

Scottish Wildlife Trust Briefing

Biodiversity Debate



Key points

- **Biodiversity has an intrinsic value which we as a society have a responsibility to protect, enhance and pass on for future generations to enjoy; it is also inextricably linked to Scotland's prosperity**
- **Scotland's ecosystems are worth an estimated £21 billion per annum to the Scottish economy**
- **There is an increasing realisation that the impacts of species loss from ecosystems might be large enough to rival the impacts of other global drivers affecting our environment such as climate change**
- **Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2020 will only be achievable if the Scottish Government sticks to its commitments to deliver the Convention of Biological Diversity's (CBD) 20 Aichi targets**
- **Biodiversity must no longer side-lined and we ask the Minister to champion to all government directorates, the socio-economic benefits of ecosystems and their services above and beyond the environmental benefits**

Why is biodiversity important?

Over 20 years ago, the Earth Summit formally recognised that biodiversity was crucial to human wellbeing. Such was the realisation of the significance of this relationship that it led to 193 countries signing up to the Convention on Biological Diversity in order to support the conservation of biological diversity.

Not only does biodiversity have a fundamental value which we as a society have a responsibility to protect, enhance and pass on for future generations to enjoy, but it is also inextricably linked to Scotland's prosperity.

Scotland's brand is sold on the quality of its beautiful landscapes and iconic species such as Atlantic salmon, Scottish wildcat, golden eagle and bottlenose dolphins - nature based tourism alone is worth about £1.4 billion and 39,000 full time equivalent jobs¹.

Research has shown that species- richness (biodiversity) is vital for the health and functioning of ecosystems² which provide services such as - crop pollination; flood prevention, carbon storage, marine fisheries, increased soil, air and water quality - upon which Scotland's economy depends. The total value of these 'free services' in Scotland has been estimated at £21 billion per annum.³

There is an increasing realisation that the impacts of species loss from ecosystems might be large enough to rival the impacts of other global drivers affecting our environment such as climate change.¹

Therefore it is essential that the Scottish Government makes conservation of biodiversity a top priority and supports it in a similar way as it has done in its response to tackling climate change.

In 2010 Scotland, like our European neighbours, failed to meet its biodiversity target -to halt the loss of biodiversity. We must learn from past mistakes and take the chance which is afforded through the

¹ Bryden et al (2010) cited in UK National Ecosystem Assessment 2011

² See: Cardinale et al (2012) Biodiversity loss and its impact on humanity. Nature

³ RPA & Cambridge Econometrics. (2008). *The Economic Impact of Scotland's Natural Environment*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.304 (ROAME No. R07AA106).

revised Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to do things differently and better so that we stop the continued decline of Scotland's wildlife and the degradation of habitats and ecosystems.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy - 2020 Challenge

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that the Scottish Government will have to be bolder and do more than before to conserve Scotland's wildlife and ecosystems and we would urge the Scottish Government to stick to its commitments to deliver the Convention of Biological Diversity's (CBD) 20 Aichi targets.⁴ We see this as the only way forward for Scotland to halt the decline in biodiversity and ecosystems by 2020.

The first goal of the CBD's 2012 -2020 Strategic Plan for Biodiversity is to: *address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society.*

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes this goal can only be achieved if biodiversity is no longer side-lined - it should not be the 'Cinderella' of climate change. Indeed, as we stated in Climate Connections⁵: *Action to tackle climate change and efforts to prevent biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin.* Therefore, maintaining and restoring ecosystem health is a prerequisite to mitigating the impacts of, and adapting to, climate change.

We believe the Minister should champion to **all** government directorates the socio-economic benefits of ecosystems and their services (above and beyond the environmental benefits) and the message that the key to sustaining ecosystem services is having healthy, species-rich and connected ecosystems.

It is also crucial that society understands that maintaining Scotland species' is vital for ecosystem health and that for Scotland to flourish we need to conserve and enhance species and habitats so that they can continue to provide the 'free services' upon which our society depends.

We know people living in Scotland value Scotland's nature and landscapes (a survey showed that 94% agreed with the statement that Scotland's nature and landscapes are what make Scotland special) and their number one species' concern is the decline of the red squirrel. However, nearly three quarters are unaware of biodiversity or what it means.⁶

As a Senegalese Conservationist, Baba Dioum, has said:

*"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, we will understand only what we are taught"*⁷

A vital component missing from the present strategy and, one which would help deliver the 'step change' that the Minister is keen to see, is a commitment to delivering positive biological outcomes. Any proposed actions must add value to Scotland's biodiversity and should be new initiatives that are not being delivered already by other plans or strategies.

Examples of what they could be include:

- Restoring at least 100,000 hectares of peatland to favourable condition
- Reversing the decline in wild pollinators and establish a monitoring programme
- Phasing out peat use by public bodies completely by 2015
- Developing the National Ecological Network on land and at sea to restore health and connectivity to Scotland's ecosystems
- Improve 5,000 hectares of urban greenspace and hospital ground, through managing publically owned land for biodiversity

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⁴ See: <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

⁵ See:

http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/docs/027__104_publications__Climate_Connections_final__low_res__1306398243.pdf

⁶ see: <http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/customercare/Scottish%20Nature%20Omnibus%20Autumn%202011.pdf>

⁷ Extracted from The Diversity of Life by E. O Wilson.