

The Wildlife Trusts Biodiversity Benchmark

Requirements



1 COMMIT

1.1 Policy

Your organisation has a *biodiversity* policy in relation to its *landholdings* which is:

- a. a statement of your organisation's commitment to:
 - i. compliance with legal requirements relevant to biodiversity;
 - ii. biodiversity protection and *enhancement*;
 - iii. elimination of unjustified *pesticide* use;
- b. documented, implemented, maintained and communicated;
- c. signed by the person with appropriate authority within your organisation, and
- d. publicly available.

1.2 Partnerships

In relation to its *landholdings*, your organisation identifies, engages with and seeks to involve *partners* active in biodiversity in order to help define and fulfil *objectives* and *targets*.

1.3 Performance

In relation to its *landholdings*, your organisation is able to show continual biodiversity protection and *enhancement*.

2 PLAN

2.1 Surveys

Baseline ecological surveys are conducted to establish the potential for, and the presence of, habitats and species within the *scope* of the *biodiversity management system*.

Where a potential for protected and/or *noteworthy* habitats and species has been identified within a *baseline ecological survey*, *additional ecological surveys* are planned.

All surveys and *surveillance* will be documented, and completed by *independent* and competent people.

2.2 Legislation and other Requirements

Your organisation:

- a. is aware and understands the implications of all legal and *other requirements* relating to your landholdings and *biodiversity impacts*;
- b. documents legal and *other requirements* showing the relationship to *biodiversity impacts* and keeps the information up to date, and
- c. periodically tests compliance with applicable legal and *other requirements*, and documents the findings.

2.3 Assessment of Significance

Your organisation assesses the significance of habitats and species within your landholdings, together with threats and opportunities. The assessment is documented and kept up to date.

This assessment will *take account of*:

- a. survey/s;
- b. *site designations*;
- c. relevant biodiversity legislation, and *other requirements*;
- d. *noteworthy* habitats and species;
- e. threats to the species and habitats on site,
- f. the *extent of pesticide* use;
- g. opportunities for management to enhance and encourage habitats and species' populations;

- h. *landholdings* within the context of the surrounding landscape, including potential support for wider *Living Landscapes* and *Nature Recovery Networks*.

The assessment will also *consider* the potential for the site to support the wellbeing of users including employees, visitors and local communities.

2.4 Objectives and Targets

Your organisation sets *biodiversity objectives* and *targets* to deliver your policy commitments.

Objectives and *targets* are:

- a. based on the significant species and habitats as determined by the assessment of significance;
- b. based on biodiversity policy commitments;
- c. periodically reviewed and revised as appropriate, and
- d. documented.

Objectives and targets will include the measurement of *pesticide* use and elimination of *unjustified* use.

Your organisation creates *biodiversity performance indicators* based upon the assessment of significance, and the *biodiversity objectives* and/or *targets*.

2.5 Action Plans

Your organisation establishes, implements and maintains *action plans* to achieve your *objectives* and *targets*.

2.6 Assessment of Impact

Before any activity, including maintenance, is conducted on your *landholdings*, an assessment of the potential *biodiversity impact* of those works will be undertaken. The relevant outcomes from the assessment, including the identification of appropriate controls, will be documented.

3 DO

3.1 Responsibilities and Resources

Responsibilities within your *biodiversity management system* are appropriately assigned and communicated. Your organisation provides adequate resources to deliver policy commitments and *objectives* and *targets*.

A specific management representative(s) is appointed by someone with appropriate authority within your organisation. The representative has defined responsibilities and authority for:

- a. ensuring that a *biodiversity management system* is established, implemented and maintained in accordance with the requirements of this Biodiversity Benchmark, and
- b. reporting to management review on the outcomes specified in management review.

3.2 Competence

Your organisation is able to show that any people working for or on your behalf that may cause a significant impact on biodiversity are competent to deliver your commitments to biodiversity and the requirements of this Biodiversity Benchmark. The performance of people working on your behalf and their impact upon biodiversity is periodically assessed and the results recorded.

