

A site conservation target for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

BirdLife believes that site-based conservation should be a key component of the new post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. However, Target 2 should be modified to give primary emphasis to the desired outcome (effective conservation of sites of particular importance for biodiversity) before specifying the means of achieving this (expansion and effective management of protected and conserved areas). It should also include specific reference to 'key biodiversity areas', given they comprise the most comprehensive network of sites of particular importance for biodiversity and are already used for targeting and tracking expansion and effectiveness of protected and conserved areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TARGET 2 IN THE POST-2020 FRAMEWORK

The latest post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework draft proposes the following language for Target 2:

By 2030, protect and conserve through well connected and effective system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures at least 30 per cent of the planet with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity.

BirdLife proposes strengthening the text as follows, with modifications indicated in bold, and explained and justified below:

*By 2030, **effectively** conserve **key biodiversity areas and other sites of particular importance** for biodiversity through well-connected **and equitable** protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures covering at least 30 per cent of **land and sea**.*

Inverting the sequence of elements to focus on the biodiversity benefits that protected and conserved areas are intended to deliver. The aim of this target is to ensure that the most important sites for biodiversity are effectively conserved. We therefore suggest that the wording starts with the desired outcome (effectively conserving important places for biodiversity) and then explains the means of delivering this (through expanding and effectively managing protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)). The 30% coverage target is then clearly articulated as a means of conserving biodiversity, and not an end in itself. This suggestion matches the sequence of elements in the zero draft of the framework. Placing the focus on the important places at the start of the target minimises the risk that protected area expansion will continue to follow recent trends of favouring areas that are remote and (on land) unsuitable for agriculture (and therefore less likely to be affected by habitat loss), rather than locations of greatest biodiversity importance which are often under great pressure¹.

BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation partnership, with 115 partners. Through our unique local-to-global approach, we deliver high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.

For more information, see www.birdlife.org/post2020 or contact:

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Emphasising the need for sites to be effectively conserved. A key challenge with existing protected areas is that many are ineffective in terms of preventing loss of species and their habitats². Aiming to ‘effectively conserve’ rather than ‘protect and conserve’ sites of biodiversity importance more strongly emphasises that protected and conserved areas need to be managed effectively, not simply designated. ‘Protect’ may also imply formal protection, which is inconsistent with the reference to OECMs.

Specifying key biodiversity areas and other sites of particular importance for biodiversity³. The conservation community have reached a considerable degree of consensus around how to identify sites of biodiversity importance. [Key Biodiversity Areas \(KBAs\)](#) are defined as “sites of significance for the global persistence of biodiversity”, and the [16,000 KBAs identified to date](#) in all countries, and terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems represent the only global network of systematically identified sites of significance for biodiversity, justifying their explicit mention in the target. KBAs are identified nationally, through a highly inclusive, consultative and bottom-up process using [criteria](#) relating to threatened or geographically restricted species or ecosystems, ecological integrity, biological processes, and irreplaceability. KBAs encompass [Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas](#), [Alliance for Zero Extinction sites](#), and KBAs identified through [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund hotspot ecosystem profiles](#). KBAs have not yet been identified for all taxa and ecosystems, and expanding application of the [Global Standard for the Identification of KBAs](#) is a priority (see Figure 1 below). Hence, ‘sites of particular importance for biodiversity’ are not restricted to KBAs, and effective conservation of all sites of documented importance for biodiversity is encouraged. These may include, for example, those Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) that have been identified at the site scale, Natura 2000 sites in the EU, natural and mixed World Heritage Sites listed under the World Heritage Convention, and Wetlands of International Importance identified under the Ramsar Convention. Specifying in the target the need to effectively conserve key biodiversity areas through protected and conserved areas also *de facto* ensures that the resulting site networks are representative, given that the KBA criteria address both species and ecosystems, and can be applied to all macroscopic organisms. To date, 61% of KBAs are completely or partially covered by protected areas, and 42% of the area of each KBA is currently covered on average⁴. Preliminary data from a range of countries suggests that many KBAs outside of protected areas may qualify as OECMs⁵.

