

## Westminster Hall debate on the World Species Congress 14.05.24

### Briefing from Wildlife & Countryside Link

The World Species Congress, held on 15<sup>th</sup> May by the 'Reverse the Red' coalition<sup>1</sup>, will provide a forum to celebrate global wildlife and to discuss how best to reduce species decline.

Link members, such as Chester Zoo, are spearheading World Species Congress activity in the UK. With initiatives ranging from a science webinar on saving species, a livestreamed lesson for schools and presentations to the World Species Congress programme, the 15<sup>th</sup> May will see extensive, expert discussion of how global species recovery targets can be actually achieved on the ground by individual nations.

Link asks MPs to attend the Westminster Hall debate on the World Species Congress on 14<sup>th</sup> May<sup>2</sup>, and the Westminster Hall debate taking place the next day on biodiversity loss<sup>3</sup>, and to highlight a timely opportunity for the UK to show global leadership on halting species decline. By adopting an ambitious and effective UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) this year, the UK can demonstrate exactly how it will contribute to the achievement of global species recovery targets and set a global precedent for successful delivery.

### The need for an ambitious UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

The 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (known as COP15) agreed an ambitious set of 4 goals and 23 targets to halt and reverse the loss of nature across the world by 2030.<sup>4</sup> It is critical that these commitments, known as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, are followed up by detailed delivery by all parties to it. The last set of comparable targets, the 2011-2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets agreed by COP10, were comprehensively missed due to a failure to follow up agreements with national-level implementation policies.<sup>5</sup>

Parties to COP15 are required to publish National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) ahead of COP16 at the end of 2024, setting out how they will contribute to the achievement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The success or failure of the Framework will be largely determined by the ambition of these documents, the extent to which they effectively incorporate nature into cross-sectoral policies and decision-making, and the appropriate levels of financing to enable delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reversethered.org/world-species-congress-2024>

<sup>2</sup> <https://whatson.parliament.uk/event/cal48224>

<sup>3</sup> <https://whatson.parliament.uk/event/cal48225>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-cbd-press-release-final-19dec2022>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/new-era-for-nature-needed-after-lost-decade.asp>

The UK's NBSAP is expected to comprise four individual country strategies for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as strategies for the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. It is understood that the UK's NBSAP could be published and adopted very soon, and that the content may be underwhelming, with the country strategy for England simply being a restatement of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). The EIP has been widely criticised, including by the Government's environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection<sup>6</sup>, as being simply list of general environmental aspirations, which fail to embed the action needed to recover nature into Government policy.

The UK Government must prioritise quality of content over speed of publication and take the time to make the UK NBSAP more than a repetition of already inadequate aspirations. Only by adopting an ambitious NBSAP, which sets out exactly how legislative and financial measures will add up to a meaningful contribution to achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, can the UK play its full part in turning global promises into on-the-ground delivery.

### What should an ambitious UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan include?

An ambitious and effective UK NBSAP must:

- **Ensure collaboration between all four UK nations.** Successfully meeting the GBF targets will require a collaborative approach between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Just as it will be impossible to meet global targets unless there is coordination between all parties, it will be challenging to meet the UK targets collectively as a whole unless each country plays its part. The NBSAP should clearly integrate the four country strategies, so they are components of the wider whole rather than documents that speak past each other. It should also establish a framework for ongoing collaboration between environment departments and nature agencies in each country, to facilitate lesson sharing on what does and doesn't work for successful implementation.
- **Not just restate the current Environmental Improvement Plan as the England country strategy.** The EIP is far from a ready-made plan to slot into the NBSAP. The plan lacks important detail about how the Government will meet interim and long-term Environment Act targets, with little mention of how other Government targets will support action on nature as part of a cross-sector implementation effort. The EIP also fails to set out key governance structures that will ensure progress continues to be made over the coming years, across all Government departments. The Government should act swiftly to revise and reissue the EIP, to address the shortcomings identified by the Office for Environmental Protection and other environmental experts<sup>7</sup>. The country strategy for England in the NBSAP should go far beyond

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theoep.org.uk/report/government-remains-largely-track-meet-its-environmental-ambitions-finds-oep-annual-progress>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/government-off-track-oep.asp>

the current EIP in detail, level of ambition and purchase on decision making across Government.

- **Identify where policy gaps exist across the four UK nations and explain exactly how they will be filled, including through funding decisions.** In December 2023, a year on from the agreement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Link analysed UK progress towards 18 of the 23 Framework targets. The analysis suggested that none of the 18 targets assessed none were on track, with progress in 11 of them either stalled or going backward<sup>8</sup>, whilst species continue to decline in abundance across the UK.<sup>9</sup> Preparation of the UK NBSAP should include a thorough review of these policy gaps, with the final document explaining exactly how they will be filled through legislative or regulatory change, land and sea designations and/or funding decisions. Sufficient resourcing for nature interventions is likely to be particularly critical, given the £56 billion nature recovery funding gap identified by the Green Finance Institute.<sup>10</sup> With the next Comprehensive Spending Review coming up, the Government should commit to funding an uplift for nature through it, including the renewal of important species recovery programmes such as Darwin Plus<sup>11</sup> and the Species Survival Fund.<sup>12</sup> This is the level of detail required for a successful NBSAP, the enumeration of precise policy levers to effect change, rather than vague and generalised aspirations.
- **Develop and implement a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework to measure progress towards targets and goals.** The collective failure to meet the Aichi targets was in part due to a lack of a monitoring framework to periodically assess to what extent parties were on track to meet the 2011-2020 framework targets. This can be avoided by NBSAPs including coordinated set of indicators to enable transparent assessment of implementation progress at regular intervals, allowing for plan adjustments when required. By including a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework, the UK NBSAP can drive wider adoption of monitoring systems across the world, helping pave the way to the achievement of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets.

Global events like the World Species Congress and the various COPs generate lots of warm words and positive headlines for participating nations. What separates nations that do from nations that merely say are granular implementation plans, designed to actually deliver on the commitments made. The UK has the opportunity to show global leadership for species recovery by adopting an ambitious, effective National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan; Link urges the Government to seize this opportunity.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/cop15-one-year-on.asp>

<sup>9</sup> <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.com/news-and-insights/finance-gap-for-uk-nature-report/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://darwinplus.org.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/putting-nature-on-road-to-recovery-with-species-survival-fund>

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 83 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world.

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