

## Written Submission from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland

### **Scotland's progress to meeting 2020 biodiversity targets**

RSPB Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity. Working to conserve biodiversity for Scotland's varied habitats and species is at the heart of what we do. This briefing sets out RSPB Scotland's view on progress towards meeting biodiversity targets and halting biodiversity loss.

#### ***Progress to 2020***

Whilst we welcome Scottish Government's commitment to report progress towards the 2020 Aichi targets, we are concerned over the lack of progress to date. As the recent Scottish Natural Heritage report notes, out of 20 targets Scotland is committed to meeting by 2020, only 7 are likely to be met. The report also highlights a worrying decline of biodiversity funding in those organisations that have a biodiversity remit in the past five years.

The report indicates that it is unlikely that Scotland will fully meet the 2020 Aichi targets - indeed the trend towards reduction in biodiversity action and funding suggests that meeting targets will now fall far beyond the initial 2020 target. There is therefore a need to reassess how public policy and funding in Scotland can meet targets sooner.

Notably, we are unlikely to meet Aichi **Target 5** on habitat loss, **Target 9** on control of invasive species, or **Target 12** on preventing extinction of species, unless we significantly increase our efforts ahead of 2020. There is therefore an urgent need to streamline efforts to tackle biodiversity loss and ensure that policy and funding frameworks incentivise delivery of practical action on-the-ground, which will directly further species and habitat conservation. Current indications point, however, to a strong shift in government and NDPB focus in the opposite direction, away from biodiversity. This is partly due to an assumption that work on Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services has wholly and effectively integrated biodiversity values, or indeed that it is a proxy for, or alternative to, biodiversity conservation. We contend that this assumption is misdirected.

#### ***Biodiversity Reporting Duties- A Key Mechanism***

The requirement on public bodies to further biodiversity conservation continues to be a key tool to help Scotland meet the 2020 Aichi targets, and permits their effectiveness to be scrutinised.

There are a number of areas in which biodiversity reporting duties could be improved, such as around stronger statutory requirements to improve compliance, clearer guidance on actions and evaluation and monitoring to improve outcomes, and provision of additional resources to support delivery of the duties. Addressing these issues would strengthen potential outcomes for habitats and species to ensure

compliance with international obligations and streamlined integration of biodiversity into public-decision making across all sectors.

### ***Biosecurity***

Invasive species are a major global driver of biodiversity loss, and islands are especially vulnerable ecosystems. Putting in place proportionate but effective biosecurity measures for Scottish islands, will not only reduce future harm to the natural environment, but will also safeguard economic and agricultural interests.

Scotland can become a global leader on biosecurity. Together with the success of past projects, and the challenges of currently unfolding issues such as Orkney stoats, Scotland is well placed to develop timely and ground-breaking public policy in this regard.

Ambition and recent successes in dealing with invasive species on islands will be pointless without long-term effective biosecurity arrangements and a programme of island restoration. This is an essential climate change mitigation action for protecting key areas of biodiversity.

We have been encouraged by recent progress of the Islands (Scotland) Bill with biosecurity accepted as a key outcome for any future National Islands Plan, and we therefore look forward to the plan's development and publication. We would welcome the Committee's involvement and oversight over this new important mechanism for conservation.

### ***Target C11 – Protected Areas***

Whilst we are worried about the various 2020 targets not being met, we are also concerned as to how some of the targets have been reported on.

For instance – the protected areas target (Target C11) has been reported as 'exceeded', however since this report was published the 2018 protected area statistics showed that the proportion of features in favourable condition fell below the 80% target to 79.7%. Furthermore, this percentage includes features for which management measures have been put into place that are expected to bring the feature to favourable condition in the future. The proportion of features assessed as being currently in favourable condition is actually 66.2% - this has fallen 1.2% since 2005. Finally, the other 'tests' of Target C11 – that protected areas are effectively and equitably managed, ecological representative and well connected – have not yet been met. We therefore question how this target can be considered to have been exceeded.

Nevertheless, we would hope that the positive report showing a commitment to meeting this target by 2020 indicates that Scottish Government will respect the national and international designations of these protected areas in future policy decisions to ensure that there is no net-loss incurred to the biodiversity of these vital sites. Any decision that does not take account of the value of protected areas for their species and genetic diversity, would likely hinder progress and result in a failure

to meet this Aichi target, while contributing negatively to other targets such as B5 and C12.

***Post-2020 action – National Ecological Network***

The introduction of a National Ecological Network (NEN) for Scotland was included as a commitment in Scotland's *Third National Planning Framework* (2014) as a way to enhance and complete the existing suite of protected sites, improve connectivity and the biodiversity value of land in between these sites. Scientific and academic evidence indicates that the NEN would help Scotland to progress towards biodiversity targets while also having positive socioeconomic impacts. Unfortunately, there has been little progress to date on rolling out Scotland's NEN. This is so far a missed opportunity to better streamline the protection of our natural environment and biodiversity into public policy, to deliver outcomes for the public good.

We would welcome an inquiry from the Committee on biodiversity targets that would include assessing the potential usefulness of the National Ecological Network as a means for delivering biodiversity success in the future. There is a clear need for action and debate around this issue or we risk losing some of the elements that make Scotland's landscape and natural environment so unique and valuable.

12 June 2018  
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