removed from the list.

A long-term JNCC commitment has been the Geological Conservation Review (GCR), a major project to identify Britain’s most important geological sites to ensure they are protected and conserved.

This work is supported by the GCR series of publications, which will eventually run to 45 volumes describing more than 3,000 sites. During the reporting year, the latest addition to the series, volume 33 *Mass Movement*, was finalised and sent for publication. Work on the final dozen volumes is nearing completion and four of the texts were submitted by the commissioned authors for production in 2007.

Alongside the production of the print series, JNCC continues to make GCR information more widely available in digital form; the content of six volumes is now available at www.thegcr.org.uk

We also play a central role in maintaining standards for the way habitats are classified. During the reporting year we published *National Vegetation Classification: Users’ Handbook*, prepared by the leading plant ecologist Professor John Rodwell. The

publication explains how plant communities should be sampled and classified.

It complements the five published volumes of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC), which provide a comprehensive account of British vegetation types.

Since its development in the 1980s, the NVC has become the standard method for describing vegetation in Britain and has provided a common language for understanding the character and value of plant communities – allowing comparisons to be made at national and European levels.

Mam Tor

(Far left) Part of the GCR Mass Movement site at Mam Tor, showing how the trunk road has been irreparably damaged by mass movement processes.

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(Left) Oblique aerial photograph of the Mam Tor area, showing the old road which was closed in 1979 owing to repeated slippage. The scar of the landslide is clearly visible, as well as a slumped mass.

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National Vegetation Classification

(Below) The Users’ Handbook was published during the reporting year.

