South Ayrshire Biodiversity Strategy 2026

South Ayrshire
COMMUNITY
PLANNING
Partnership

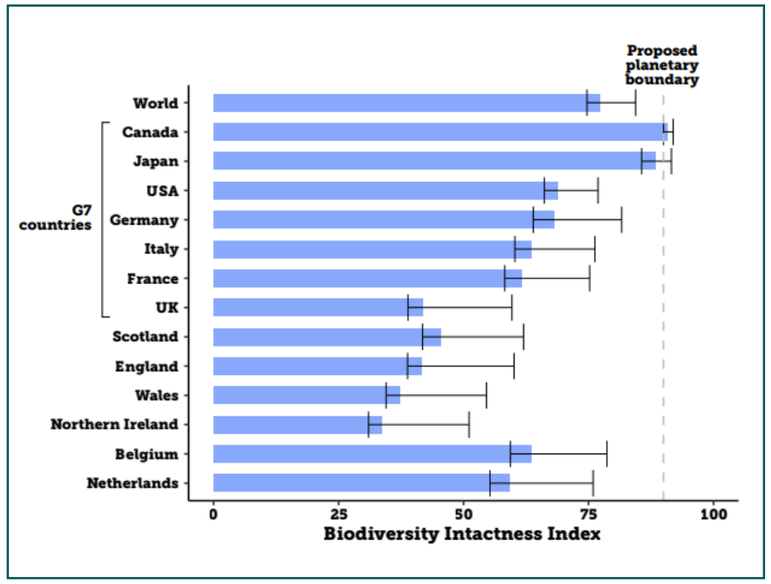
Contents

Foreword

South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership acknowledges the ambitious targets for biodiversity set out in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and we are proud to introduce South Ayrshire's first Biodiversity Strategy.

At its core this strategy is about conserving and enhancing our local wildlife and encouraging everyone in South Ayrshire to make space for nature.

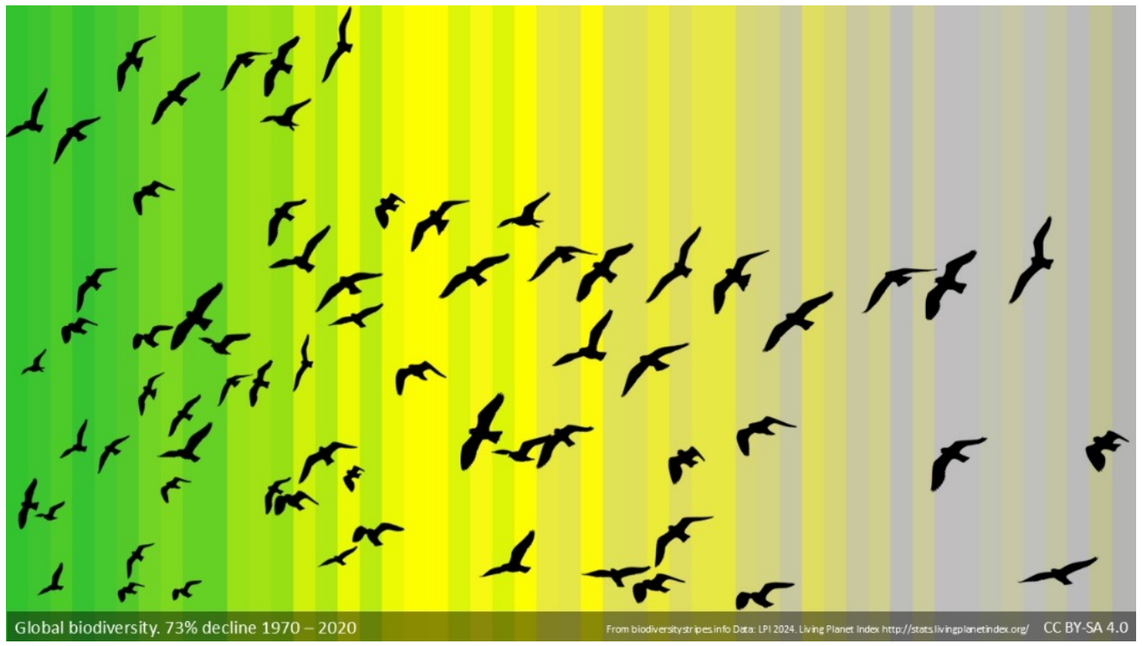
We are in a nature emergency; average global wildlife numbers have declined by 73% in the past 50 years (WWF), these declines are not limited to the world's biodiversity hotspots but are also taking place closer to home. Scotland has retained just over half of its historic land-based biodiversity, this is slightly more than other parts of the UK, but Scotland still ranks in the bottom 25% of global nations for nature intactness.



Source: 2023 State of Nature - Scotland - State of Nature

The Scottish Government recognises that there is an urgent need to address biodiversity loss and has declared a climate and nature emergency. Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity has the high-level goal to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and restore biodiversity by 2045.

This strategy is our response to the nature emergency and strategic framework set out by the Scottish Government.



From biodiversitystripes.info Data LPI 2024. Living Planet Index database. 2024 www.livingplanetindex.org CC BY-SA 4.0 #BiodiversityStripes

1. Introduction

The Biodiversity Strategy is being produced at a time when urgency is building around the need to act decisively to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. This strategy outlines the actions South Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership will implement to tackle the nature emergency over the next five years, providing a strategic framework with clear outcomes and actions to drive progress.

The strategy will contribute to Scotland's goal of being nature positive by 2030, and the outcomes and targets as set out in Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity.

Protecting, restoring, connecting and creating habitats for wildlife will be central to the South Ayrshire Biodiversity Strategy. To achieve this our primarily aims for this 5 year period are:

Aim 1: Identify and facilitate a connected landscape for nature through nature networks:
Aim 2: Secure and mainstream positive effects for biodiversity:
Aim 3: Protect, enhance, restore and create habitat for nature:
Aim 4: Connect people with nature.

1.1 What is Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things, including plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms such as bacteria, and any genetic variation within species. Each of these species work together in ecosystems. This web of life maintains all life on earth, providing food, clean water and air, raw materials, and other essential ecosystem services.

1.2 Why is Biodiversity Important

Biodiversity has enormous value in its own right; however, it is also central to our survival as a species.

Our economy, jobs, health and wellbeing depend on biodiversity, and it is an integral part of our culture and way of life. More than half of the world's GDP (US$44 trillion) is thought to be dependent on nature in some way. Yet humanity has caused the loss of 83% of all wild mammals and half of all plants. (Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, ScotGov 2023)

