

[Environment Agency report sets out urgent need to work with nature](#)

An [Environment Agency report](#) that lays bare the scale of change needed to halt England's biodiversity and climate crisis has been published today.

It sets out how significant changes will be needed to how land is used in England, with the need for significant landscape scale interventions and the use of nature-based solutions to help wildlife recover, and for humans to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

The '[Working with Nature](#)' report compiled by Environment Agency scientists sets out the global challenges facing the basics for life on Earth – clean water, climate regulation and food. It describes the potential loss of complex natural ecosystems that provide such essentials as an existential risk to human survival.

Referencing Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*, considered by many to be the most important piece of environmental writing of the 20th century, Environment Agency chief executive [Sir James Bevan today spoke](#) about the 'silent spring' that awaits humanity unless action is taken by businesses, government and individuals to prevent further damage and rebuild the natural environment.

The report was unveiled at event today hosted by the Green Alliance, ahead of the COP15 Biodiversity Conference taking place later this year.

Internationally, the G7 leaders have committed to the global mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. The COP 15 meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2022 will review the progress towards previously agreed Biodiversity targets.

Sir James Bevan, Environment Agency Chief Executive, said:

The biodiversity crisis joins the climate crisis as an existential risk to our survival, but as this report sets out the solution is not to retreat but to work together to build a nature-positive response.

Nature provides the basics for life – clean water, clean air and food. With major pressures on land use across England, nature-based solutions must be a major part in our response to protect these essentials whilst rebuilding our natural world.

England is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world due to its long history of industrialisation and land use changes over millennia. Large

areas of habitats have been lost with 99.7% of fens, 97% of species-rich grasslands, 80% of lowland heathlands, up to 70% of ancient woodlands and up to 85% of saltmarshes destroyed or degraded.

The impacts on species have also been severe, with a quarter of mammals in England and almost a fifth of UK plants threatened with extinction.

Nature in England has also been impacted by pressures on land use. The report sets out the impact of the last 50 years of agricultural production and points to the likelihood of a need of further intensification and increased yields from agricultural land. It also charts the impacts of urbanisation, forestry and the need for large areas of land for climate change mitigation.

To address the major declines in biodiversity that will only be accelerated by a changing climate, the report sets out a need for more land to be dedicated to nature conservation to act as refuges for nature and to mitigate against climate change – such as coastal wetlands to combat flood risks. However, with such demand on land, it will need to provide multiple benefits to people and nature.

The Environment Agency has a leading role to play in restoring or recreating new wildlife-rich habitat in England. Recent projects include peat restoration at Great Fen, Cambridgeshire, which will save 325,000 tonnes of CO₂ from being released each year while restoring habitats for threatened fenland species and protecting surrounding towns, villages and farmland from the risk of flooding after heavy rainfall.

The report identifies such nature-based solutions as a crucial tool in restoring nature and achieving multiple other benefits. By working with nature, including tree planting, peat restoration, species reintroductions and natural flood management, it suggests there are opportunities to restore biodiversity, whilst providing other benefits such as carbon sequestration, flood protection and clean and plentiful water.

The report also says action will also be required to address the levels of consumption in wealthy countries, which contribute to the loss of biodiversity, and that sustained effort will be required from many people and organisations at forums like the COP 15 meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to tackle the effects of global consumption, production and supply chains.

Strengthened controls to protect the public from medically unfit gun

holders

Strengthened controls for licensed gun owners will be in place from this week to better protect the public from those who are medically unfit to own a firearm.

A new digital marker is being rolled out across GP surgeries in England which, once applied to a patient's record, will flag that they have a firearms licence and automatically alert doctors if there has been a relevant change in their medical situation.

This could include a change in their mental health, diagnosis of a neurological condition or evidence of substance abuse.

The new system will mean GPs can alert the relevant police force, who can then ensure licensed gun holders who may no longer be fit to own a firearm are swiftly identified, their licence reviewed and, if deemed appropriate, their firearm seized.