3.3 Communication

Your organisation establishes, implements and maintains internal and external communication processes to ensure that:

- a. all relevant people are aware of and understand biodiversity issues;

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- b. reports on your *biodiversity performance* are made available to an external audience including your *partners*;
- c. the contents of any reporting are appropriate to your organisation's assessment of significance;
- d. the importance of biodiversity as applied to your *landholdings* is promoted to a wider audience, and
- e. the wellbeing benefits of your *landholdings* are promoted to a wider audience.

3.4 Documentation

Your organisation's *biodiversity management system* documentation:

- a. defines the *scope*;
- b. describes the main elements of the management system and their interaction;
- c. provides appropriate reference to related documents;
- d. defines the frequency associated with the term "periodically" contained within this Biodiversity Benchmark, and
- e. is available and controlled.

4 CHECK

4.1 Surveillance

At appropriate frequencies and timing, your organisation periodically measures and records the current status of its habitats and species including its *biodiversity performance indicators*.

4.2 Monitoring

Your organisation periodically checks and records progress of *action plan(s)*.

Your organisation compares the biodiversity *objectives* and *targets* with the results of *surveillance* including previous surveys, and records the findings.

4.3 Identifying and Dealing with Problems

Your organisation establishes, implements and maintains a means to find and deal with problems, whether actual or potential, which may either adversely affect the commitments to biodiversity, or undermine the requirements of the Biodiversity Benchmark.

Where appropriate, your organisation investigates the problem(s), takes *preventive*, *remedial*, and *corrective action(s)* as appropriate, and records the outcome(s).

As necessary, lessons learned will be disseminated within the *scope* of your *biodiversity management system*.

4.4 Internal Audit

Your organisation periodically audits the *biodiversity management system* to determine whether or not the requirements of the Biodiversity Benchmark are:

- a. being met, and
- b. properly implemented and maintained.

Audit findings are documented and considered as part of management review.

The selection of your auditors will ensure the conduct of audits is objective and impartial.

5 ACT

5.1 Analysis, Evaluation and Response

The outcomes from *monitoring* are periodically analysed to determine whether or not the management of biodiversity is delivering your policy commitments. The results of *analysis* will be *evaluated* and a response

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undertaken where appropriate; as part of this process the outcomes from identifying and dealing with problems, and internal audit will be considered

Partners are given the opportunity to contribute to *analysis, evaluation* and *response*.

Following *analysis* and *evaluation*, the *biodiversity management system* will be reviewed and revised where necessary.

The results of *analysis, evaluation* and *response* will be documented including recommendations for improvement.

5.2 Management Review

The people with appropriate authority within your organisation periodically review the outcomes from:

- a. *surveillance*;
- b. *monitoring*;
- c. identifying and dealing with problems;
- d. internal audit, and
- e. *analysis, evaluation* and *response*.

Any recommendations for improvement will be considered. Where necessary, actions are determined. The review is documented, and distributed to *partners* where appropriate.

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6 Terms & Definitions including some biodiversity management system Guidance shown in courier new

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

6.1 Action Plans: comprise a set of tasks; allocated responsibilities for completion of those tasks; timeframes by which tasks are to be completed, and the detailing of locations where appropriate.

6.2 Additional ecological surveys: are identified as a result of/following the *Baseline Ecological Survey*. Examples include a National Vegetation Classification habitat survey or species-specific surveys (protected species) or species group surveys (breeding birds, bryophytes, invertebrates etc.). An **additional ecological survey** may be identified following **analysis, evaluation and response**.

6.3 Analysis, evaluation and response: **analysis** is a consideration/review of the outcome/s from monitoring that is carried out in order to understand and explain the causes/reasons for any significant changes (negative and positive). **Evaluation** is the application of judgement to determine whether or not something is important. The **response** will identify what, if anything, can either be done, or done differently. **Analysis, evaluation and response** is likely to result in either changes to existing **objectives/targets/actions**, or new **objectives/targets/actions** being generated, and may also involve other changes in the organisation's biodiversity management system.

