UK Biodiversity Indicators 2019

This document supports
C3a. Status of UK habitats of European importance

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C3. Status of European habitats and species

C3a. Status of UK habitats of European importance

Type: State Indicator

Summary

No new data since the previous publication, however, a new assessment of conservation status is being finalised through the 2019 Habitats Directive Article 17 report to the European Union. This indicator will be updated once the Article 17 report has been published.

In 2007, 5% of UK habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive were in favourable conservation status, decreasing to 3% in 2013.

The conservation status of 48% of the habitats was unfavourable-improving in 2007, decreasing to 31% in 2013.
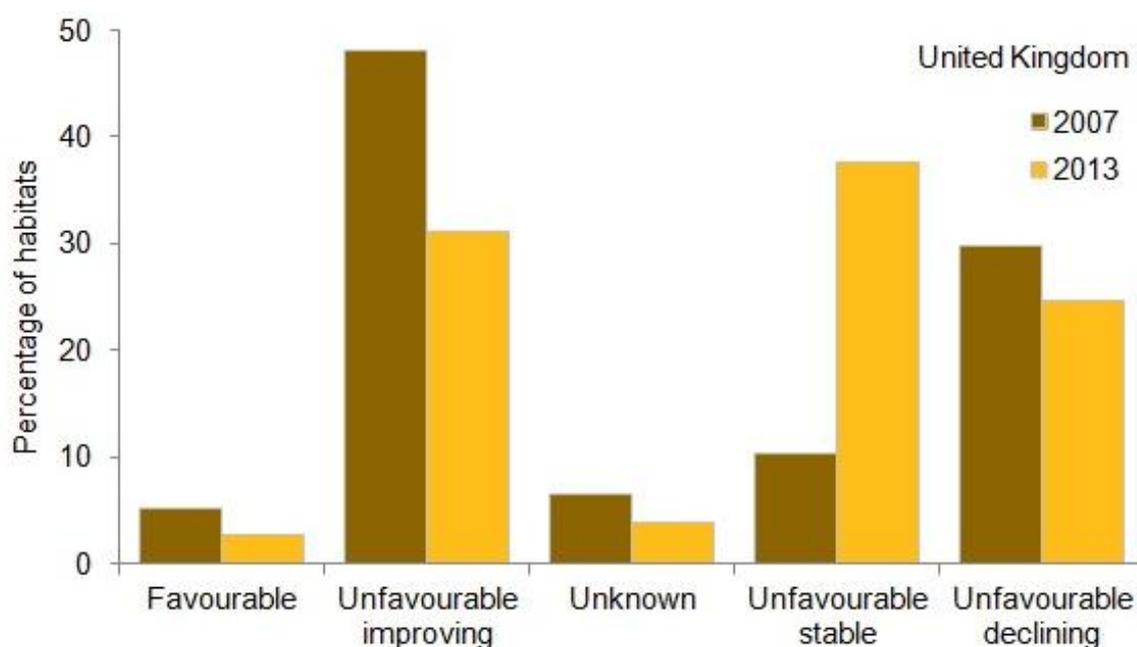
The conservation status of 30% of the habitats was unfavourable-declining in 2007, decreasing to 25% in 2013.

Indicator Description

Member States of the European Union are required to report every 6 years on the conservation status of habitats and species of community interest (listed in the Annexes of the Habitats Directive). These are habitats and species for which the UK has European level conservation responsibilities.

The assessments need to conclude whether each habitat of European importance found in the UK is in a: 'Favourable', 'Unfavourable-Inadequate', 'Unfavourable-Bad' or 'Unknown' conservation status. This indicator is based on an evaluation of whether the results of the most recent assessment (2013) are better or worse than those for the previous assessment (2007).

Figure C3ai. Conservation status of UK habitats of European importance, 2007 and 2013.

Notes:
1. The chart is based on 77 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
2. The aim of the Habitats Directive is to achieve favourable conservation status for the species and habitats listed in its Annexes. An assessment of status and trends for each species and habitat is undertaken every 6 years. Trends in 'unfavourable' conservation

status allow identification of whether progress is being made, as it will take many years for some habitats and species to reach 'favourable' conservation status.

Source: UK Habitats Directive (Article 17) reports 2007 and 2013.

