

Biodiversity and conservation

Short debate

13 March 2025



Background

- Biodiversity is in freefall across the world. We are facing twin climate and nature crises, and neither can be tackled without urgent action to address the other.
- A healthy natural world is essential for a thriving economy and society. Nature degradation [could cause](#) a 12% loss to GDP in the coming years, larger than the impact of Covid 19.
- The UK has a series of targets and strategies designed to reverse the decline in biodiversity, but the government's environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, [believes](#) the "window of opportunity is closing fast" to meet these.
- The Environment Act 2021 set legally binding targets to address biodiversity loss, including a commitment to end the decline in populations of certain species by 2030, and then increase populations by 10%, on average, by 2042. Other targets include increasing tree and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area in England by 2050 and restoring 70% of designated features in Marine Protected Areas to a favourable condition by 2042, with the rest in a recovering condition.
- The UK is a signatory to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the headline pledge of which commits us to protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

What is the state of the UK's nature?

- One in six species are threatened with extinction in the UK and wild populations are, on average, 3% smaller than in 2010, and 19% smaller than in 1970, [according to](#) the 2023 State of Nature report.
- Nature has been in decline for centuries, primarily due to habitat loss due to industrialisation. England is [thought to have lost](#) 99.7% of fen habitat, 97% of species rich grasslands, 80% of lowland heaths, 70% of ancient woodlands and 85% of saltmarshes
- No progress has been made towards meeting the UK's commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, which it first committed to [in 2020](#). Five years on, just 2.93% of land and 9.92% of oceans are [effectively protected](#) – land designations like National Parks offer no specific protections for nature, whilst many sites which should be protected are currently in poor condition.
- The UK is the [most nature depleted country in the G7](#) and amongst the bottom 10% globally.

How can the UK government get nature back on track at home?

- With [around 70%](#) of UK land farmed, transitioning towards nature-friendly farming practises will be vital to halting the decline in biodiversity. Farmers must be supported to make these changes, which not only help nature but can also boost farm incomes and make farms more resilient to flooding and heatwaves. This requires a strong settlement for farming at the upcoming spending review, to drive an ambitious Environmental Land Management scheme that can deliver for farmers and nature. Analysis [commissioned by](#) the RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust suggests the farming budget should be £3.1bn per year for England to meet this challenge.
- Oceans in the UK are likely to miss their target of being in 'good ecological condition' by 2027 due to pressures like overfishing and pollution, and were identified as a key concern by

the Office for Environmental protection [this year](#). To reverse this trend the government must urgently stop damaging practises like bottom trawling and dredging in [Marine Protected Areas](#), huge protected sites designed to protect marine wildlife.

- Increasing house building and reforming the planning system are priorities for the government. In tackling these issues, government must also consider its commitments to the environment, and promote development that works with nature, not against it. To do this, government must make small-scale actions like bat, bird, and bee bricks a requirement, whilst avoiding development on protected nature sites and boosting ecologist capacity in Local Planning Authorities. Work from [the RSPB with Barratt Developments](#) and [London Wildlife Trust with Berkeley Homes](#) has demonstrated the potential to build homes at scale whilst protecting nature.

How can the UK show international leadership on biodiversity and conservation?

- The UK has the opportunity to lead global action on biodiversity loss and conservation. Having played a key role in agreeing the Global Biodiversity Framework and in autumn's COP16 negotiations, the UK must ensure its targets are met at home, setting a credible example for other nations to follow.
- To remove deforestation from supermarket shelves, the Environment Act 2021 commits the government to introducing a due diligence regime for large companies on forest-risk commodities like beef, cocoa, palm and soy. These products are known to drive 90% of global deforestation. The government must urgently pass the secondary legislation needed to put this law into practise to protect forests, like the Amazon, which are [home to](#) 80% of terrestrial biodiversity.

What do voters think?

- Two-thirds of the public believe nature is fundamental to economic growth, [according to](#) polling released last month by The Wildlife Trusts.
- Four in five people in Britain support rewilding projects, which can help the UK meet its conservation goals, [found](#) June 2024 research from Rewilding Britain.
- Protecting nature and the environment is a unifying and stable priority across all segments of the public, [according to](#) work from Climate Outreach.

Suggested interventions

- Will the government ensure the farming budget can give farmers the financial support they need to transition to nature-friendly practices through the Environmental Land Management schemes?
- When will the government introduce the secondary legislation required to implement to due diligence scheme for forest risk commodities, as required under the Environment Act 2021?
- Does the government plan to end bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas to protect the wildlife and habitats in British seas?