6.4 Baseline ecological survey: is the determination of the habitats present and the presence, likely absence or potential for particular species. The baseline ecological survey will usually include the following two elements:

1. A **desk study** to determine the presence of any nature conservation sites, or protected or other noteworthy species, which have been recorded either on or within at least a 1 km radius of the landholding. This typically involves contacting the local Biological Records Centre. Existing information held by the organisation should also be gathered.
2. A **field survey**
 - 2.1 The aim is to provide a record of habitats that are present on the landholding. It consists of the mapping of habitat using a recognised habitat classification (e.g. Phase 1ⁱ or UK Habitat Classification (UKHabⁱⁱ)) with target notes on habitat and species features either of interest or too small to map.
 - 2.2 To undertake a search and site-based assessment for protected and other noteworthy species and assess the importance of the habitat features recorded, this should include reference to the results of the **desk study**.

All **baseline** and **additional ecological surveys** need to be carried out at an appropriate time of year; for example, the habitat survey season is usually late March to mid-October; woodland is best surveyed at the start of the survey season (April and May), grassland in the middle (June & July), and heathland, bog and fen towards the end (September and October).

All survey report(s) should give the full results and identify significant findings and any further necessary surveys (in the immediate or long-term).

Constraints in the surveys should also be pointed out (such as survey outside the optimal time) and highlighting the species groups that were either not covered or were not surveyed in detail.

6.5 Biodiversity: the "totality of genes, species, and ecosystems of a region"ⁱⁱⁱ.

6.6 Biodiversity impact: any change to biodiversity on its **landholdings**, whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an organisation's activities.

6.7 Biodiversity management system: a combination of interrelated elements designed to fulfil the organisation's biodiversity policy. The biodiversity management system may be a part, an extension, of an existing environmental management system. It may also stand-alone and be entirely separate from any of the organisation's other systems.

6.8 Biodiversity objective: a clear statement that defines what the organisation intends to achieve and is consistent with the organisation's biodiversity policy, and the outcomes from the assessment of significance at the site.

6.9 Biodiversity performance: measures of the net gains or losses of habitats and/or species within the organisation's landholdings. This can also include measures related to site status, and quality/condition of the habitats. **Surveillance** and the associated **biodiversity performance indicators** are the means by which **biodiversity performance** is measured.

6.10 Biodiversity performance indicator: is something chosen by the organisation to enable it to track progress towards objectives and targets. It reveals the current status of a habitat, species, or relevant environmental parameter (for example, the condition of a habitat, the numbers of an individual species recorded, or water levels within a lake). On the other hand, a target is where the organisation seeks to be at some future point in time. **A biodiversity performance indicator and a target** will often be set for the same habitat/species/relevant environmental parameter of a site.

6.11 Biodiversity target: a SMART (i.e. specific; measureable; attainable; relevant, and time-bound) aspiration based upon the organisation's **biodiversity objectives** and that needs to be set and met by the organisation in order to achieve those **biodiversity objectives**.

6.12 Consider: to think through something. The organisation may decide (a) to do something, (b) to not act upon it or (c) to keep it under review and/or to gather more information and to consider it again after a period of time.

6.13 Corrective action: action/s to stop the same or a similar problem from happening again.

6.14 Enhancement: an incremental improvement in **biodiversity**, for example, an increase in either the number of species, or the number of individuals within a species; improvement in the condition of habitats; increase/extension in area of noteworthy habitats; creation of new habitats, and improved conditions for interaction/connectivity (such as hedgerows providing corridors between two habitats). **Analysis, evaluation and response** is a means by which biodiversity **enhancement** can be identified and delivered.

6.15 Extent: in the context of pesticide use, extent includes volume, type and toxicity. This could, for example, include the types of pesticide used, what they are used for, who uses them and how often.

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6.16 Independent: is not necessarily external to the organisation, but must not be related through line-management to the management of the site.

6.17 Justified: In the context of pesticide use, examples would include control of non-native plants and animals detailed within Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and in support of complying with any other relevant legislation including food hygiene.

In addition to this, organisations may be able justify use where there is a business, conservation and/or Health & Safety case accepted by the Assessor. Where any use is not justified a review of scope may be appropriate.

