

Biodiversity

The biodiversity contained within Northern Ireland's 14,130 km² is vital to the functioning and health of our society, our economy and our environment. The abundance and variety of life underpins the ecosystem services that we all rely on. Northern Ireland is home to approximately 20,000 species, with the biological diversity reflecting the outstanding geological diversity found here. Species such as the Irish Hare, Irish Damselfly, Irish Whitebeam, Cryptic Wood White and Pollan are found nowhere else in the UK.

Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the UK, supports around 100,000 wintering waterbirds, including internationally important numbers of breeding Black-headed Gulls and the largest concentration of Great Crested Grebe on the island of Ireland.

The Northern Ireland marine area spans over 6,000 km², and includes a coastline of over 650 km. More than half of Northern Ireland's biodiversity is in our seas, including whales, dolphins and porpoises, grey seals, puffins and gannets, horse mussels and cold-water corals. Strangford Lough alone is home to over 2,000 marine species and attracts up to 80% of the world's population of light-bellied Brent geese throughout October and November, which come to feed on the eelgrass on the mudflats.

However, Northern Ireland ranks as the 12th-worst performing country for biodiversity loss out of 240 countries. We have lost more wildlife than anywhere in the UK, with 97% wildflower meadows gone, 11% species at risk from extinction from the island of Ireland, and in 2021, no rivers or lakes achieved good overall status.

Our biodiversity is in crisis, and strategies and actions taken to date have not been enough to achieve nature's recovery. If we want a resilient and prosperous future, we need to take bold steps now. Now is the time for the Northern Ireland Executive to commit to saving nature. What we need:

- The introduction of ambitious targets in law to halt and reverse the systemic loss of biodiversity and put nature on the path to recovery by 2030
- The effective protection and management of at least 30% of land and sea for nature and people by 2030 (30x30)

The implementation of both an ambitious Environment Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy containing nature restoration targets set in law will be key components in achieving nature's recovery.

Related documents:

- [30x30: What does it mean for Northern Ireland?](#)
- [30x30: Land for Nature's Recovery in Northern Ireland](#)
- [Nature Targets for NI's Seas](#)

The post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

Biodiversity in Northern Ireland sits within a broader international context, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity, (CBD), which came into force in 1993. The Aichi Biodiversity Targets agreed by 196 countries under the CBD in 2010, aimed to halt the loss of biodiversity globally by 2020. However, globally, at UK level and in Northern Ireland, we failed to take the actions to achieve this.

The Environment Links UK report, '*Achieving Harmony with Nature*', outlines how to ensure a strong post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is agreed and delivered, to help restore nature across the four countries of the UK.

Our recommendations cover 5 key areas on which the four governments of the UK must take action. These are:

1. Set ambitious targets in law to halt and begin to reverse the decline of nature by 2030;
2. Implement measures to ensure success of the post-2020 framework, including effectively protecting 30% of the UK's land and seas by 2030;
3. Develop and implement a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework to allow measurement of progress towards targets and goals both in the UK and at a global level;
4. Align nature policy with climate policy to maximise synergistic approaches to tackling the twin crises, and;
5. Co-ordinate action on nature and climate across the four countries of the UK

Related documents:

- [Achieving Harmony with Nature - Summary Report](#)
- [Achieving Harmony with Nature - Full Report](#)