Natural Capital & Ecosystem Services

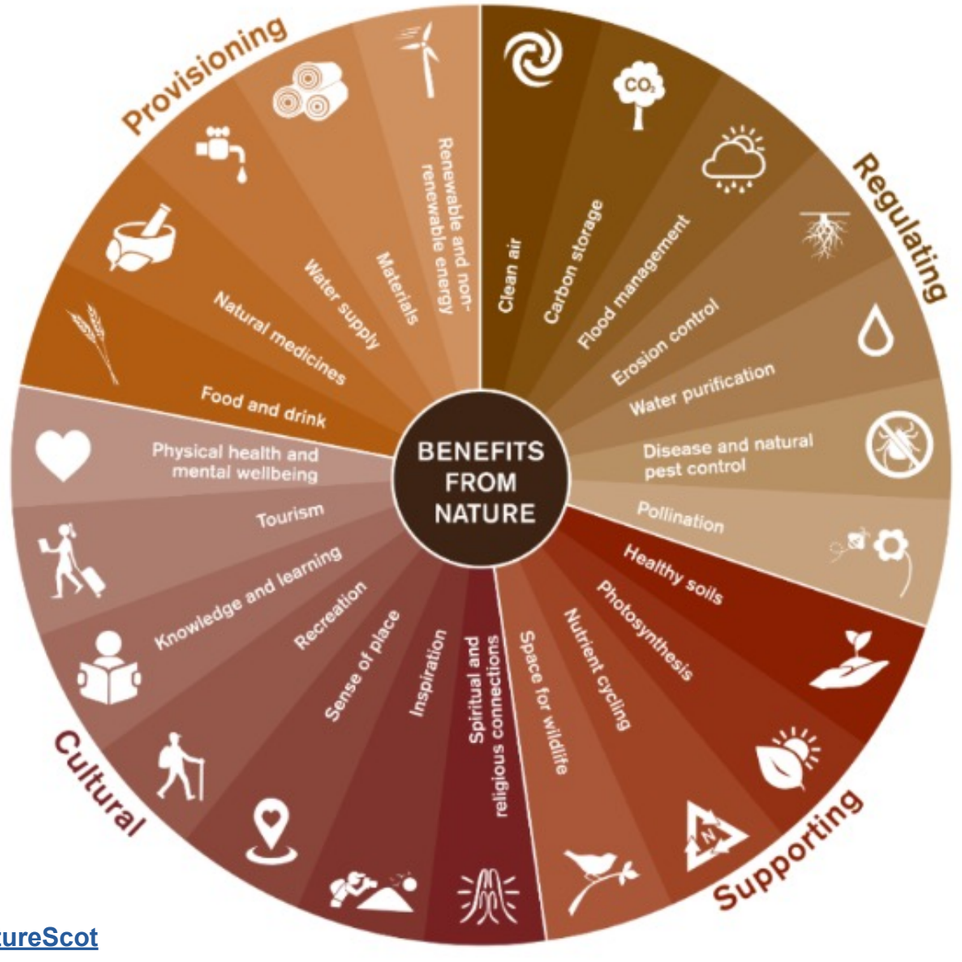
Natural Capital is everything we get from the natural world that benefits us. It is a concept that recognises that stock of natural elements, such as forests, biodiversity, soils and rivers are a valuable asset to society. Biodiversity is a core component of natural capital it underpins the ecological condition and quality of ecosystems that support the provision of ecosystem services.

Enhanced natural capital is a priority theme of the Ayrshire Regional Economic Strategy. The Biodiversity Strategy will support the delivery of this, as a healthy natural environment has economic benefits for the region.

The example below illustrates how forests (Natural Capital) provides all of these services.

Natural Capital	**Forest/Woodland**	
Ecosystem Service	**What it means**	**Forest Example**
Provisioning	Tangible goods	Timber, food, medicine
Regulating	Regulate environmental conditions	Water regulations, carbon storage
Cultural	Non-material benefits	Recreation, wellbeing, aesthetic value
Supporting	Fundamental life supporting processes	Nutrient cycling, soil formation

Ecosystem Services are the direct and indirect contributions ecosystems provide that we require to survive. There are four types of ecosystem services: Provisioning, Regulating, Cultural and Supporting.

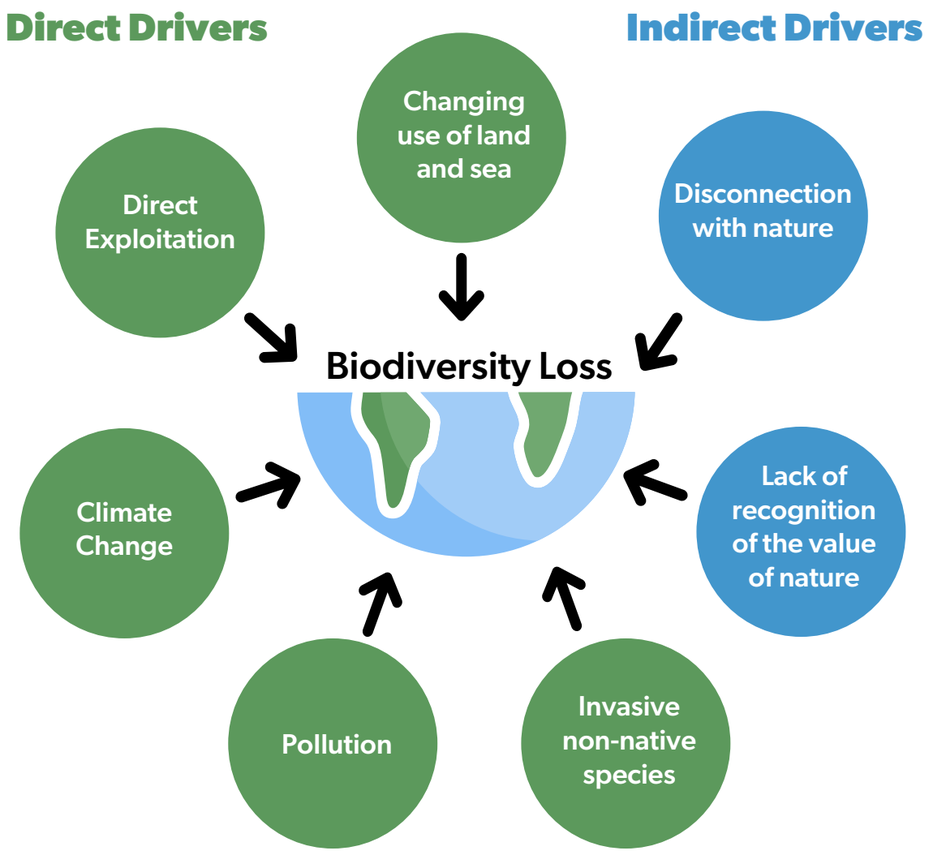


NatureScot

1.3 Threats to Biodiversity

Most people are aware of the wide variety of wildlife, flora and fauna, with which humans share the natural environment and of the increasing numbers of threats they face.

In the last century human impacts have led to large scale loss of biodiversity, this is occurring worldwide and at a local level, within the United Kingdom more than one hundred species have disappeared. The IPBES Global Assessment of Biodiversity (May 2019) report identified five direct drivers of global biodiversity loss and two indirect drivers:



Curlew

Curlew, although often seen in winter in large numbers around coasts and estuaries, migrate inland in spring to nest in upland farmland and lowland moorland. They favour semi-natural, rough grazing or less intensively managed moorland or arable land, livestock farms in Scotland's marginal uplands provide important habitat. The breeding population of curlews has declined by almost 50% since the mid 1990s, manly due to loss or fragmentation of suitable habitat. Maintaining diverse habitats such as open ground that has vegetation of different heights for hiding nests and chicks, wet areas with broken ground for feeding on worms and insects and minimising disturbance/predation can help these ground nesting birds.

Photography by Eric Rietveld

2. Strategic Context

In 2022 at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted which set out four long-term goals and twenty three targets for the 2050 Vision for biodiversity.

In response to this the Scottish Government have introduced Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity, with aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and restore biodiversity by 2045. This includes the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 and the first delivery plan 2024-2030.

