



Introduction

Nature is in crisis. Human activity is driving dramatic declines in wildlife and habitats at rates never seen before. The scale and urgency mean we need to see bold ambition from Scotland's decision makers in the current decade, the [UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration](#). Critically, we need to see Scotland adopt legally underpinned nature targets to reduce and reverse nature loss. **This briefing sets out five key things you need to know about the state of nature in Scotland and why nature targets are essential for Scotland's future prosperity and wellbeing.**

1) Nature is in crisis

Scotland's nature is iconic. Scotland is home to 60% of the UK's coastline and marine habitat, all of the UK's arctic habitats, all the machair and Caledonian pinewood and most of the temperate rainforest. But all is not well. The [State of the Nature 2019 report](#) highlights depressing long-term loss for Scotland's wildlife. The report finds that since recording began in 1970:

- 49% of Scottish species have decreased;
- 28% of Scottish species have increased;
- 62% of species show strong changes, leaving little doubt that nature is changing rapidly, and;
- One in nine species in Scotland are at risk of extinction from Scotland.

At the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 2010 talks in Nagoya, Japan, 194 countries (or Parties) signed up to a series of [20 targets](#), called the Aichi targets, to be met by 2020. Fast forward a decade to 2020, and the [5th Global Biodiversity Outlook](#) report revealed that these targets were spectacularly missed across the world. The UK failed in their contribution towards this global goal, with Scotland failing to meet 11 targets. 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.

2) Legally binding Nature Recovery Targets are needed to save our nature

To meet the ambitious commitments set out in the Scottish Government's [statement of intent](#) on biodiversity, Scotland's new Biodiversity Strategy must contain ambitious targets and an effective way to reach them. We are unlikely to succeed in saving Scotland's nature without a greater sense of urgency and investment. Governments across the world are using climate targets to achieve key policy objectives within an agreed timeframe and in a manner that can be measured, resulting in a strong focus for cross-sector action and targeting of resources. We need a [binding headline target](#) to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2030 and secure nature recovery by 2045, in line with the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) Scotland Act. This would support the ambitions of Scotland's Biodiversity Plan and ensure Scotland plays its part in fulfilling global biodiversity targets and the commitments of the CBD.

3) Adoption of a Scottish Nature Network builds resilience to change

The way in which we use and manage our land and our seas fragments natural habitats and is the top driver of nature loss. An ecologically and cost-effective way to tackle some of the key changes they cause is to adopt a Scottish Nature Network. A Scottish Nature Network would join up sites for nature and wildlife and link ecological processes across landscapes and in the sea, working with, and around,



productive land and sea use. This requires spatial planning and a long-term strategic investment plan to coordinate action towards shared objectives across the planning and land use sectors. It also requires effective partnerships to build success at local, regional and national levels. Joining up sites for nature allows habitats to evolve and species to move across the country in response to our changing environment. Tackling nature loss in Scotland also plays a huge role in tackling climate change: [nature-based solutions](#) such as native woodland and peatland restoration are fundamental to Scotland reaching its ambitious net-zero goals. A Nature Network across Scotland represents an investment in a wide-reaching natural solution to the nature and climate emergency, that will also ensure people can access nature and the mental and physical health benefits it brings.

Scotland's protected areas are our most important sites for wildlife and must be well managed to help nature recovery and strengthen ecological processes. Protected areas should form the backbone of [Scotland's Nature Network](#), to be expanded and connected by restoring and enhancing existing habitats and creating new areas of habitat surrounded by land that is also managed in a way that supports nature and removes barriers to movement. The Scottish Government's commitment to protect 30% of Scotland's land for nature by 2030 is welcome. However, protected areas must be effectively managed to maintain and restore the species and habitats that they are designated to protect.

4) Our bills and acts need to be nature positive

All aspects of society and our lives depend on nature. At the very basic level, the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink depends on a flourishing and healthy natural environment. As such, all aspects of policy and law passed through the parliament should be nature positive, meaning that by 2030, we must have more nature than we do now. 2021 is a crucial year for nature, as the world comes together to agree global targets at COP15 in Kunming to put biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030. Scotland is playing a key leadership role by driving the Edinburgh Declaration. The Declaration has been agreed between subnational, regional and local governments across the world, and calls on the Parties to the CBD to take bold action to halt biodiversity loss by working in partnership.

However, a new international deal for nature must be matched by domestic ambition to halt biodiversity loss and deliver capacity and investment to meet commitments made under the CBD. The Scottish Government can demonstrate leadership through transformative and coherent policies that put the natural environment at the centre of decision making.

5) Resources are required to reverse nature loss

We need to act fast if we are to save Scotland's nature. This requires the right resources in the right place and at the right time. Scottish environmental organisations, in both the public and charitable sectors, play a crucial role in enhancing our environment and contribute massively towards the delivery of public policy objectives, including the Scottish Government's biodiversity strategy and land and sea use policies. Resources do not just come from the Scottish Government: the charity sector invests directly and accesses matched investment in activities that help the Government fulfil its policy objectives and achieve its goals. To face the scale of the challenge of reversing nature loss and to support a resilient environmental sector, this crucial work needs to be adequately funded. Successful action for biodiversity does not happen in a vacuum but needs a supportive and integrated policy framework, delivered in partnership and through investment from multiple sources. Explore some examples here: <https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Still-Delivering-the-Goods.pdf>



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Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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