Assessment of change in status of UK habitats of European importance			
	Long term	**Short term**	**Latest year**
Percentage of UK habitats of European importance in favourable or improving conservation status	⊙	⊗ 2007–2013	Decreased (2013)

Note: The short-term assessment is based on a 3% rule of thumb. See Assessing Indicators.

Indicator description

Member States of the European Union are required to report every 6 years on the conservation status of habitats and species listed on the annexes of the Habitats Directive. Details of exactly what information is to be delivered is laid out in the report format and guidance notes. Each assessment needs to conclude whether the habitat is in one of the following states:

- Favourable
- Unfavourable-Inadequate
- Unfavourable-Bad
- Unknown

However, it is likely to take time before habitats move from unfavourable conservation status to favourable conservation status, so for the unfavourable assessments, an assessment of trend is made to determine if the habitat is improving, declining, or stable. The information sources on which the assessments are based vary between habitats – their quality is documented in the database which underpins the assessments. The changes are largely based on evidence, though expert opinion was used in a few cases where evidence was not available.

The indicator is based on an evaluation of whether the results obtained in 2007 are better or worse than those obtained in 2013. At its simplest (Figure C3ai), this can be the proportion of habitats which are favourable or show an improving trend (i.e. favourable, or unfavourable-inadequate but improving, or unfavourable-bad but improving). This applies to 53% of habitats assessed in 2007, and 34% in 2013; the measure is therefore assessed as declining in the short term.

Figure C3ai combines the unfavourable inadequate and unfavourable-bad assessments which show a similar direction of trend. In both 2007 and 2013 improving and declining trends were assigned where the evidence allowed a conclusion that improvements or declines in the conservation status of habitats were occurring. Thus:

- Unfavourable-inadequate improving, and unfavourable-bad improving were summed to form the category 'unfavourable improving';
- Unfavourable-inadequate declining, and unfavourable-bad declining were summed to form the category 'unfavourable declining'.

In 2007, no trend was assigned to those habitats which were neither improving nor declining. This included both habitats for which the trend was unknown, and those for which there was no evidence of change. In 2013, careful consideration of evidence allowed the use of the term 'stable'. For ease of comparison in the figures, unfavourable-inadequate, and unfavourable-bad assessments with no trend conclusion in 2007 were summed to form the

category 'unfavourable stable'; the same term was used for 2013 data, but with more confidence that the trend was neither improving nor declining.

Relevance

Article 17 of the European Union Habitats Directive requires Member States to report every 6 years on progress made with maintaining and/or restoring favourable conservation status for habitat types and species of community interest. These are habitats and species for which the UK has European-level conservation responsibilities.

Background

The first assessment of conservation status of species and habitats listed on the annexes of the Directive was produced in 2007. A second assessment was produced in 2013. Each individual habitat assessment requires information on 4 parameters, which are brought together using an evaluation matrix to form an overall assessment.
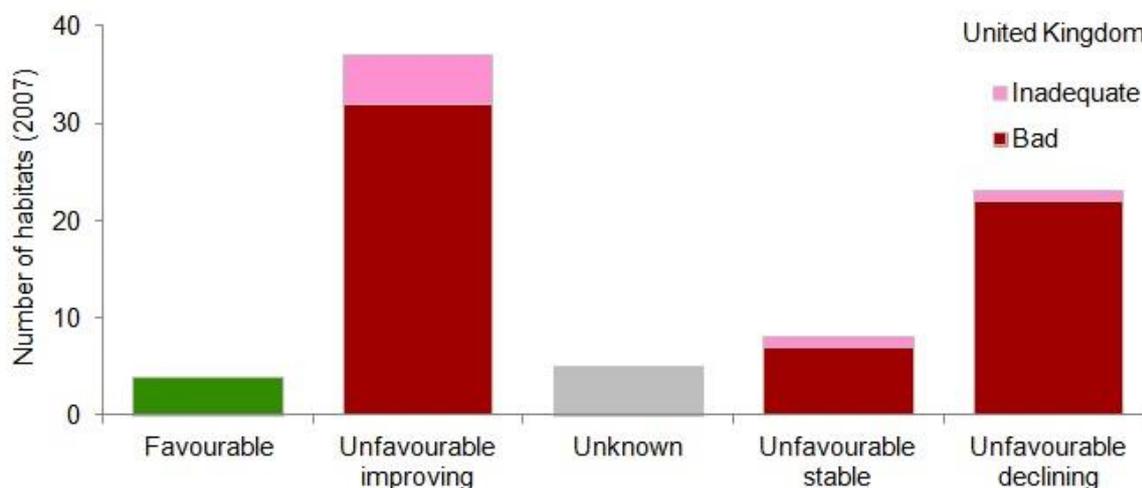
For habitats the parameters are:

- range;
- area;
- structure and functions; and
- future prospects.

The trend in the overall assessment is based upon an integration of the trend information for the individual parameters.

The UK reported on 77 habitats in the Atlantic biogeographic region in both 2007 and 2013. Grouping the habitats by broad habitat types leads to the following breakdown:

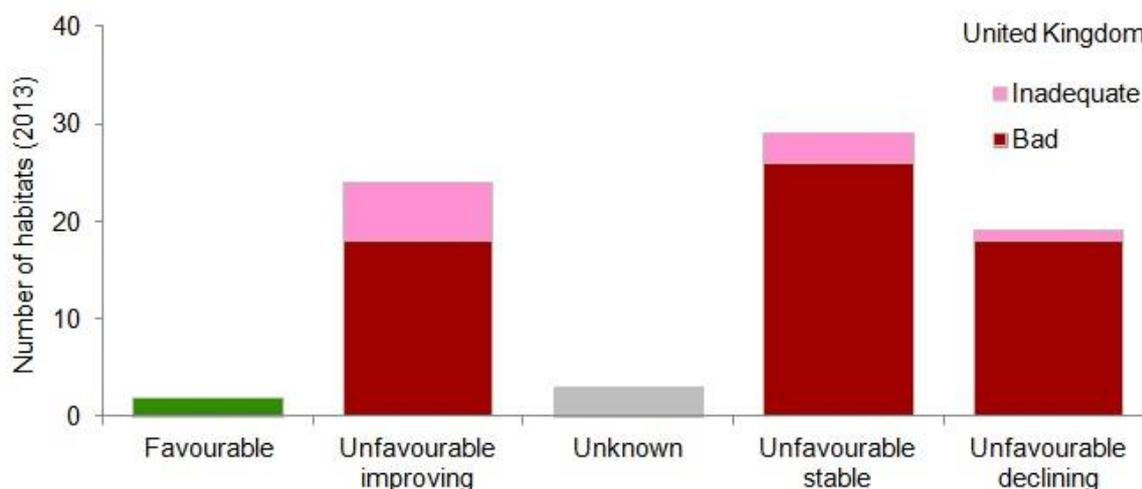|	
Marine	8
Coastal	19
Heaths and scrub	8
Woodlands	10
Grasslands	9
Freshwater	8
Bogs, Mires and Fens	9
Rocky habitats	6

Figure C3aii. Conservation status of UK habitats of European importance, 2007.

Notes:

1. Graph based on 77 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
2. The aim of the Habitats Directive is to achieve favourable conservation status for the species and habitats listed in its Annexes. An assessment of status and trends for each species and habitat is undertaken every 6 years. Trends in unfavourable conservation status allow identification of whether progress is being made, as it will take many years for some habitats and species to reach favourable conservation status.
3. Red shows the number of habitats within a trend which were unfavourable-bad; pink shows the number of habitats within a trend which were unfavourable-inadequate.

Source: UK Habitats Directive (Article 17) reports 2007 and 2013.

Figure C3aiii. Conservation status of UK habitats of European importance, 2013.

Notes:
1. Graph based on 77 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
2. The aim of the Habitats Directive is to achieve favourable conservation status for the species and habitats listed in its Annexes. An assessment of status and trends for each species and habitat is undertaken every 6 years. Trends in unfavourable conservation status allow identification of whether progress is being made, as it will take many years for some habitats and species to reach favourable conservation status.
3. Red shows the number of habitats within a trend which were unfavourable-bad; pink shows the number of habitats within a trend which were unfavourable-inadequate.

Source: UK Habitats Directive (Article 17) reports 2007 and 2013.