The South Ayrshire Biodiversity Strategy sets out how we aim to contribute locally to the global effort to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Some of the key international, national and local policy context is set out below:

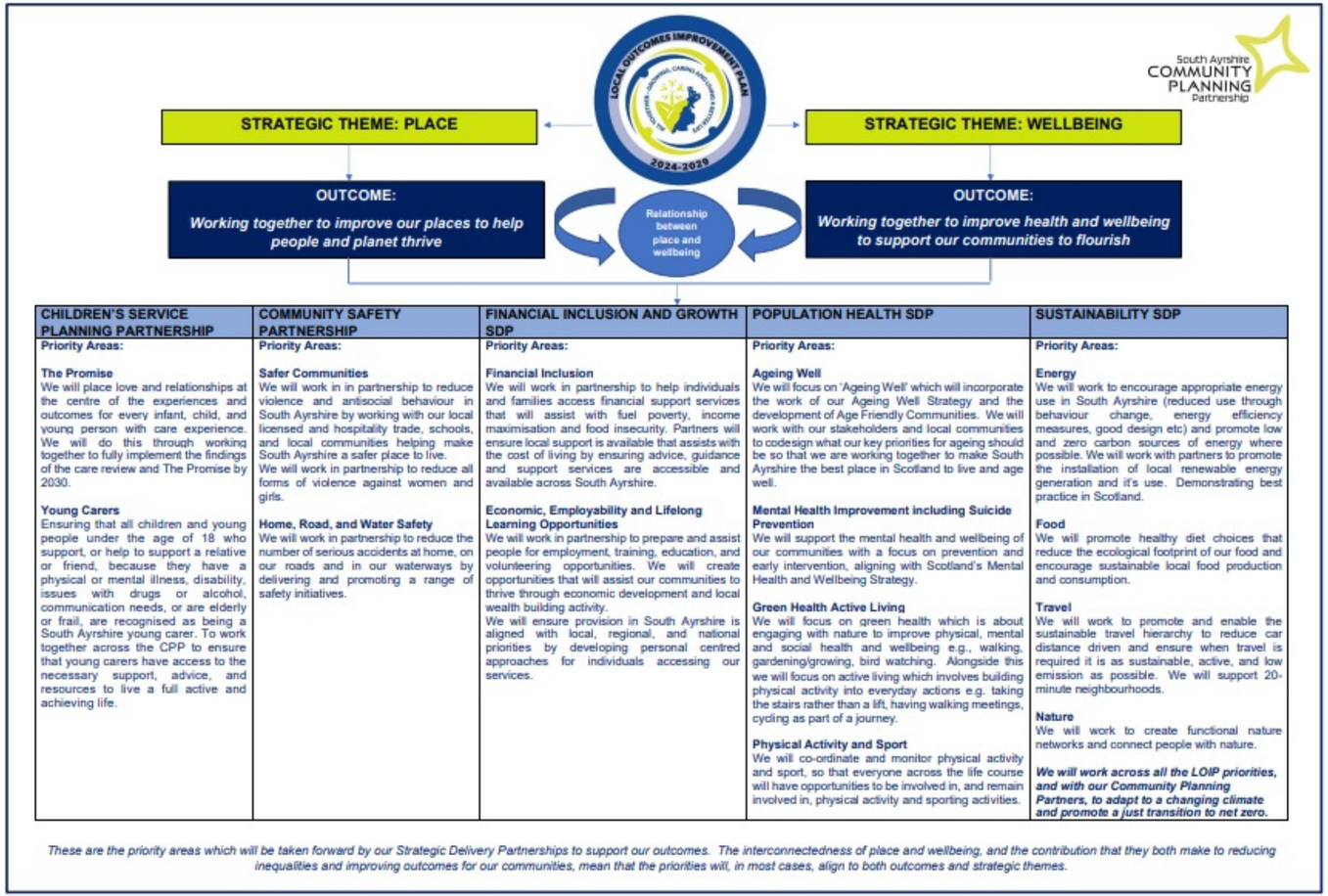
International	The UN Convention on Biodiversity Kunming -Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)	The UN Sustainable Development Goals	The Edinburgh Declaration
National	Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill	Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004	National Planning Framework 4	Framework for Nature Networks in Scotland
Regional & Local	Ayrshire Regional Economic Strategy	SAC Local Outcomes Improvement plan 2024-2029	South Ayrshire Council Plan 2023-2028	SAC Local Development Plan
	SAC Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy	SAC Open Space Strategy	SAC Food Growing Strategy	

Photography by Eric Rietveld

2.1 The Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2024 – 2029

The Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) is a statutory requirement under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, that mandates Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) to produce a LOIP and locality plan.

Nature is a priority area with the Sustainability Strategic Development Partnership (SDP). Delivery of the Biodiversity Strategy actions will be overseen by the Nature Subgroup reporting to the Sustainability SDP and in turn the Community Planning Board.



CHILDREN'S SERVICE PLANNING PARTNERSHIP	COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP	FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND GROWTH SDP	POPULATION HEALTH SDP	SUSTAINABILITY SDP
Priority Areas: **The Promise** We will place love and relationships at the centre of the experiences and outcomes for every infant, child, and young person with care experience. We will do this through working together to fully implement the findings of the care review and The Promise by 2030. **Young Carers** Ensuring that all children and young people under the age of 18 who support, or help to support a relative or friend, because they have a physical or mental illness, disability, issues with drugs or alcohol, communication needs, or are elderly or frail, are recognised as being a South Ayrshire young carer. To work together across the CPP to ensure that young carers have access to the necessary support, advice, and resources to live a full active and achieving life.	**Priority Areas:** **Safer Communities** We will work in in partnership to reduce violence and antisocial behaviour in South Ayrshire by working with our local licensed and hospitality trade, schools, and local communities helping make South Ayrshire a safer place to live. We will work in partnership to reduce all forms of violence against women and girls. **Home, Road, and Water Safety** We will work in partnership to reduce the number of serious accidents at home, on our roads and in our waterways by delivering and promoting a range of safety initiatives.	**Priority Areas:** **Financial Inclusion** We will work in partnership to help individuals and families access financial support services that will assist with fuel poverty, income maximisation and food insecurity. Partners will ensure local support is available that assists with the cost of living by ensuring advice, guidance and support services are accessible and available across South Ayrshire. **Economic, Employability and Lifelong Learning Opportunities** We will work in partnership to prepare and assist people for employment, training, education, and volunteering opportunities. We will create opportunities that will assist our communities to thrive through economic development and local wealth building activity. We will ensure provision in South Ayrshire is aligned with local, regional, and national priorities by developing personal centred approaches for individuals accessing our services.	**Priority Areas:** **Ageing Well** We will focus on 'Ageing Well' which will incorporate the work of our Ageing Well Strategy and the development of Age Friendly Communities. We will work with our stakeholders and local communities to codesign what our key priorities for ageing should be so that we are working together to make South Ayrshire the best place in Scotland to live and age well. **Mental Health Improvement including Suicide Prevention** We will support the mental health and wellbeing of our communities with a focus on prevention and early intervention, aligning with Scotland's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. **Green Health Active Living** We will focus on green health which is about engaging with nature to improve physical, mental and social health and wellbeing e.g., walking, gardening/growing, bird watching. Alongside this we will focus on active living which involves building physical activity into everyday actions e.g. taking the stairs rather than a lift, having walking meetings, cycling as part of a journey. **Physical Activity and Sport** We will co-ordinate and monitor physical activity and sport, so that everyone across the life course will have opportunities to be involved in, and remain involved in, physical activity and sporting activities.	**Priority Areas:** **Energy** We will work to encourage appropriate energy use in South Ayrshire (reduced use through behaviour change, energy efficiency measures, good design etc) and promote low and zero carbon sources of energy where possible. We will work with partners to promote the installation of local renewable energy generation and it's use. Demonstrating best practice in Scotland. **Food** We will promote healthy diet choices that reduce the ecological footprint of our food and encourage sustainable local food production and consumption. **Travel** We will work to promote and enable the sustainable travel hierarchy to reduce car distance driven and ensure when travel is required it is as sustainable, active, and low emission as possible. We will support 20-minute neighbourhoods. **Nature** We will work to create functional nature networks and connect people with nature. ***We will work across all the LOIP priorities, and with our Community Planning Partners, to adapt to a changing climate and promote a just transition to net zero.***

These are the priority areas which will be taken forward by our Strategic Delivery Partnerships to support our outcomes. The interconnectedness of place and wellbeing, and the contribution that they both make to reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for our communities, mean that the priorities will, in most cases, align to both outcomes and strategic themes.