Emphasising the importance of equity and the rights and role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs). It is critical that designation and management of protected areas and OECMs take into account issues of equity, and recognises and supports the rights and contributions of IPLCs. To prevent the wording of the target becoming unwieldy, BirdLife proposes that the word ‘equitable’ is included in the target text, and that the issue of IPLC rights is addressed in the associated rationale and guidance for the target, as well as in overarching principles and the enabling conditions for the framework as a whole.

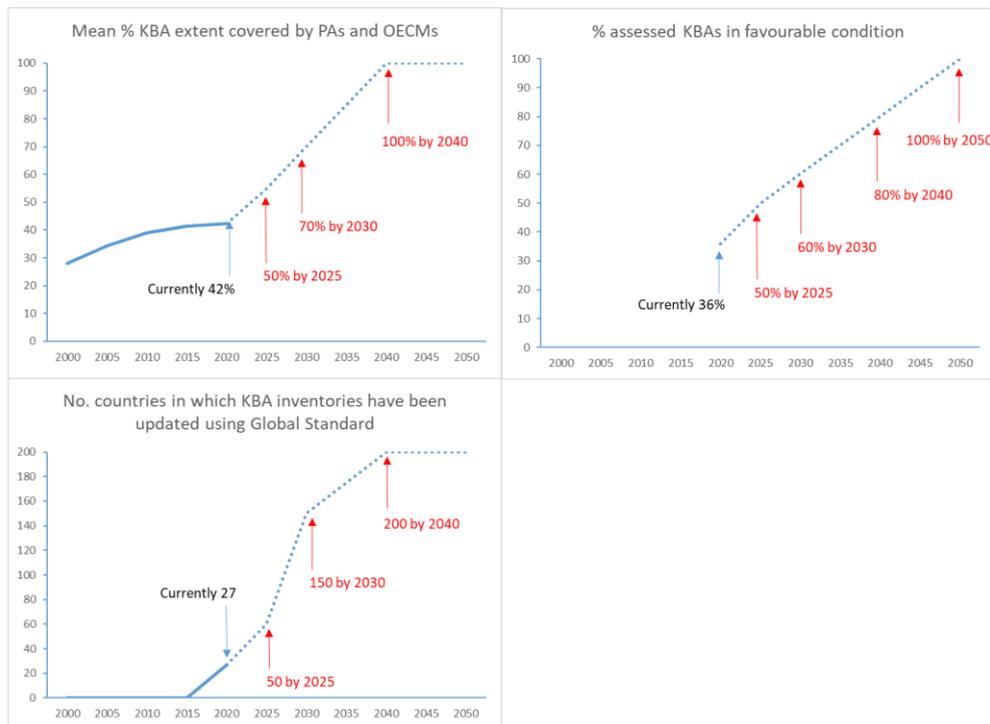
Aiming for at least 30% coverage of each of terrestrial, freshwater, marine and coastal ecosystem. It is important that the specified 30% coverage of protected and conserved areas applies individually to each of the major ecosystem types (terrestrial, freshwater, marine and coastal), to ensure that none are neglected through pursuing designation in locations that are politically expedient rather than biologically significant. To prevent the wording of the target becoming unwieldy, BirdLife proposes that ‘land and sea’ is included in the target text, and that the different ecosystem types are listed in the associated rationale and guidance for the target, and specified in the monitoring framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MONITORING FRAMEWORK

To measure progress towards this target, we propose the following modifications to the draft monitoring framework.