6.18 Landholdings: the area owned and/or managed by the organisation and determined by the organisation to be the extent of the **scope** for Biodiversity Benchmark. Landholdings includes terrestrial and non-terrestrial areas or habitat.

6.19 Living Landscape: is a recovery plan for nature championed by The Wildlife Trusts since 2006. The aim of Living Landscapes is to produce a network of ecologically coherent habitats restored, recreated and reconnected through the combined and coordinated efforts of landowners, farmers, conservation organisations, local authorities and communities. The Wildlife Trusts' website lists the Living Landscape schemes around the country. <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/living-landscape>

6.20 Monitoring: a desk-top exercise to determine whether or not the organisation's actions and management system are working.

6.21 Nature Recovery Networks: a joined-up system of places important for wild plants and animals, on land and at sea. It allows plants, animals, seeds, nutrients and water to move from place to place and enables the natural world to adapt to change. It provides plants and animals with places to live, feed and breed.^{iv}

6.22 Noteworthy: species and/or habitats not necessarily defined by legislation but considered to be important on any of a national, regional, or local basis. Some examples include: "birds of conservation concern", and "rare", "scarce", and uncommon flora; fauna, and fungi.

The local Biological Records Centre will be able to provide the status of any species or habitat for an area.

6.23 Other requirements: includes relevant (for biodiversity) best practice standards; on-going local biodiversity action plans; planning conditions; legal consents; industry protocols; conditions associated with site designations; environmental stewardship schemes; woodland grant schemes; registered seed stands for local tree provenance; environmental permits; protected species licensing; invasive/pest species control; use of pesticides; discharge consents; abstraction licences; flood control measures; operational constraints, and The Wildlife Trusts' Policies.

6.24 Partners: are external to the organisation. Partner organisations/groups may include either biodiversity or landscape partnerships; The Conservation Volunteers (formerly BTCV); Local Authority ecologists; educational establishments; relevant statutory agencies; Wildlife Trusts; RSPB; amphibian & reptile groups, bat groups; local botanical societies; mammal groups; Butterfly Conservation, 'Friends of' and other voluntary groups/individuals, ornithological societies. Partner organisations do not comprise statutory agencies that **ONLY** visit the site(s) to undertake audits/inspections of legal compliance. Contractors who **ONLY** carry out paid work for the client are not partners.

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6.25 Pesticides: a 'pesticide' is something that prevents, destroys, or controls an organism ('pest') or disease, or protects plants or plant products during production, storage and transport. Pesticides include, amongst others: herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, acaricides, nematocides, molluscicides, rodenticides, growth regulators, repellents, and biocides.

6.26 Preventive action: action/s to stop a potential problem/s from ever happening in the first place. Where an organisation has more than one site, then a **corrective action** at one site may become a **preventive action** at other sites. The controls identified as a result of *Assessment of Impact* may be **preventive actions**.

6.27 Remedial action: action/s to address the immediate consequences of an identified problem.

6.28 Scope: the boundaries of the **landholdings** set by the organisation for the purposes of Biodiversity Benchmark and to which the **biodiversity management system** applies.

6.29 Site designations: sites which have been assigned to be important for biodiversity by statutory and/or recognised non-statutory bodies.

Internationally important sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar sites.

Nationally important sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England, Scotland and Wales; Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) in Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, and Natural Heritage Areas in the Republic of Ireland.

Local Authorities and The Wildlife Trusts have identified sites that are considered to be of importance at regional/county, district/borough levels. These are contained in Local Plans, Local Development Frameworks etc. under a variety of names, which are now generally referred to collectively as "Local Sites".

6.30 Surveillance: a repeat of a standardised survey, for example, a breeding bird survey, or habitat condition assessment, in a manner that can be analysed.

6.31 Take account of: to think about something and to take appropriate action.

ⁱ JNCC (2010) Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough

ⁱⁱ <https://ukhab.org>

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Global Biodiversity Strategy – Guidelines for Action to Save, Study, and Use Earth's Biotic Wealth Sustainably and Equitably, 1992

^{iv} <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-recovery-network>