



South East Biodiversity Strategy

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South East England
Biodiversity Forum



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Biodiversity Strategy

Published by the South East England Biodiversity Forum, February 2009
www.sebiodiversity.org.uk

The South East England Biodiversity Forum is an independent advisory group made up of statutory bodies, local authorities and non-government organisations which identifies, advises and responds to the biodiversity challenges in the South East. It engages key regional stakeholders to ensure that development in the South East is truly sustainable.



The population of skylarks in the South East of England decreased by 25% between 1994 and 2007

Foreword

As current Chair of the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF) it is a privilege to write this foreword to the new South East Biodiversity Strategy. A great deal of hard work has gone into its production over the last two years by a wide range of individuals and organisations working in partnership to ensure the future of the natural heritage of the South East.

So why is this important? A simple example will illustrate: The 20% decrease in farmland birds in the last ten years in the South East has reduced the chance of being thrilled by the sound of skylarks singing in our countryside. Such recent and historic loss of species and reduction in extent and quality of habitats across the South East, linked with the inevitable additional pressure caused by climate change, requires urgent action. We need to act now and into the future to secure and enhance the wide range of biodiversity that the South East is fortunate to be able to support.

The South East Biodiversity Strategy is essentially a web-based resource and provides a working guide for the South East as a basis for effective policies and actions to deliver a secure future for biodiversity. It is also the regional expression of the national England Biodiversity Strategy and replaces the Forum's 'Action for Biodiversity' launched ten years ago. I encourage you to visit: strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk

The South East Biodiversity Strategy identifies what we collectively believe to be the best way forward and provides a flexible framework for all to work with so that biodiversity can thrive. In particular it is important to recognise the benefits to the economy, culture, health and society that following such a strategy will achieve.

The strategy is more than a route map to better biodiversity for a geographical area. It breaks new ground in providing a focus on how all business sectors can contribute and most importantly where priority action should be taken to deliver through specific targets. It should help existing Regional Strategies and assist in the development of new strategies which may be required for the South East. As we gain greater understanding especially with regard to coastal, marine and urban biodiversity needs the strategy will develop so our work will continue through this living document.

We are greatly indebted to those organisations which have provided the funding to enable this production – Natural England, South East England Regional Assembly, Hampshire County Council, Kent County Council, Environment Agency, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts in the South East, Woodland Trust, Government Office South East and the Forestry Commission. However, without the advocacy and help of a wide range of other partners who are members of SEEBF, Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships, and, in particular, the staff of the Local Biological Record Centres in the South East, this would not have happened. Finally I should record my special thanks to the current (Tom Butterworth) and past (Lori Frater) Biodiversity Co-ordinators for the South East and to Kit Oliver (the previous Chair) all of whose total commitment and determination has enabled this production.

We now look forward to effective delivery using this strategy in order to secure rich habitats and species in the South East for present and future generations to enjoy.

Tim Bines, Chairman

Introduction

The South East Biodiversity Strategy (SEBS) provides a coherent vision and framework for action. It seeks to both inspire those individuals, groups and bodies with the power and resources to make a difference to our biodiversity assets, and to provide guidance on where the best opportunities exist for action that will make a significant difference.

The richly biodiverse South East region, made up of the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, East and West Sussex and Surrey, is an area of great significance for its natural beauty.

The varied geology and soils, combined with our climate and land use history, have produced a diverse range of important wildlife habitats and iconic landscapes in South East England. Nationally and internationally important habitats include the ancient woodlands and heaths of the New Forest and the Thames Basin, the rolling chalk downlands of the Chilterns and the North and South Downs. Add to this the expanses of seagrass beds off the south coast, the intertidal flats of the Thames estuary and the Solent, the chalk streams, river valleys, reedbeds and manmade wetlands such as reservoirs and flooded gravel pits. The result is a rich and varied tapestry of countryside and seascapes and these spectacular habitats support some equally fascinating and, in some cases, very rare plants and animals.

The South East has more than:

- 70 internationally important designated wildlife sites
- 682 Sites of Special Scientific Importance (amounting in total to 134,000 hectares)
- a third of England's ancient woodland
- 40% of the UK's lowland heathland
- 30% of the UK's flower rich chalk grassland and
- 1500 km of England's chalk streams

While we can be rightly proud of our current wildlife assets, the wider picture is less heartening and demonstrates why we need action now to safeguard and enhance our biodiversity. For example, the fact that we have 40% of the UK's existing lowland heathland is clearly important. But this has to be set in context: we have lost 80% of our lowland heathland in the last 150 years, and what remains is highly fragmented into often small and sometimes isolated patches. 70% of the lowland heathland in the South East is under an

Biodiversity is the term used to
describe all life on earth –
from micro-organisms to plants and
animals, the places in which they live
and their genetic diversity



agri-environment scheme but still leaves 13% of the national resource that is not covered by such an agreement at present. Natural England and partners are working hard to address this. However, analysis of the national data presented in the Defra report *'The UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Highlights from the 2005 reporting round'** shows that even where there has been an increase in habitat, this is not yet benefiting the associated species. This is particularly important in the South East as populations of over 30% of the UK's species most in need of urgent conservation action are found in the region.