1. BirdLife proposes that the Headline indicator “2.0.1. Protected area coverage of important biodiversity areas” is reworded as “Protected area and OECM coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas” (replacing Complementary indicator “2.1.1.3 Protected area coverage of key biodiversity areas”. This is an [existing CBD and SDG indicator](#) reported by BirdLife International, UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, whereas there is no consensus on what other ‘important biodiversity areas’ might be that allows comparability between countries. Inclusion of OECMs in the indicator is important given these are included in the wording of the target and countries are beginning to submit data on OECMs to the World Database of OECMs⁶. Currently, mean % coverage of KBAs by protected areas and OECMs is 42.3%, having increased from 27.9% in 2000 and 39.0% in 2010. Mean coverage of 55% by 2025, 70% by 2030 and 100% by 2040 would arguably be appropriate milestones towards the Vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050⁷.
2. For the same reasons, BirdLife proposes that Component indicator “2.1.2 Protected area coverage of important biodiversity areas, by type (marine, freshwater, mountain and terrestrial)” be reworded as “Protected area and OECM coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas, by type (terrestrial, freshwater, mountain, marine and coastal)”.
3. The Complementary indicator “2.1.1.2 Status of key biodiversity areas” should be reworded as “Proportion of Key Biodiversity Areas in favourable condition” and treated as a Component indicator. KBAs in favourable condition are those in which the species/ecosystem for which the site is significant is in ‘favourable status’, either measured directly or through proxy metrics. This indicator is produced from data from the [World Database of KBAs](#) but requires scaled-up KBA monitoring using standardised methods based on a combination of remote sensing and systematic in situ monitoring. Currently, c.36% of assessed KBAs are in favourable condition out of 2,589 with relevant data. Potential milestones for consideration in the guidance could be 50% of KBAs in favourable condition by 2025, 60% by 2030 and 80% by 2040, reaching 100% by 2050.
4. A new Complementary indicator should be added: “Number of countries in which KBA inventories have been updated nationally using the [Global KBA Standard](#)”. This is a new indicator to track progress in formally identifying sites of significance for the persistence of biodiversity; it can be produced from data in the [World Database of KBAs](#). Currently, KBA identification using the Global Standard is underway in 27 countries; appropriate milestones could therefore be for this total to exceed 50 countries by 2025, 150 countries by 2030 and all countries by 2040⁸.

Figure 1. Indicators for monitoring Target 2: i) Protected area and OECM coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas; ii) Proportion of Key Biodiversity Areas in favourable condition; iii) Number of countries in which Key Biodiversity Area inventories have been updated nationally using the Global Standard.



¹ Since 2010, the proportion of protected area extent covering KBAs has declined ([Visconti et al. 2019, Science](#)), protected areas have been established primarily in locations that minimize conflict with agriculturally suitable lands instead of protecting areas of biodiversity importance ([Venter et al. 2017, Conservation Biology](#)), ecological representation of the global protected area estate has improved no more than if protected areas were established at random ([Kuempel et al. 2016, Conservation Letters](#)); and recent protected area expansion has failed to target places with high concentrations of threatened vertebrate species ([Venter et al. 2017, Conservation Biology](#)).

² In many countries, <50% of all protected areas are effectively managed (having the same level of modification as non-protected lands) ([Clark et al. 2013, PLoS ONE](#)). Fewer than 25% of protected areas report having adequate resources in terms of staffing and budget ([Coad et al 2019, Frontiers Ecology & Environment](#)).

³ Some Parties and organisations have proposed that sites of importance for ecosystem services should also be specified in this target. BirdLife believes that their conservation is better dealt with in other targets in the framework, such as Target 1 on ecosystem retention and restoration and Target 7 on nature-based solutions, because areas of importance for most ecosystem services are typically located close to areas of high human population density with low biodiversity importance. Where such areas are also important for biodiversity, they would already be covered in Target 2 as it stands (if necessary, this could be acknowledged through reference to “*key biodiversity areas and other sites of particular importance for biodiversity and associated ecosystem services*”). We do however caution that a site-based conservation target could produce unintended outcomes if it allows the focus to be on **either** conservation of biodiversity **or** protection of ecosystem services. Multiple targets will require protected areas as part of the solution to meet them, but Target 2 should focus on their contribution to biodiversity conservation specifically.

⁴ [UN SDG indicators database](#).

⁵ [Donald et al. 2019, Conservation Letters](#).

⁶ Since 2021, SDG indicators 14.5.1, 15.1.2 and 15.4.1 include both protected areas and OECMs in calculating coverage of KBAs, although few countries have submitted data to the World Database of OECMs so far.

⁷ The use of this indicator should not be used to justify downgrading, downsizing and degazettement of existing protected areas that do not cover KBAs, but to stimulate further expansion of protected area networks and recognition of OECMs to focus in particular on KBAs that are currently not covered (or not completely covered) by protected and conserved areas.

⁸ The exercise and outcome from updating national KBA inventories using the Global Standard will vary considerably between countries, depending on national context, availability of data on biodiversity, nature of existing networks of important sites for biodiversity and protected areas, and the degree to which these are comprehensive in their coverage of species and ecosystems of conservation concern.