



Natural England Position Statement: Impacts of Climate Change on Biodiversity

1.0 Key Issues

- The UK temperature may rise by between 2°C and 3.5°C this century with the highest increase and most frequent drought in South East England.
- Wetter, milder winters are projected; on the coast of South East England sea levels could rise by between 26 and 86 cm this century. Both factors are likely to increase flood risk. In England, habitat loss has already occurred in coastal areas due to sea level rise.
- Globally, climate change could commit 15 to 37% of species to eventual extinction by 2050.
- Wildlife is already responding to climate change by changes to the timing of seasonal events such as flowering, species distributions, species abundance, and rates of growth. These changes are likely to have adverse impacts on some species and habitats, but gains for others.
- England's biodiversity is made more vulnerable to climate change impacts due to a range of current pressures including water abstraction, eutrophication, intensive land use, built development, invasive non-native species, neglect of management and various types of pollution.
- Habitat loss and intensification of land use in the 20th century has created a fragmented and ecologically simplified countryside, in which some species may no longer be able to respond to climate change by movement.
- A healthy, biodiverse natural environment provides society and the economy with a wide range of ecosystem services and it is important that these are maintained in the face of climate change.

2.0 We believe

- Conservation of protected areas and other high quality habitats is important now and in the future. We will continue to conserve these sites and enhance their resilience, although we will accommodate change where this is a natural response to climate change and seek to offset any losses through habitat creation.
- Management objectives of protected areas in particular, and conservation actions in general, must take full account of climate change adaptation and mitigation requirements.

- Identification of new protected areas must take account of the likely effects of climate change and support the ability of biodiversity to adapt in the future.
- The range and ecological variability of habitats and species should be maintained as an insurance against uncertainty, until there is clear evidence this is inappropriate due to climate change.
- Climate change is one of many threats to biodiversity and by reducing other sources of harm, including potential adverse impacts of climate adaptation and mitigation by other sectors, we will help natural systems maintain their capacity to adapt to climate change impacts.
- Landscape diversity must be maintained and, where possible, enhanced to conserve biodiversity in the face of climate change.
- We should promote the use of approaches that work with natural processes on rivers and coasts.
- Ecological connectivity should be improved through promoting and enhancing ecological networks.
- Biodiversity delivers important ecosystem services that should be properly valued and taken into account in the policies and decisions of all sectors of society.

3.0 We call for

- All sectors to take action to ensure that implementation of the Climate Change Act increases the resilience of the natural environment to climate change.
- Wildlife legislation which remains effective in the face of climate change.
- Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks and associated policies which support the identification, protection and enhancement of ecological networks.
- Full delivery of the priority habitat targets under the England Biodiversity Strategy, with habitat restoration and expansion carried out in ways which increase resilience to climate change.
- Implementation of actions for priority species under the England Biodiversity Strategy which maintain or create climatically resilient populations and facilitate dispersal through the landscape.
- Action within National Parks, AONBs and elsewhere to pioneer new approaches to landscape scale adaptation of biodiversity.
- Land management schemes to deliver co-ordinated action by land owners and managers; support biodiversity adaptation; and protect ecosystem services at a landscape scale.
- Catchment Flood Management Plans and Shoreline Management Plans which use approaches that work with natural process to secure flood risk management and biodiversity.

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