Figures C3aii and C3aiii provide a breakdown of Figure C3ai by showing the number of habitats in the unfavourable categories which arise from the unfavourable-inadequate or unfavourable-bad assessment categories. The picture for habitats is somewhat worse than for species (see indicator C3b), in that more habitats are in unfavourable conservation status, and more habitats which are unfavourable are in unfavourable-bad status.

A change matrix to show improving and declining conservation status has been developed (Figure C3aiv) to apportion how each transition from a category in 2007 to a category in 2013 contributes to a 'better' or 'worse' result between the 2 reporting periods. Using this matrix, a comparison between the conservation status assessments undertaken for the 2007 and 2013 Habitats Directive reports shows that 35 habitats remained favourable or improved and 39 remained unfavourable or deteriorated; the net change (calculated as the difference between the red and green columns in Figure C3av) is minus 5%.
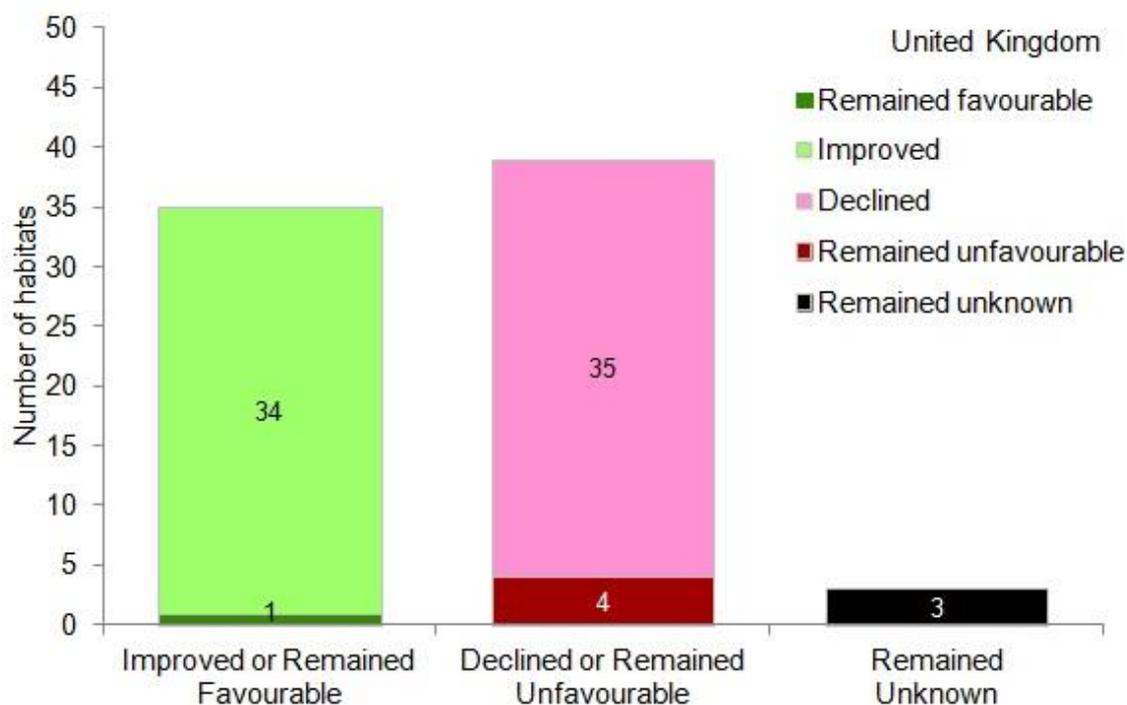
Figure C3aiv. Change matrix for conservation status assessments in 2007 and 2013.

Habitats 2007	2013								
	Favourable	Inadequate improving	Inadequate stable	Inadequate declining	Bad improving	Bad stable	Bad declining	Unknown	Total
Favourable	1	1			2				4
Inadequate improving	1	3						1	5
Inadequate			1						1
Inadequate declining					1				1
Bad improving		1	1		10	11	9		32
Bad					2	3	2		7
Bad declining		1		1	3	11	6		22
Unknown			1			1		3	5
Total	2	6	3	1	18	26	18	3	77

Note: Cells marked red contribute to Declined or Remained Unfavourable; cells marked green contribute to Improved or Remained Favourable.

