



1 Introduction

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Purpose of the Report

This Report is the first in-depth compilation of the evidence on the state of, threats to, and actions taken to secure England's natural environment. It brings together the available evidence base in order to inform the integrated delivery of measures to secure our natural environment both now and for the future.

The purposes of the Report are therefore:

- 1) to describe the current state of the natural environment, as a baseline for comparisons in the future;
- 2) to make this information widely available; and
- 3) to inform policy, decision makers and future research priorities.

Report structure

In addition to this introduction the Report is divided into three main parts, covering:

- The values of the natural environment
- The pressures and risks to these values
- The responses that are currently being used to conserve and enhance the natural environment.

Throughout the Report, case studies highlight the economic benefits of the natural environment in relation to the range of ecosystem services such as clean water, food and flood defence that it provides.

A short conclusion draws together the key issues and points to some of the key challenges for the future.

Values of the natural environment

Three chapters of the Report describe why the natural environment is valuable and what aspects we value most. Chapter 2 looks at the value of our landscapes and geodiversity, and Chapter 3 at the importance of our biodiversity, whereas Chapter 4 looks at how people value the natural environment for recreation, enjoyment and inspiration.

Pressures and risks to the natural environment

Chapter 5 describes the current pressures on the natural environment as well as the potential risks in the future. Individual sections look at climate change, the impact of invasive species and diseases, land use and management practices and pollution.

Responses to conserve and enhance the natural environment

Chapter 6 assesses the actions that have been taken in response to the threats to the natural environment and how effective these have been. We describe a range of examples where action has been taken to conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment. We look at strategies to conserve special sites and species as well as the wider countryside. We also provide examples of responses in our freshwater, coastal and marine environments as well as the use of spatial planning.

The evidence

The Report is evidence-based. We have sought to use and provide reference to the primary sources of data which provide the essential information on the state of, and trends in, our natural environment. Where the data are from Natural England we have made this clear on the graphics (Source: Natural England 2008).

In the Report particular emphasis has been placed on presenting evidence in geographical form wherever possible and providing a regional breakdown of data. This is in recognition of the importance of understanding regional and local variations in the state of the natural environment. Throughout the Report we have used maps as a basis for integrating evidence for different aspects of the environment.

Although the Report presents a considerable amount of evidence on our natural environment, it has also identified significant gaps in the evidence available. The key gaps are identified at the end of each chapter.

In producing this Report a more detailed set of resource documents has also been produced, containing more information than could be included in this Report. These are available on the Natural England website.

To assist the reader we provide a Quick Find and a Glossary of Terms for the key topics.