2.2 South Ayrshire Council Plan 2023-2028

Sustainability, climate change and biodiversity

The council aims to both fulfil and show leadership in relation to our statutory climate change, sustainability, and biodiversity duties across all our services, decision making and work with partners. We have committed to be net zero by 2045 and to adapt to the already locked in impacts of a changing climate. In doing so we aim to ensure a just transition for people and nature, supporting ecological recovery and wellbeing, reducing inequalities and creating sustainable, liveable places where people are connected to nature, climate literate and understand the natural systems we rely on, are supported to develop green skills and can work in a fast-evolving local green jobs market, travel less overall and make active and sustainable travel choices first.

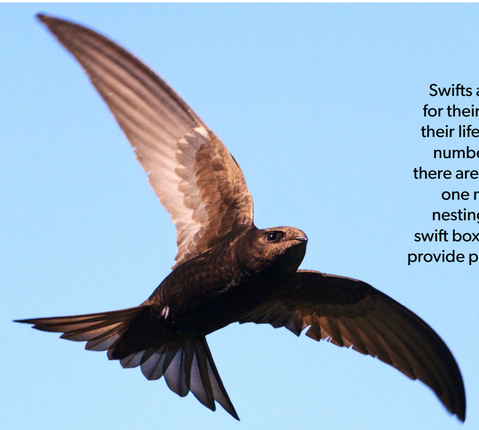
Sustainability, Climate Change and Biodiversity is a cross-cutting theme for the current South Ayrshire Council Plan.

2.3 Edinburgh Declaration

The Edinburgh Declaration, signed by South Ayrshire Council, is a commitment by subnational governments and local authorities to address the challenges of biodiversity and climate change. It emphasizes the importance of healthy biodiversity, which is crucial for maintaining ecological health and the ecosystem services that supports human wellbeing.

The Edinburgh Declaration:

- recognises the vital contributions of local government in delivering biodiversity outcomes and calls for greater collaboration among various stakeholders, including local communities, and the private sector, to effectively address biodiversity challenges.
- calls for transformative changes across all levels of governance to halt biodiversity loss and address climate change effectively. This includes integrating biodiversity considerations into all sectors of policy and decision-making.



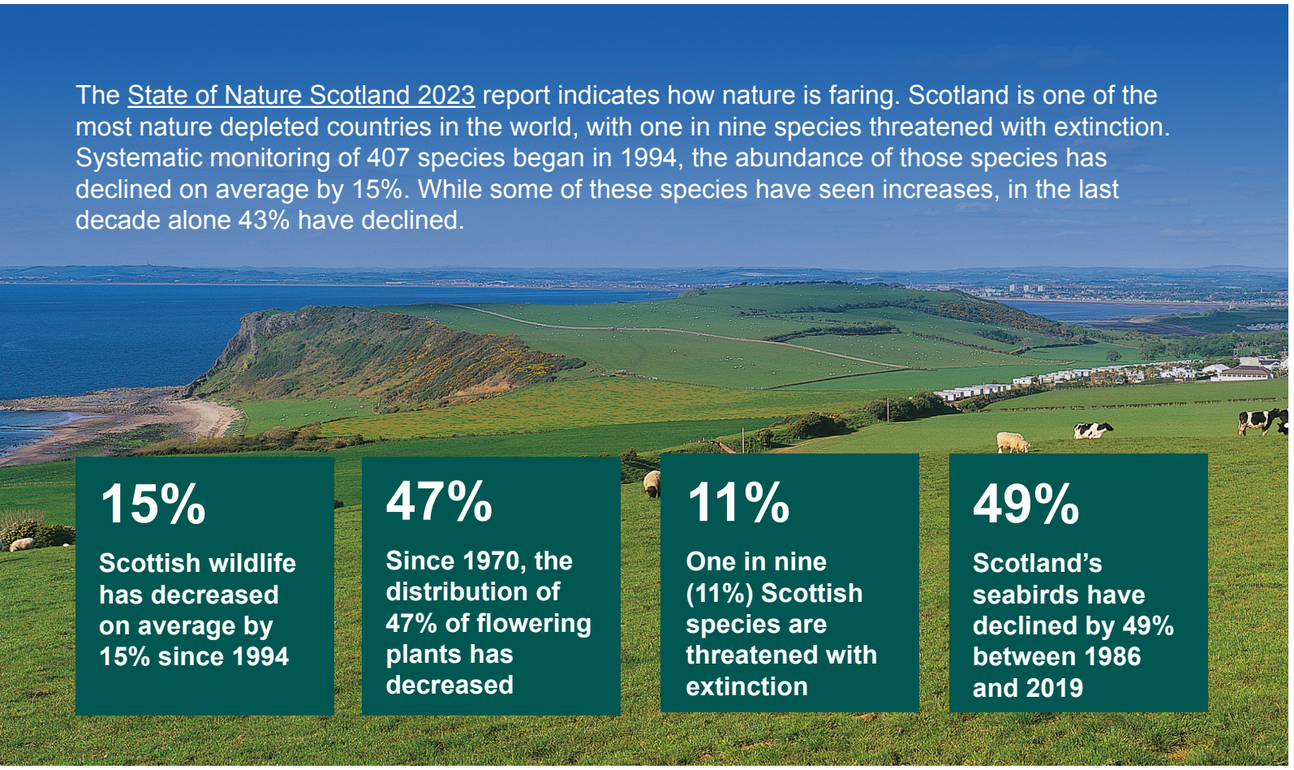
Swift

Swifts are summer visitors to the UK, known for their aerial acrobatics they spend most of their life in the air and only land to nest. Swift numbers have decreased rapidly in the UK, there are many factors behind this decline but one major reason is the decline in suitable nesting habitat in older buildings. By fitting swift boxes or swift bricks to buildings we can provide places for these remarkable little birds to nest.

3. State of Nature

3.1 Biodiversity in Scotland

The State of Nature Scotland 2023 report indicates how nature is faring. Scotland is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, with one in nine species threatened with extinction. Systematic monitoring of 407 species began in 1994, the abundance of those species has declined on average by 15%. While some of these species have seen increases, in the last decade alone 43% have declined.



The evidence around the scale and nature of the biodiversity crisis is strong, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 reports that:

In our terrestrial landscapes:

- The Biodiversity Intactness Indicator indicates that Scotland has retained just over half of its historic land-based biodiversity. That is slightly more than other parts of the UK, but Scotland still ranks in the bottom 25% of nations.
- Measurements of natural capital indicate it has declined by over 15% since 1950. The Natural Capital Asset Index finds that only around 64% of Scotland's protected woodlands are in a favourable or recovering condition despite being the habitat with the greatest ecosystem services potential in Scotland.
- There has been a 24% decline in average abundance of 352 terrestrial and freshwater species since 1994 (noting that 1994 was not a high point) and a 14% decline in range for 2,970 terrestrial and freshwater species since 1970.
- An expert review of diversity within species found that of 26 key species selected for assessment, four were classed as being at risk of severe genetic problems. Drought-sensitive plants (mosses and liverworts) have shown strong declines since 1990. Despite recent improvements in air quality, pollution-sensitive lichens have continued to decline since 1971.