Minister for Crime, Policing and Probation, Kit Malthouse said:

We have some of the strictest gun control laws in the world and we will not hesitate to bring in even stronger processes where we see the need for them.

The imminent inquest into the tragic shootings in Sussex and impending first anniversary of the horrific shootings in Plymouth are a stark reminder of how much we owe it to the public to take these matters seriously.

We are focused on making our streets safer and it is absolutely right that the police be told about changes in the medical circumstances of anyone licensed to own a gun. This move is yet another example of us giving the police the tools they require to protect the public.

The digital marker system bolsters recent statutory guidance, brought into force last November, that set out that the police cannot grant a firearms licence until they have reviewed information from a suitably qualified doctor regarding the applicant's medical history.

The digital marker will streamline the way doctors can keep track of patients who have applied for, or been granted, a firearms certificate – which was previously something done manually. The marker has been developed by NHS Digital and is being rolled out in GP practices across England, with 98% of

practices able to access it from this week.

Minister for Patient Safety and Primary Care, Maria Caulfield, said:

These new measures make it easier for GPs to identify any concerning medical issues with gun holders or applicants, before passing this vital information on to relevant police forces, helping ensure public safety.

The new system was agreed following extensive cooperation with the British Medical Association (BMA) and comes after they agreed a Memorandum of Understanding in July 2019 with the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs Council about the role of doctors in the firearms licensing system.

NHS Digital CEO, Simon Bolton, said:

The addition of this marker to GP records is a prime example of how a digitally enabled healthcare service benefits patients and the public.

This new system will also reduce the administrative burden for GPs, giving them more time to deliver care.

Dr Peter Holden, BMA lead for firearms licensing policy and a GP in Matlock, Derbyshire, said:

As advocates for their patients and communities, family doctors support the need for scrutiny and proper safeguards when it comes to owning a weapon that can be used with lethal outcomes.

For decades now, the BMA has been pushing for an active flagging system within patients' records that is robust, clear and standardised across the country, and the new digital marker is a positive step in the right direction of improving the contribution GPs make to the licensing process.

However, the public should be under no illusion that this will be an overnight solution. This new scheme will apply only to new applicants or people renewing their licences, so it will take up to five years before all licensed gun owners are included within this framework.

Of course, when there is a diagnosis of concern, GPs will continue to use all of the information in front of them and where there is a danger to the wider public or the patient themselves, they will alert authorities.

The introduction of the marker though must not imply that the buck for public safety stops with the GP; as the police have acknowledged, they themselves are ultimately responsible for firearms licensing.

But as this new marker is rolled out, we encourage GPs to build on existing relationships with local forces to help further protect public safety.

[Reversing the Nature Crisis: Silent Spring or Adlestrop?](#)

Introduction: Silent Spring

“There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. Then a strange blight crept over the area. Everywhere was a shadow of death. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh. No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.”

Those are the opening lines of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, the 1962 book that sparked the modern environmental movement. Sixty years on we are closer than ever to that silent spring happening. Since we humans and everything we cherish depends on nature, we have the strongest possible interest in avoiding that outcome.

But if we are going to fix the problem, we need to start by understanding what the problem is, its magnitude, and what’s causing it.

That is why the Environment Agency has today published a major new report on the state of our nature. It looks in particular at what is happening to our plants and animals (trigger warning: it’s shocking), explains what these do for us (apart from bringing us joy at their beauty), and sets out how we can turn things around.

Our report focuses on England, but you could write this report about almost any other country in the world right now and while the details would all be different, the underlying picture would be the same – awful.

What's happening: the story so far

People have affected the environment in England for millennia. Most of our untouched natural wilderness had probably already vanished from Britain by the time the Romans arrived. Even then our forebears were not living sustainably, cutting down forests and starting to degrade nature. The Industrial Revolution made things worse, by triggering the start of climate change as coal was burned to power machines, and by starting to put much more pollution into environment. That accelerated the degradation of nature on which our plants, our wildlife and all of us ultimately depend.