Figure C3av shows the change in the conservation status of UK habitats of European importance between 2007 and 2013. It is linked to Figure C3ai, but is not a duplication, as Figure C3ai is based on state, and Figure C3av is based on change; the 2 measures are therefore complementary.

Figure C3av. Change in conservation status of UK habitats of European importance between 2007 and 2013.

United Kingdom
- Remained favourable
- Improved
- Declined
- Remained unfavourable
- Remained unknown

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Notes:
1. Graph based on 77 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
2. The aim of the Habitats Directive is to achieve favourable conservation status for the species and habitats listed in its Annexes. An assessment of status and trends for each species and habitat is undertaken every 6 years. Trends in unfavourable conservation status allow identification of whether progress is being made, as it will take many years for some habitats and species to reach favourable conservation status.

Source: UK Habitats Directive (Article 17) reports 2007 and 2013.

In summary, the main changes in the conservation status of UK habitats of European importance between 2007 and 2013 are:

- 35 habitats improved or remained favourable (green cells in Figure C3aiv, and green column in Figure C3av):
  - One habitat remained favourable (natural dystrophic lakes and ponds);
  - One habitat became favourable (box woods on rock slopes);
  - 33 habitats showed an improvement in conservation status:
    - moving from unfavourable-bad to unfavourable-inadequate conservation status (e.g. machair), or
    - an improvement within one of the unfavourable categories (for example from unfavourable declining to unfavourable improving e.g. calcareous fens), or
    - the status has remained at improving since the last assessment (e.g. lowland hay meadows, and limestone pavements).
- 39 habitats declined or remained unfavourable (red cells in Figure C3aiv, and red column in Figure C3av):
  - 4 habitats remained unfavourable (e.g. coastal lagoons);
  - 35 habitats got worse (e.g. blanket bogs), or are still declining (e.g. estuaries).
- 3 habitats remained in an unknown status (e.g. submarine structures made by leaking gases) between the 2 assessments (white cells in Figure C3aiv, and in the black column in Figure C3av). They are not included in the calculation of net change.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Country Nature Conservation Bodies put a huge amount of effort into checking the assessments, and therefore have a high level of confidence that they are correct, and that changes, including within category changes, have been consistently and accurately discriminated. These changes are ecologically important, as stabilising a decline in a habitat, for example, is an important conservation achievement. The information sources on which the assessments are based are quite varied – their quality is documented in the database which underpins the assessments. The changes are largely based on evidence, though expert opinion was used in a few cases where evidence was not available.

A guiding principle in presenting this indicator has been that if conservation action is making a difference, positive change would be expected between reporting periods. On that basis, both declines in conservation status and stability in status (i.e. habitats remaining in a stable unfavourable conservation status) would be seen as a negative outcome.

Goals and targets

Aichi Targets for which this is a primary indicator

Strategic Goal B. Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use

Target 5: By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.

Strategic Goal C. To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity

Target 11: By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

Aichi Targets for which this is a relevant indicator

Strategic Goal B: Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use

Target 8: By 2020, pollution, including from excess nutrients, has been brought to levels that are not detrimental to ecosystem function and biodiversity.

Strategic Goal C. To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity

Target 12: By 2020 the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.

Web links for further information

Reference	Title	Website
UK Habitats Directive Report 2001	First report by the United Kingdom	http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-3051
UK Habitats Directive Report 2007	Summary of Conservation Status Assessments	http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4067
UK Habitats Directive Report 2013	Summary of Conservation Status Assessments	http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6565
European guidance on making	Reference Portal for Article 17 of the Habitats Directive	http://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/help/habitats_art17

Reference	Title	Website
conservation status assessments		
European level assessments	Online report on Article 17 of the Habitats Directive: conservation status of habitats & species of Community interest (2001–2006)	https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/external/habitats-directive-article-17-report-2000201306
European level assessments	EEA Technical report No 2/2015: Results from reporting under the nature directives 2007-2012	http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/ state-of-nature-in-the-eu

Full details of this indicator, including a datasheet and technical documentation are available at: jncc.gov.uk/ukbi-C3a

Last updated: September 2019
Latest data: 2013