Biodiversity is an integral part of the South East's economy, supporting our livelihoods and our wellbeing. Yet the threats to the region's wildlife are great; they include: inappropriate management, direct and indirect habitat loss, environmental pollution and invasive non-native species. These pressures are compounded by climate change, especially as the biodiversity in the South East is so fragmented.

The challenge we face is to halt ongoing losses and rebuild biodiversity, while taking account of climate change. This requires us to look beyond protecting sites and separate species and move towards an integrated landscape scale approach, working to restore whole ecosystems. It is not only the partners in the South East England Biodiversity Forum working together who need to tackle this, but also all those that can affect or have an interest in biodiversity. Through their engagement and working collectively we will ensure that efforts are co-ordinated, better understood and, most importantly, deliver real and lasting biodiversity benefit.

* www.ukbap.org.uk/library/Reporting2005/UKBAPReport05.pdf
Further reports at www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3713



Aims

The South East Biodiversity Strategy is a web-based resource which aims to:

- Be a clear, coherent and inspiring vision for the South East
- Provide a framework for the delivery of biodiversity targets that guide and support all those who have an impact on biodiversity in the region
- Embed a landscape scale approach to restoring whole ecosystems in the working practices and policies of all partners
- Create the space needed for wildlife to respond to climate change
- Enable all organisations in the South East to support and improve biodiversity across the region
- Be a core element within the strategies and delivery plans of organisations across the South East region

Visit strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk



Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

The Regional Biodiversity Opportunity Areas Map identifies the areas which are priorities for the restoration and creation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats in the South East of England.

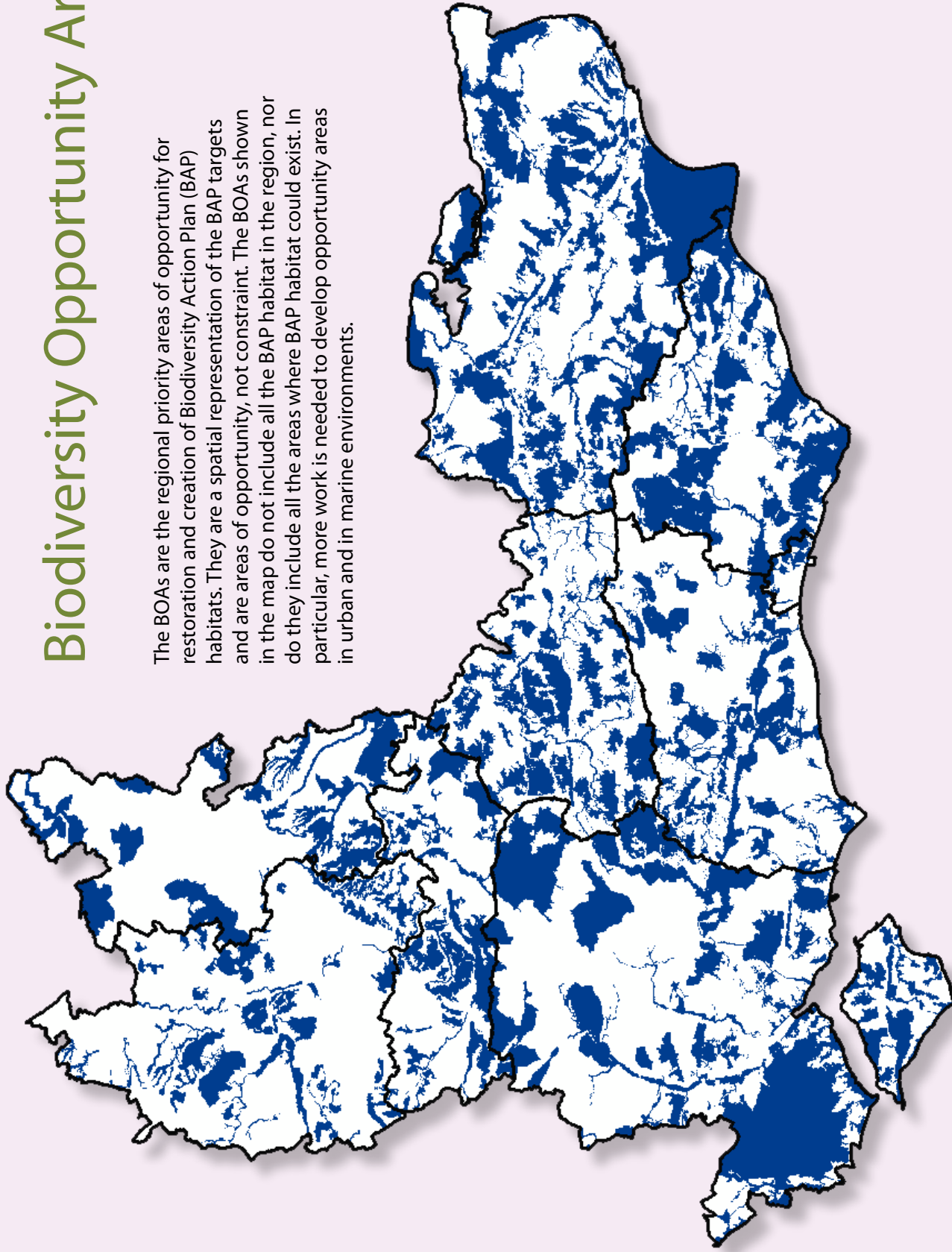
These Biodiversity Opportunity Areas will complement the work of regional and local organisations working to restore and create areas rich in biodiversity. Delivering Biodiversity Action Plan targets and actions through this agreed area-based approach will result in a landscape scale approach to conservation, making our wildlife more robust to changing climate and socio-economic pressures.