3.2 Biodiversity in South Ayrshire

South Ayrshire is home to a wide range of habitats and species. Some of our important areas for nature are safeguarded through statutory protection, however many of our nature-rich areas do not have the same level of protection but are recognised locally as Wildlife sites.

The effects of climate change can already be seen in South Ayrshire, several species that once would have been considered a rarity for the region are now becoming more common. This northern expansion of species range in the UK is a significant response to climate change. Some some plants and animals are struggling to survive in places they once thrived and have their habitat range squeezed into smaller areas. Upland and montane species are very vulnerable to rising temperatures. As are freshwater species, during the summer water temperatures are already near or encountering lethal high temperatures and oxygen depletion resulting in fish deaths. Statutory sites alone cannot protect biodiversity, for ecosystems to remain healthy they must be connected through the landscape. A connected landscape allows wildlife to move between areas of suitable habitat and into new areas, which increases the resilience of habitats and the populations of species using them.

3.2.1 Designated sites

There are a number of nature rich sites in South Ayrshire that are statutory designated sites or recognised locally as being important for nature.

In South Ayrshire we have 32 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), they are designated for either biological or geological features.

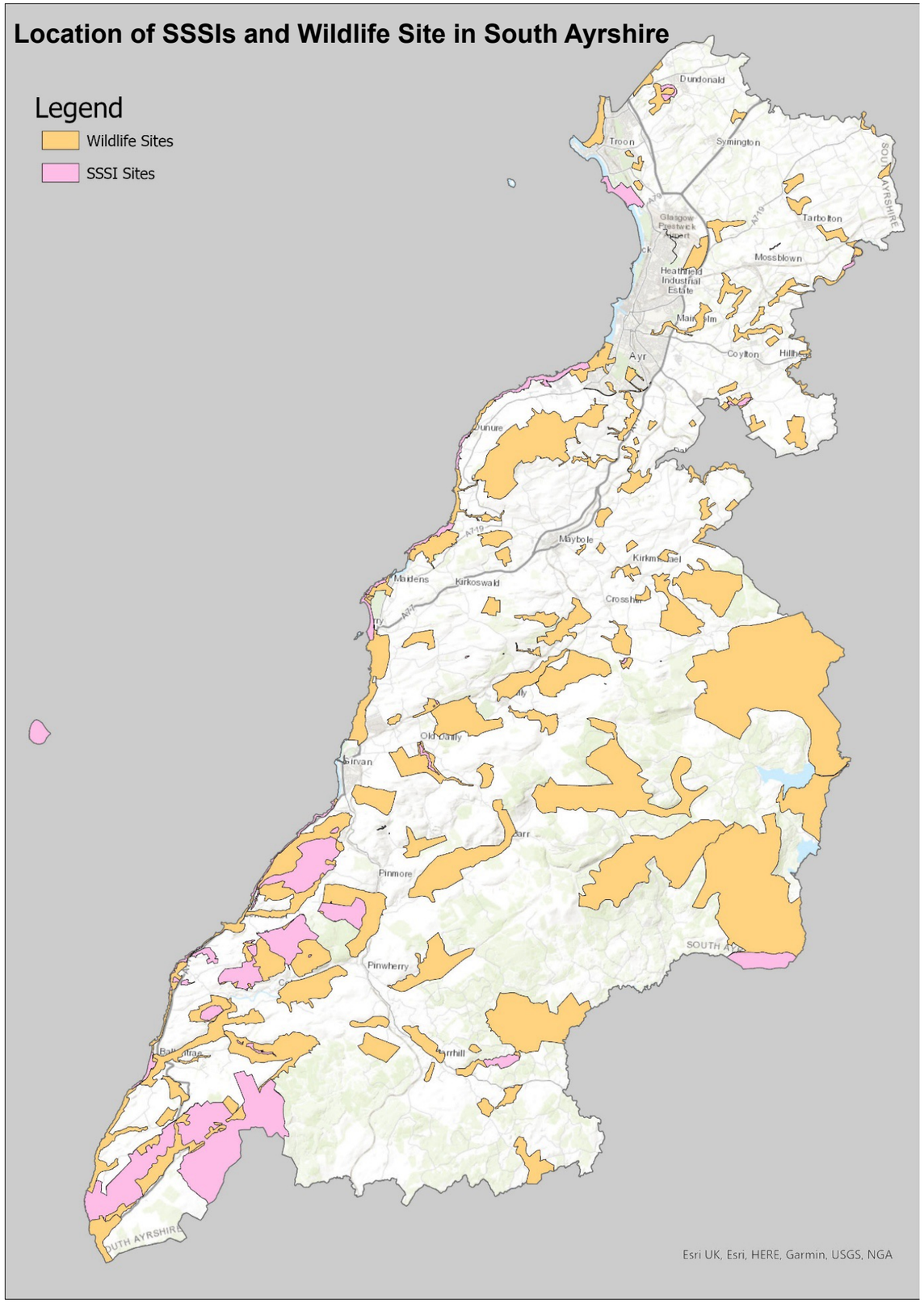
We have 14 biological, 15 geological and 3 mixed (biological and geological) sites. SSSIs are a statutory designation made by NatureScot under The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

There are 4 Natura sites in South Ayrshire, 2 Special Areas of Conservation(SACs) and 2 Special Protection Areas(SPAs), 2 of which are only partially located in South Ayrshire. Natura sites are the European network of protected sites.

In Scotland, SACs and SPAs are given legal protection by the Habitats Regulations.

Our wildlife sites are the next highest in value for nature conservation after statutorily designated sites. There are 105 Wildlife Sites, confirmed and provisional sites, in South Ayrshire designated by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (the Trust) for their importance for nature. In addition, the Trust manages 4 Reserves in South Ayrshire for the benefit of both people and wildlife, all of their reserves overlap in part with statutory designated sites.

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) are sites outside of protected areas that are managed effectively to achieve positive effects for biodiversity. There are currently no OECMs in South Ayrshire however sites that demonstrate effective management practices that contribute to biodiversity and meet NatureScots Nature30 criteria can become recognised as an OECM.



3.2.2 Habitats

Ayrshire contains a remarkable range of habitats from the marine environments of the Firth of Clyde, notably the internationally important Ailsa Craig, to the uplands of the Straiton Hills & Carrick Forest. The 2001 LBAP included a comprehensive suite of Habitat Action Plans for 26 habitat types which together cover almost all habitat types in Ayrshire and will continue to be used as a point of reference for both habitats and species.

The habitat types have been put into broad habitat types to correspond with the strategic outcomes of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Delivery Plan Actions.

Broad habitat type	Includes
Coastal & Marine	Subtidal zones*, Estuaries*, Interidal zones* (sediment, rocky, shingle shores), Dune systems*, Maritime cliff & health*, Shingle above high tide*,
Freshwater	Rivers & Stream*, Fen, Carr, Marsh and reedbed*, Standing Open Water*, Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh*,
Woodlands	Native Woodland*, Parkland and Policy Woods*, Coniferous Woodland*, Riparian Woodland,
Grasslands	Acid Grasslands*, Base-rich Grassland*, Unimproved neutral Grassland*,
Farmland*	Field margins, Field boundaries such as hedgerows, dry stane dykes, water margins, farm ponds and wetlands,
Uplands/peatlands	Upland health*, Blanket bog*, Montane*,
Urban*	Parks, cemeteries, gardens, golf courses, allotments, hospital & school grounds, vacant and direct land, wildlife corridors such as path/ cycle networks, hedgerows, road verges.

