

Countdown to the COPs - why the nature and climate talks go hand in hand

Later this year, the UK will host 195 world leaders at an international climate summit in Glasgow. Also known as COP26, the talks will be a crucial opportunity for the global community to find solutions to the climate crisis.

But fewer people are aware of another key summit this year: the international talks taking place to address the equally urgent nature crisis. The COP15 biodiversity summit will take place in Kunming, China. To date it may not have attracted the same level of attention as its climate counterpart, but there's a lot riding on success at the talks.

What is the Convention on Biological Diversity?

At the landmark 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders agreed to three Conventions as mechanisms to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Each is governed by the Conference of the Parties (COP), where world leaders meet to review progress and take decisions that advance the delivery of the convention's objectives.

COPs take place every two years under the CBD, with this year's COP being the fifteenth meeting. The CBD's purposes is to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of biological diversity at every level.

At the 2010 talks in Nagoya, Japan, 194 countries (or parties) signed up to a series of [20 targets](#) to be met by 2020. Dubbed the Aichi targets, they were created to address a wide variety of issues in support of global biodiversity. Following the conference, signatories were also required to devise national biodiversity plans to meet the targets. In the UK, biodiversity is a devolved policy issue, and so the devolved governments are responsible for creating and delivering their own action, while the UK Government's plans pertain to England.

Fast forward a decade to 2020, and the [5th Global Biodiversity Outlook](#) report revealed that these targets were spectacularly missed across the world. Despite world leaders promising a decade of concerted efforts to tackle the inexorable decline of nature, the world collectively failed to meet a single one of the 20 targets. The UK, and each of the four nations, also failed in their contribution towards this global goal. This lack of progress and the deepening ecological emergency make it clear that while the last UN decade on biodiversity failed, this coming decade on ecosystem restoration cannot.

What's the plan for COP15?

As if a triple bill of all three Convention meetings in the Autumn wasn't enough, this year's biodiversity summit is also an especially important one. As parties prepare to meet in Kunming, initial plans for the new post-2020 biodiversity framework have already been drawn up. The final version will be decided at the conference but is expected to include an agreement to put global

biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030, and a target to protect 30% of the Earth's land and seas by 2030.

We cannot afford to make the same mistakes and miss these targets again. The evidence is clear that continuing nature's destruction will lead to thousands more extinctions, pose a serious risk to global food insecurity, and increase the likelihood of further pandemics like Covid-19. And as the climate crisis worsens, degraded ecosystems also limit our resilience and ability to adapt to extreme weather events.

What role can the four countries of the UK play in influencing the outcome of COP15?

A new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition to bend the curve of biodiversity loss and deliver commitments made under the CBD. The UK has a strong opportunity to lead, taking advantage of the cross-over with the UNFCCC presidency for COP26 and the G7 presidency. In each country, the political attractiveness of adopting a global leadership role offers the opportunity to leverage greater ambition in national agendas, linking the credibility of negotiating positions to the strength of domestic actions.

In September 2020, the UK Prime Minister announced a commitment to protect 30% of the UK's land by 2030. In December 2020, the Scottish Government committed to protect 30% of Scotland's land for nature by 2030, in the '[Statement of Intent on Biodiversity](#)'. The four Links also welcomed the recent [Edinburgh Declaration on post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#), which has called for a collective commitment from subnational Governments, cities, and local authorities to raise ambition for nature's recovery. This is especially important given that most of the land and sea area that is legally protected for nature in the UK is within the jurisdiction of the devolved governments.

However, whilst these announcements are welcomed, all four countries of the UK need to show that they are serious about tackling the biodiversity crisis by translating these promises into genuine action on the ground. We want to see:

1. **Targets:** Setting a global goal for the restoration of species and habitats on land, at sea, and in freshwater habitats would be a good place to start. Going into the talks with this already put in place across the four countries of the UK would send a clear signal to other leaders to follow suit. There are opportunities to do this through [a State of Nature Amendment to the Environment Bill in England](#), and similarly through an Environment Bill and the next Biodiversity Strategy in Northern Ireland. To meet the ambitious commitments set out in the Scottish Government's statement of intent, Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy must contain ambitious and meaningful targets, and be supported with the resources needed to deliver nature's recovery. In Wales, we are calling for new legislation on environmental governance, to introduce new legally binding nature recovery targets.
2. **Measures to tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss:** Targets must be accompanied by a clear plan for how to reach them. The 30x30 initiative could play an important part in any plans, provided protected areas are effectively managed and monitored. At the

moment, however, sites protected for nature are often in poor condition and sites designated for landscapes like National Parks do not have clear legal requirements for nature's recovery. Drivers of nature loss outside the 30% must also be addressed.

3. **Adequate financing and a framework to track progress:** A robust monitoring, enforcement, reporting, and verification system will also be crucial for assessing progress towards targets, and efforts to reach them must be supported by appropriate funding.
4. **Coordination across the four nations:** It's important to remember that nature knows no borders and as global temperatures rise, species will shift their ranges to stay within suitable conditions. To successfully meet any targets, it will be essential for the four UK Governments to work collaboratively. Although each nation will be responsible for its own biodiversity strategy to suit its specific ecology, no single country can do this alone. The only way we can achieve the scale of change we need is through global leadership and commitment to legally binding targets for nature in every country.

Over the next few months, the four Links will be working together to develop our recommendations on how the four Governments of the UK can work together and contribute to the success of the post-2020 biodiversity framework. Their starting point must be legally-binding targets, credible policy plans, investment and four-country coordination.

It will be impossible to solve the climate crisis without tackling the nature crisis and vice versa, and so securing good outcomes at both summits should be of utmost priority for the four governments. COVID-19 may have derailed 2020 as being a 'super year' for the environment, but through global leadership at COP15 and COP26 the four countries of the UK could be instrumental in helping 2021 claim the title.