The Biodiversity Opportunity Areas each cover a variety of habitats allowing for an ecosystem approach to conservation to be embedded across the region. By working with larger, more dynamic ecosystems, it will be possible to create a wider range of habitat niches, which will in turn increase the ability of the landscape to support species.



Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

The BOAs are the regional priority areas of opportunity for restoration and creation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats. They are a spatial representation of the BAP targets and are areas of opportunity, not constraint. The BOAs shown in the map do not include all the BAP habitat in the region, nor do they include all the areas where BAP habitat could exist. In particular, more work is needed to develop opportunity areas in urban and in marine environments.



Transforming the vision into reality

This requires a series of actions including:

1. Embedding the strategy

Embedding this strategy, at a regional and local level, into strategic documents and plans (such as the SE Plan and Local Development Frameworks) is essential if the vision is to become reality. We look to all those partners who produce such strategic documents at regional, county, district and parish levels to embed this approach in their strategic, planning and policy documents.

2. Regional action

Targets to restore and create BAP habitats have been agreed with the local and regional biodiversity partnerships. Regional organisations signing up to the strategy will take responsibility for the delivery of a proportion of these targets in the relevant Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. For the first time we will know what and where we are able to deliver collectively for biodiversity and how much has been achieved annually.

Regional delivery in practice

South East Green Infrastructure Framework

The emerging South East Green Infrastructure Framework will make use of the data and information provided through this strategy. It will be an important tool for the development of wildlife-rich areas in urban and suburban landscapes.

3. Local action

Local Biodiversity Action Plan partnerships focusing on delivery in the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas are active in counties across the region. These partnerships include members of key agencies (e.g. Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency), NGOs (e.g. RSPB and Wildlife Trusts), Local Authorities and local people with expert knowledge of specific sites. This combination can focus the mechanisms for delivery, such as the agri-environment schemes or restoration after mineral extraction, and the local expertise into key Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.

Local delivery in practice

The River Cherwell in Oxfordshire

The RSPB, working in partnership with Natural England, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and landowners, has created a wetland mosaic of over 140 ha along the river Cherwell Biodiversity Opportunity Area. This includes areas of floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadow and fen. As a result lapwings have returned to breed for the first time in 25 years and redshanks are breeding in the area for the first time in recorded history.

Making the Strategy work

The details

The strategy consists of three core elements:

- **Working in partnership – agreed responsibility for partners**
- **A regional Biodiversity Opportunity Areas Map**
- **Biodiversity Action Plan targets – agreed regional targets for habitats and species**

Further details are provided in the following pages



Working in partnership

For those national organisations that sign up to the strategy, such as Natural England, the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the Environment Agency or the Forestry Commission, it means that they agree to:

- Be an active member of SEEBF
- Agree, with partners, the UK BAP habitat and species targets for the region
- Ensure that, where appropriate, the Regional Biodiversity Strategy and its delivery framework is incorporated into their strategic documents and plans
- Lead on the regional delivery for specific habitat groupings. This will consist of:
 - leading or taking an active role in regional projects
 - leading on actions associated with the relevant regional projects
- Contribute to the delivery of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy. This will include:
 - The Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Natural England specifying the contribution they will be making toward the BAP targets and, where appropriate, in which Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) this contribution will take place
 - Other organisations (such as conservation NGOs) will indicate what contribution they aim to make toward the BAP targets, and where appropriate, in which BOAs this contribution will take place
- Work within LBAP partnerships to prioritise and facilitate delivery against biodiversity targets within BOAs following the regional organisational priorities.