Table 1 Key habitat types in South Ayrshire. Habitats marked with an (*) have full plans in the 2001 Pan Ayrshire LBAP

The Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL) for habitats have been identified as the focus for conservation efforts.

3.2.3 Species

South Ayrshire is home to a fantastic array of wildlife; animals, plants and fungi. Many of Scotland's iconic species are present at the southerly edge of their range and the region's mild climate also supports many more southerly species at their northern ranges in the UK.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 are key pieces of legislation that safeguard various species and their habitats. Further guidance can be found on the NatureScot website, Species license A-Z guide, which has information on many of Scotland's protected species and summaries of offences in relation to each one (NatureScot, 2025).

The Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL) for species i.e. animals, plants, and fungi have been identified as the focus for conservation efforts. However, there are species that are locally or regionally important to South Ayrshire that are not included on the Scottish Biodiversity List.

We will work with partners to identify a South Ayrshire Species List the list of notable species and review periodically. Some of the species in this list will also be listed on the SBL however others will not, these will be species of local rarity or distinctiveness or that have declined in numbers or range locally.

3.2.4 Biological Records

South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC) is our local environmental records centre (LERC). SWSEIC are a not-for-profit organisation that collects, collates and manages biological records, and run workshops and events to engage more people with wildlife identification and recording.

Biological records are important to help us establish the distribution and size of species and detect any changes over time. This helps us understand how the environment is changing both positively in response to habitat creation or restoration work or negatively due to habitat loss or climate change.

This information is essential to protecting our local nature. The records assist with planning and development decision making ensuring rare and locally important species and habitats are protected from damage. They also identify suitable areas for enhancing and restoring habitat as well as creating new spaces thus, helping to create a connected landscape for wildlife.

As with many regions wildlife in South Ayrshire is under recorded. We will work together as a partnership to increase number of records for the region, through events, workshops, and promoting opportunities to involve more people in identifying local wildlife and sending in records.

4. Create a connected landscape for nature

Photography by Eric Rietveld

4.1 Connected Landscape - Why this matters

Connectivity is an essential part of nature. When nature-rich sites are fragmented it is difficult for wildlife to move through the landscape to different areas. Creating a connected landscape for nature is key to the survival of animal and plant species, it is necessary for functioning and healthy ecosystems, and is crucial in ensuring genetic diversity and adaptation to pressures such as climate change.

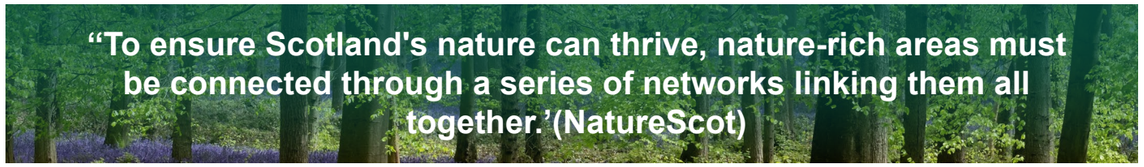
One of the outcomes of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is that:

'Nature Networks across our landscapes will underpin the resilience and health of species and habitats'

This will ensure nature-rich sites, restoration areas, and other environmental projects are connected through a series of areas of suitable habitat i.e. habitat corridors and stepping-stones of habitat. This regional and national approach to protect and restore nature, will also bring benefits to people as a key delivery mechanism of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is that our:

'Towns and cities will include nature-rich environments close to all communities, contributing to Nature Networks and measurable increases in urban biodiversity.'

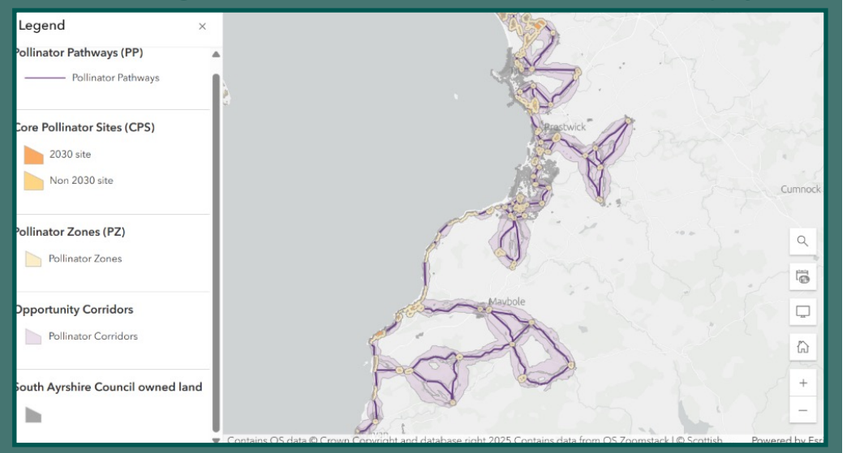
Nature Networks are also embedded in the fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) as a means of ensuring positive effects for biodiversity from development.



4.2 Connected Landscape - Case Study

The Ayrshire Nectar Network is a flagship initiative led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (The Trust) to create and connect nectar and pollen-rich habitats in South and North Ayrshire. The Trust has carried out habitat opportunity mapping using a Geographic Information System(GIS) model to identify viable gap sites in the pollinator habitat network. This mapping can be used to inform decision making for future habitat enhancement and creation projects.