But it wasn't until the second half of the 20th century and our own lifetimes that things really started to go downhill. Our report collects the evidence. Species-rich grasslands such as meadows have decreased in extent by around 97% since 1930. Lowland heathlands now cover only 20% of the area they did in the 19th century. The loss of wetlands, one of the richest habitats, has also been severe: we have lost 99.7% of our fens, 81% of our grazing marshes and 44% of our lowland bogs. Almost all our ancient trees have gone too: up to 70% of our remaining ancient woodlands have been deforested or damaged, mostly during the past century.

The loss of meadows, wetlands, woods – the decline in those precious habitats has had its inevitable consequence: an equally shocking decline in the plants and animals that depend on them. Since 1970, 41% of our species have decreased in abundance and 15% of all our native species in the island of Britain are now threatened with extinction.

The position is even worse for the mammals, birds, butterflies and moths designated as priority species – those about which we have the greatest concern. They have declined in abundance overall by 61% since 1970.

Since that date butterflies and moths have decreased in average abundance by 16% and 25% respectively; a third of pollinator species have declined; water and wetland birds have declined by 14%, woodland birds by 25%, and farmland birds by 55%. A third of farmland specialist species – those that depend on a narrow ecological niche, like grey partridge, turtle doves, tree sparrows and corn buntings – have declined by more than 90% since 1970.

It's no better for our mammals: several species have undergone drastic reductions in population sizes. Hedgehog numbers have fallen by approximately 66% since 1995 and water voles have done even worse, falling by 78%. Overall, a quarter of mammals in England are now threatened with extinction. Let me say that sentence again in case you missed it: a quarter of mammals in England are now threatened with extinction. If that doesn't make you angry, you haven't been paying attention.

The story is a bit better in our waters, partly as a result of all the work the Environment Agency has done over the last three decades to clean up our

rivers. Freshwater invertebrates, on which a lot of other aquatic life depends and which had previously declined to a low in the mid-1990s, have shown a recovery in recent years. Not so some other species like salmon though: in 2019, only 16% of our rivers met the minimum population targets for salmon conservation, the lowest score since monitoring began in 1993.

Meanwhile, things aren't any better on the ground. 18% of plants and 15% of fungi and lichens are at risk of extinction in Great Britain.

Why this is happening

Why is this happening? It's the result of a combination of factors: unsustainable use of our resources, changes in land use, pollution, the modifications we have made to our rivers, urban development, etc, much of which has been going on for centuries but which is now having a cumulative effect.

What's making this even worse is something relatively new – the climate emergency. Changing climate patterns are disturbing species and the warmer temperatures that climate change is bringing is threatening the existence of some of those species. Example: lakes. When the water temperature in a lake gets to 17 degrees C, they are likely to suffer from algal blooms which lead to a deterioration in water quality, less life in that water and less diversity in the life that remains.

So there are a range of factors in the nature crisis we are now witnessing. They all, however, have one thing in common: they are down to us, the humans.

Why is this a problem?

Why should we care about biodiversity? Does it really matter if the vole goes the way of the dodo? It would be a shame to live in a world without tree sparrows, but we could surely manage without them, couldn't we? Here's why it does matter: the biodiversity crisis is a crisis because it won't just kill the plants and animals it is killing. It will kill us too.

That's because nature is indivisible and interdependent. Nature provides us with a host of things we depend upon, such as clean water, clean air and food. No nature, no food. It's vital in providing resilience to climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide, regulating local climatic conditions and providing flood protection. No nature, no climate shield. And as humans we depend on green and blue spaces for our own health and well-being. No nature, no us.

What we do about it

Are you depressed enough yet? Don't be because we can turn this round. Just as we can successfully tackle the climate emergency by doing the right things, we can successfully tackle the biodiversity crisis too.