For GOSE, SEEDA and SEERA sign up means they agree to:

- Be an active member of SEEBF
- Contribute to the delivery of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy
- Agree, with partners, the UK BAP habitat targets for the region
- Ensure that, the objectives and targets of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy and its delivery framework are integrated wherever feasible into their strategic documents, policies and plans
- Support local and regional delivery bodies (such as Local Authorities) in contributing to the delivery of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy and integrate the strategy into relevant documents and plans



Photo: Paul Naylor

Description of the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

Identifying Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

The Biodiversity Opportunity Areas have been identified using the following data and information:

- Presence of key BAP habitats
- Designated Sites
International/ European Sites, SSSIs
- Underlying soils
- Underlying geology
- Topography (aspect and slope)
- Hydrology
- Landscape Descriptive Units where present
- Local expert knowledge backed up by data on habitats and/or species

These Biodiversity Opportunity Areas are the regional priority areas of opportunity for restoration and creation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats. However, the BOAs:

- do not include all the BAP habitat in the region and therefore do not include all the areas where maintenance of this resource is necessary
- do not represent any level of constraint due to biodiversity, although they will contain designated sites and BAP habitat that do give rise to constraints

- do not include all the areas where creation and restoration of BAP habitat will be possible. Within the South East, there will be other local opportunities, and more diffuse opportunities. For this reason local opportunity maps may differ from this regional map
- do not include all the opportunities for creating BAP habitat of potentially regional importance in the urban and marine environments. Methodologies for defining these areas are being developed and will be included as soon as is practicable

It is not the aim for the whole of each BOA identified to be restored to UK BAP quality habitat. Rather the map identifies the areas of greatest potential for restoration and creation.

Certain habitat types and species are not well represented within the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, such as wildlife associated with arable farmland. In order to address this, regional projects will be set up to support delivery across a wider area.

Update and review

Where there are improvements in the biodiversity data the BOA map will be reviewed and, where appropriate, updated by the South East England Biodiversity Forum.



Biodiversity Action Plan Targets

Habitats

Targets for the UK BAP habitats have been set for 2015. In the South East region the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas will be the focus for delivery of these targets.

Annually the Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Natural England will specify the contribution they will be making toward the BAP targets and, where appropriate, in which BOAs this contribution will take place. Other organisations (such as conservation Non Governmental Organisations) will indicate what contribution they aim to make toward the BAP targets.

Annual Reports

Reports against these targets will include two elements for each target:

- The area under an appropriate management agreement (e.g. Higher Level Stewardship)
- The area for which there is clear evidence that biodiversity assets are improving

Species

The England Biodiversity Group nationally, and SEEBF regionally, are in the process of identifying how this landscape-scale approach, which integrates the needs of habitats and species, will contribute to the conservation of UK BAP species. There may be some species that are not well served by this process, but it is considered likely that they will tend to be localised rarities. Once identified, targets will be set following national Species Action Plan objectives, and accountability assigned to relevant bodies.



Members of the South East England Biodiversity Forum

Association of Local Government Ecologists; Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust; Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum; Biodiversity International; Brighton and Hove Unitary Authority; BTCV; Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership; Buckinghamshire County Council; Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre; Chilterns Conservation Board; Defence Estates – Ministry of Defence; Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra); East Sussex County Council; Eastleigh Borough Council; Environment Agency; Fareham Borough Council; Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group; Forestry Commission; Government Office South East; Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust; Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre; Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership; Hampshire County Council; Isle of Wight Unitary Authority; Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership; Kent and Medway Biological Records Centre; Kent Biodiversity Partnership; Kent County Council; Kent Wildlife Trust; National Trust; Natural England; Oxfordshire County Council; Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; Rushmoor Borough Council; Southampton Unitary Authority; South East Marine Programme; South East England Development Agency; South East England – Intelligence Network; South East England Regional Assembly; Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre; Surrey Biodiversity Partnership; Surrey County Council; Surrey Wildlife Trust; Sussex Biodiversity Partnership; Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre; Sussex Wildlife Trust; Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre; West Berkshire Unitary Authority; West Sussex County Council; Wildlife Trusts in the South East; Woodland Trust.



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Further information on the South East England Biodiversity Forum is available at www.sebiodiversity.org.uk or from the Regional Biodiversity Co-ordinator South East, Tom Butterworth (tel 07500 608 458; email Tom.Butterworth@NaturalEngland.org.uk) For further information on the South East Biodiversity Strategy please see strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk

Organisations that have financially supported the development of the South East Biodiversity Strategy



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Published by the South East England Biodiversity Forum, February 2009
www.sebiodiversity.org.uk