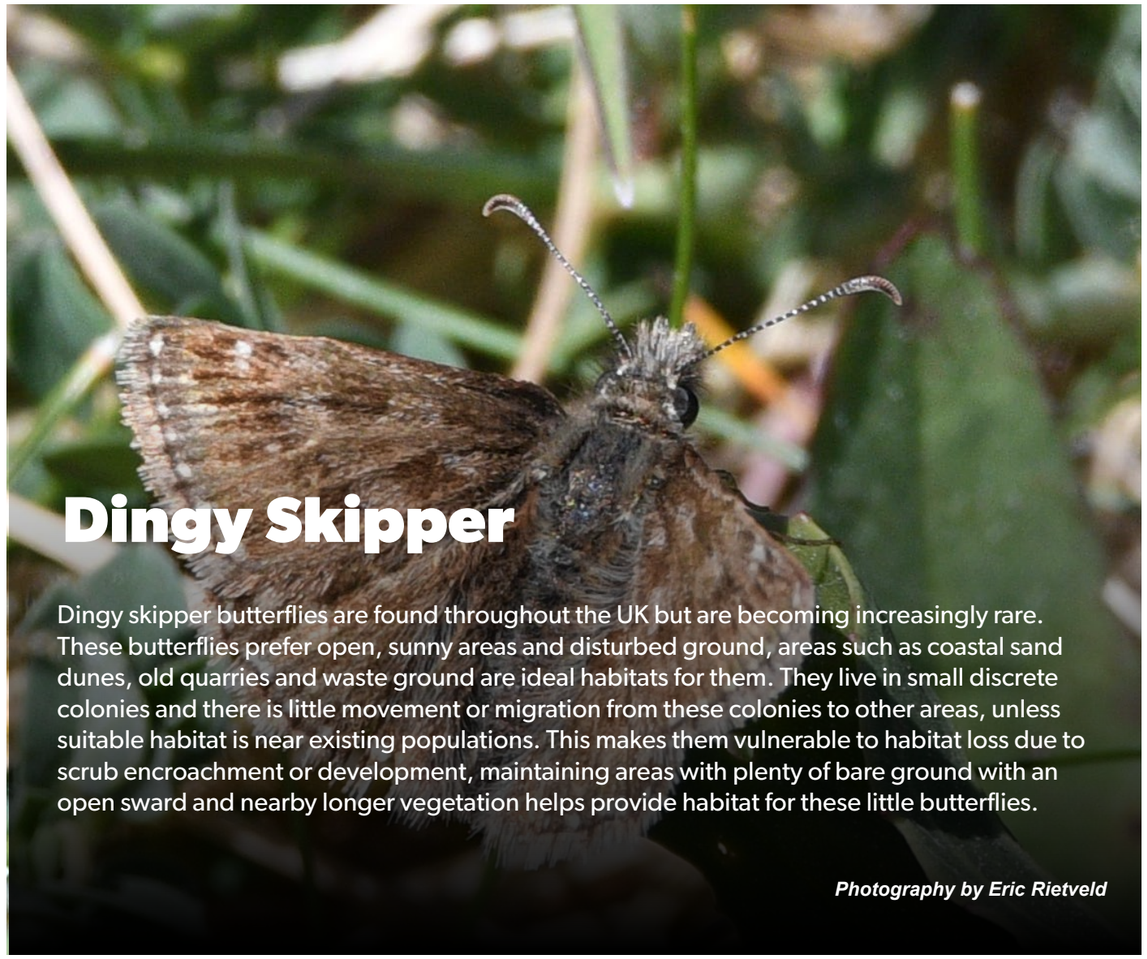
The Ayrshire Nectar Network has a strong community focus and works with landowners and local communities to address gaps in the pollinator habitat network.



4.3 Connected Landscape - Our key activities to 2030

Through the development of the new Local Development Plan 3(LDP3) South Ayrshire will facilitate the design and implementation of a spatially defined Nature Network by 2030. The draft Nature Network spatial mapping will be developed using available data and consultation with stakeholders through the LDP process. Our strategic Nature Network will aim to connect 30 by 30 sites within South Ayrshire and consider appropriate nature network routes into neighbouring local authority areas.

South Ayrshire Council will create further habitat & opportunity mapping for other habitats including Woodlands, Wetlands and Bog & Heath. The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) 2021 Habitat Connectivity Maps has already identified many existing opportunity areas for these habitats and by working with existing datasets and tools along with local expertise we aim to identify key sites for connecting habitats and identify opportunity gaps. We recognise our four river catchments already provide connectivity for wildlife through South Ayrshire, the protection and enhancement of the river and riparian habitats will be a vital contribution to connecting habitats on a landscape scale.



Dingy Skipper

Dingy skipper butterflies are found throughout the UK but are becoming increasingly rare. These butterflies prefer open, sunny areas and disturbed ground, areas such as coastal sand dunes, old quarries and waste ground are ideal habitats for them. They live in small discrete colonies and there is little movement or migration from these colonies to other areas, unless suitable habitat is near existing populations. This makes them vulnerable to habitat loss due to scrub encroachment or development, maintaining areas with plenty of bare ground with an open sward and nearby longer vegetation helps provide habitat for these little butterflies.

Photography by Eric Rietveld

5. Secure and Mainstream Positive Effects for Biodiversity

5.1 Positive effects - Why this matters

Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity in all of their activities. This includes:

- Integrating biodiversity considerations into their decision-making processes;
- Engaging with staff, partners and the public to raise awareness and promote understanding of biodiversity issues.

and further mandated by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011

- Produce a report every three years detailing actions to comply with this biodiversity duty.

Securing positive effects for biodiversity is one of six statutory outcomes introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. National Planning Framework 4(NPF4) embeds biodiversity considerations into the planning process, the policy aims to create sustainable and resilient environments that benefit both people and nature. Policy 3 is the main framework for protecting biodiversity, however improving biodiversity is a cross-cutting theme that runs throughout NPF4.

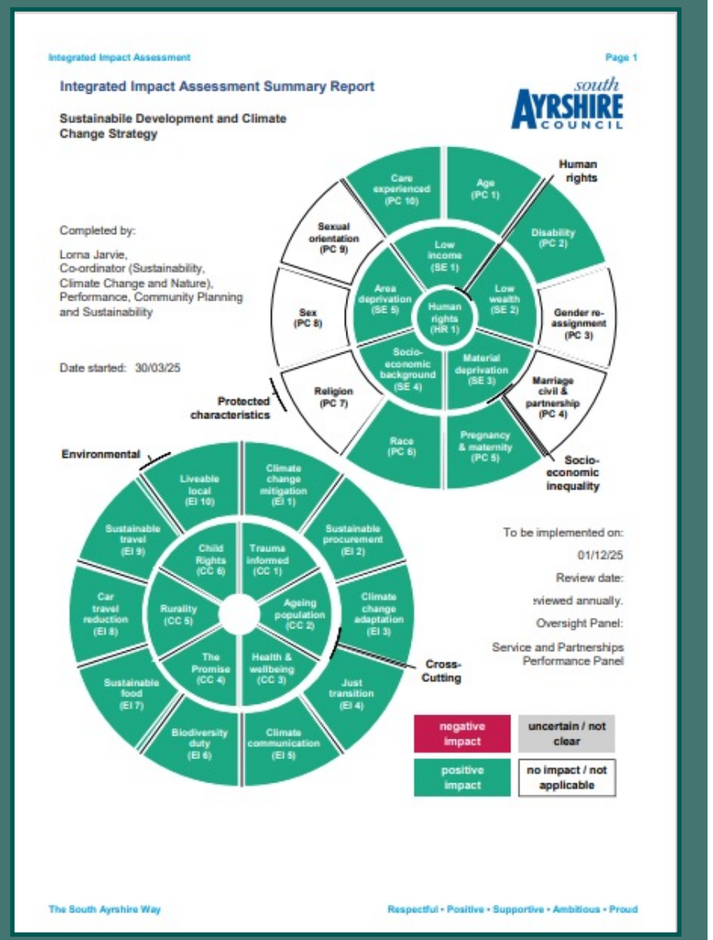
5.2 Positive effects - Case Studies

Integrated Impact Assessment

An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has to be carried out for all proposals that will have a significant impact or result in a significant change for the communities or staff of South Ayrshire Council, and is seeking approval from Elected Members.

The IIA has ten questions for Sustainability, Climate Change and Biodiversity, that ask decision makers to assess for positive and negative impacts providing justification for the impact rating and providing information on any mitigations required for negative impacts.

As the IIA is completed, a summary document is generated, offering a clear visual overview of the positive and negative impacts of the assessed policy and any mitigations required.



Sustainable Design Guidance

Our Professional Design Services Team have produced South Ayrshire Council Sustainable Design Guidance (SAC SDG) Part 1 that covers South Ayrshire Council's; non-domestic and domestic new-build developments, and non-domestic estate refurbishment.

The guidance outlines a clear pathway to help the Council meet Scottish Government Net Zero targets. It promotes a holistic approach to sustainability, and addresses Biodiversity and Ecology as one of its key areas.

The guidance focuses on the following aspects that run through the design process.