Nature is indivisible. What happens in one part of our blue planet affects all the other parts. So the solution to the biodiversity crisis has to start

at the global level. The framework for that already exists: the international Convention on Biological Diversity, which has committed all its signatories to protect our natural diversity, and to enhance it wherever possible. At the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15) due to take place later this year, governments from around the world need to agree a new set of goals for the next decade with strong monitoring to measure progress on the ground in reversing nature loss.

What the government is doing

We need action at the national level. The UK government, with other leading nations, made a commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030: or in other words to become Nature Positive. Many organisations, the EA included, have made a commitment to be Carbon Neutral by 2030. I would (and do) get out of bed every day to achieve that. But I would leap out of bed to help the planet become Nature Positive.

We could achieve that goal in this country. We know what we need to do: nurture our protected species; sustain our protected areas; better protect wildlife habitats outside those areas; restore our damaged habitats and create new ones; start to knit together nature networks across the whole country; build a nature positive approach into our planning and development; stop the pollution which damages our habitats; tackle the climate emergency which is accelerating the biodiversity crisis and vice versa; and wherever we have a problem, employ nature based solutions as the default to solving it.

And much of this not only can be done, by governments national and local, by businesses, by landowners, by others; much of it is already being done. And what gets measured gets done. That is why we welcome the lead the UK government has given others by requiring, in the new Environment Act, the setting of a legally binding target on species abundance in England for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature.

What the EA is doing

The Environment Agency is playing its part. We protect species and the habitats on which they depend. Example: our work to ensure that the abstraction of water (which we regulate) does not damage wildlife or habitat – and when we think it will, we are reducing or in some cases stopping that abstraction by adjusting or turning off the licences that allow it. We create and restore habitat: over 1,100 hectares last year (2021/22). We use our role as a statutory planning consultee to ensure that new developments don't damage the environment, and we are influential: almost all planning decisions (over 98%) are in line with our advice. We are tackling the pollution that hits our wildlife, including by reducing the amount of air pollution from the industries we regulate. We are improving our waters on which so much of nature depends: we enhanced over 1,500 kilometres of rivers and streams last year. We are tackling the climate crisis, by regulating down most of the emissions that cause it, by helping people and nature become more resilient to its effects by building flood defences and by helping planners, developers and communities create better and more resilient places. And we are increasingly using nature-based solutions as the default.

Example: Steart Marshes on the Severn Estuary. If you visited Steart and didn't know what it was, you would think it was just a beautiful bit of marshland with some nice birds. It is all of those things. But it is a lot more too. It is also the UK's biggest coastal realignment scheme which reduces flood risk to 100,000 homes and businesses – a benefit valued at £5 billion – and has created 250 hectares of new intertidal habitat. The new marshland is home to a variety of species including great crested newts, otters, butterflies, and wintering and breeding birds. It is also a place where people can enjoy nature, a benefit to the local rural economy, and a carbon sink, locking away carbon and reducing the extent of climate change. It's a massive success for our partners with whom we designed and built it, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and local communities. And it's a great example of how nature-based solutions can deliver multiple outcomes, including but not limited to tackling the biodiversity crisis.

Second example: Keeping Rivers Cool. If warm lakes are bad (algal bloom, as I mentioned) then warm rivers are bad too, killing off the wildlife in them. Our Keeping Rivers Cool project (the clue is in the name) uses trees to shade streams and prevent some of the warming that happens on hot sunny days, reducing the impact on trout and salmon and other species. The shade from trees can reduce temperatures in small rivers on average by 2 to 4°C (compared to unshaded streams), sometimes by more on the hottest days: and that can make all the difference to the wildlife. Since the programme began in 2012, the Environment Agency, Rivers Trusts and Wildlife Trusts have planted more than 500,000 trees along our rivers and streams. This doesn't just help the wildlife and tackle both the causes and consequences of climate change, though it does. It is also providing other benefits, such as reducing erosion, intercepting sediment and pollutants, and making the rivers nicer places for the humans as well as all the other forms of wildlife that benefit.

What we can all do

So the EA is doing its bit. But none of us is as good as all of us. We are all contributing in some way to the biodiversity crisis, and we all have a role to play in tackling it. There are simple steps we can all take, most or all of which will also help us address the climate crisis too. Walk, cycle or take public transport instead of driving. Have less stuff, and reuse or recycle as much of it as you can. Use water wisely. If you have a garden don't concrete over it: keep it green and put in a pond. Only eat sustainably sourced food. Make sure your pension is not invested in businesses that are trashing the planet. Think about how your footfall resonates on this earth.

Conclusion

I started with a silent spring in which no birds sang. That is one future we can have, and will have if we fail to act. But there is another future we can have, a much brighter one, if we do choose to act. That's a future best encapsulated by another work of literature, a famous poem about the past which is also a kind of nostalgia for a future we would all like. It's "Adlestrop", by Edward Thomas, written in 1917 towards the end of a war that

the poet himself tragically did not survive.

Adlestrop

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—

The name, because one afternoon

Of heat the express-train drew up there

Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.

No one left and no one came

On the bare platform. What I saw

Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,

And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,

No whit less still and lonely fair

Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang

Close by, and round him, mistier,

Farther and farther, all the birds

Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

So let's tackle the nature crisis. Let's refuse the silent spring. Let our future be Adlestrop.

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[Trap and drag incidents on London Overground](#)

News story

Trap and drag incidents on London Overground, 23, 27 and 29 June 2022.



The train at Seven Sisters station (image courtesy Arriva Rail London)

At around 09:11 hrs on 23 June 2022, a person on the platform at Seven Sisters station placed their hand between the closing doors of a train which was about to depart. The train subsequently departed with the person's hand still trapped in the doors. The person ran alongside the train, freeing their hand after a few seconds, and the train stopped shortly afterwards.

At around 06:26 hrs on 27 June 2022, a person on the platform at Wembley Central station placed an object, which appeared to be a walking pole, between a set of closing doors on a departing train. The person tried unsuccessfully to remove the object, and the train departed with it still trapped in the doors. The train stopped after it had moved a short distance along the platform.

At around 13:46 hrs on 29 June 2022, a person on the platform at Crouch Hill station placed their umbrella between the closing doors of a train that was about to depart. The person tried to remove the umbrella but the train again moved a short distance along the platform with the item trapped in the doors before it came to a stand.

There were no significant injuries resulting from any of these incidents.

We have undertaken a [preliminary examination](#) into the circumstances surrounding these incidents. Having assessed the evidence which has been gathered to date, we have decided to publish a [safety digest](#).

The safety digest will be made available on our website in the near future.

Published 12 July 2022

[RSH publishes regulatory notice for](#)

Incommunities Limited following a breach of the economic standards

Press release

The regulator has concluded that Incommunities Limited has breached the Rent Standard



In a regulatory notice published today (12 July), the Regulator of Social Housing has concluded that Incommunities Limited has breached the Rent Standard.

Following a self-referral, RSH found that Incommunities had set rents incorrectly for hundreds of tenants. The housing association had wrongly classified some of its homes as supported housing. It also set some of its rents incorrectly on re-let, and did not cap rents on some of its homes in line with requirements. As a result of those errors a significant number of tenants have been overcharged.

Upon uncovering these issues, and in agreement with the regulator, Incommunities has committed to an external investigation into its rent-setting and is developing an action plan to ensure that errors are rectified and to minimise the risk of any repeat. This work will identify the full scale of the errors and the number of tenants who have been overcharged. The affected tenants will be reimbursed by the provider.

Maxine Loftus, Director of Regulatory Operations, said:

Incommunities' failure to set rents correctly has resulted in tenants being overcharged.

We will work with Incommunities to make sure it puts things right for its current and previous tenants.

More information about our findings in this case are available in the regulator's [regulatory notice](#).

1. RSH promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver and maintain homes of appropriate quality that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.
2. More information about how RSH regulates against its [standards](#) is available in [Regulating the Standards](#).
3. For press office contact details, see our [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

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