- Conservation, restoration, expansion and improvement of habitats and green spaces by;
  - Protecting irreplicable habitats
  - Retaining, and mitigating damage to, existing habitats
  - Achieving overall biodiversity Net Gain, and
  - Mitigating the impacts of climate change
- Improving, and reinstating, links between green spaces, habitats and wider ecosystems
- Safeguarding protected species
- Removing, and preventing the spread of, invasive species
- Benefitting and engaging communities by;
  - Improving access to, and time spent in, nature, for all demographics.
  - Getting people from local communities (more) involved in management of local green spaces.
  - Providing/Enhancing economic benefits of green spaces (such as farming/community food production, providing sustainable resources/materials, tourism and other business opportunities)
- Taking account of NPF4 Policy 3.
- Ensuring that spaces can be maintained, without pollution, and minimising the resources required to do so.
- Designing with function and usability in mind

Proposals must target an increase of the Green Space Factor(GSF) of a site by +10%, and target achievement of a minimum GSF of 0.4 and must also demonstrate a targeted +10% biodiversity net gain in all three of; area habitats, hedgerow, and watercourse biodiversity units defined by DEFRA's Biodiversity metric. Note that at the time that Sustainable Design Guidance was written a Scotland specific tool was under development by the Scottish Government. Once this has been released then this tool should be used for this assessment alongside the Green Space Factor Calculation.

5.3 Positive effects - Our key activities to 2030

Planning plays a vital role in protecting and enhancing biodiversity. It is a statutory duty for all local planning authorities to have regard for biodiversity conservation. The planning system offers an opportunity to reverse biodiversity loss through promoting wildlife conservation and habitat restoration.

The SAC Ecology and Biodiversity Planning Guidance Note, stipulates that planning applications take account of policy 3 of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which is set out as follows:

'To protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks.'

South Ayrshire Council is preparing the evidence report for our next Local Development Plan (LDP3), which is timetabled to be completed June 2029. We will develop the LDP in line with national guidelines and mitigation hierarchy to protect, conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity. It will also promote nature recovery and nature restoration across the development plan area, including by:

- facilitating the creation of nature networks and strengthening connections between them to support improved ecological connectivity.
- restoring degraded habitats or creating new habitats
- incorporating measures to increase biodiversity, including populations of priority species.

Biological records are vital in planning and development decision making. We will work in partnership with the nature subgroup stakeholders we will produce a species list for South Ayrshire. We will also work with partners to increase participation in wildlife recording the and South Ayrshire Council will mainstream the sharing of information gathered in the course of its duties with our local environmental recording centre.

We will mainstream and support the implementation of both our Integrated Impact Assessments and the Sustainable Design Guidance, ensuring that biodiversity is integrated into our decision-making and operations.

6. Protect, enhance, restore, and create habitat for nature

6.1 Protect, enhance,restore - Why this matters

Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is to conserve at least 30% of Land, Water and Seas by 2030. This is known as the 30 by 30 initiative and in Scotland 30 by 30 sites are made up of Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

6.2 Protect, enhance,restore - Case Studies

Wildflower meadows - ***Photography by Eric Rietveld***

Our Grounds Maintenance team have been creating wildflower areas throughout South Ayrshire on areas that were formally amenity grassland. The wildflower sites are mostly annual mixes that benefit pollinators and the sites also create a more visually appealing and diverse range of open spaces for members of the public to enjoy.

Golf South Ayrshire have created large perennial meadows on areas of rough on their Belleisle, Seafield and Lochgreen golf courses. Perennial meadows are in flower from May through to late September providing a food source for pollinating insects throughout the summer. The meadow areas are cut and removed once a year, and are adjacent to areas of vegetation that is left uncut to provide overwintering habitat for invertebrates. Which is especially beneficial to caterpillars and pupae of our butterfly and moth species.

Wetlands

We have created wetland scrapes in Rozelle Park, these are areas that retain water throughout the summer providing habitat for amphibians and aquatic invertebrates.

New wetland habitats have been introduced at Belleisle Golf Course enhancing the course for both people and nature. Ponds have been designed to collect and hold excess water during periods of heavy rainfall, helping adapt to our changing climate. The ponds have shallow edge margins to provide habitat for frogs and aquatic invertebrates, the deeper areas provide suitable breeding habitat for toads. The wetland areas are surrounded by wildflowers and other habitats to benefit wildlife.

6.3 Protect, enhance,restore - Our key activities to 2030

South Ayrshire Council estate offers potential to deliver biodiversity enhancements to benefit both nature and people. This strategy recognises the amenity and recreational value our green spaces have and the need for a balance to make best use of our green and blue spaces. We will create management or maintenance plans for South Ayrshire Council owned Greenspace that reflects the Open Space Strategy and biodiversity outcomes.

We will work with local communities and partners to identify sites suitable for habitat creation, enhancement or opportunities to enhance the council estate for nature, and use the spatially mapped Nature Networks to help identify opportunity areas throughout South Ayrshire.

We will work with partners to develop a set of ‘ready to go’ project proposals at varying scales to take advantage of any future funding opportunities that may arise.

7. Connecting people with nature

7.1 Connecting people - Why this matters

Disconnection with nature is one of the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss. Connecting people with nature matters as it improves well-being and inspires people to care for and protect nature.

Time in natural settings reduces stress, boosts mood and improves physical health. By providing people with a wide range of opportunities where they can become involved in activities in their local greenspace can nurture healthier individuals and stronger communities.

Tackling the nature emergency is one of the greatest challenges we face in this generation and we recognise the best way to approach this is through collaboration with all partners and the support of our local communities. The Community Planning Partnership through the Nature subgroup will continue to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and to show that even small changes can make a big difference in protecting our natural world.

7.2 Connecting people - Case Studies

The South Ayrshire Ranger Service runs Adult and Junior Conservation Volunteer groups. Volunteering provides an opportunity for people to make a difference for nature and become more involved in their local greenspace, it is also a form of gentle to moderate exercise and provides a social outlet for those who are interested in the natural world.

Pollinator Friendly Symington was formed by a group of residents to make their gardens pollinator friendly and to create a network of pollinator sites throughout the village. The group shares skills and knowledge to garden for wildlife in mind and organises events and activities to engage people in wildlife recording. The group also maintains a wildflower verge in the village and have planted pollinator friendly trees.

7.3 Connecting people - Our key activities to 2030

We will continue to support local groups and individuals that are interested in making a difference for nature in South Ayrshire. We will look to build an online presence for information, resources and advice that will share knowledge and inspire others.

The Stepping Stones project, the pilot will support 12 communities in South Ayrshire to make space for nature. A range of resources and communications will be prepared to spread the word and help everyone in South Ayrshire understand what is happening locally and how they can play their part. The project will help people to connect with and support nature locally in ways that work for them and in turn will grow environmental awareness and support both climate literacy and green health.

8. Enabling delivery and capacity building

Nature literacy, communications and training will be used to support a shift in ethos, renewed motivation for action and support implementation of both Integrated Impact Assessment and Sustainable Design Guidance, delivering better decisions for the council. We will monitor our progress and work to increase the wildlife data for South Ayrshire to inform decisions:

- Increase our wildlife recording to support our nature networks and planning processes.
- Inform service planning with integration of the strategy activities into the performance reporting system.
- Use best practice guidelines to monitor species and habitats to gauge whether activities have benefitted biodiversity.

The Community Planning Partners recognises they cannot tackle the nature emergency alone. The partnership will continue to develop an enabling approach, through the nature subgroup of the Sustainability SDP, to engage with all stakeholders.

This will support a broad understanding of how the Community Planning Partnership can deliver a holistic local-led approach contributing to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's aim to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and restore biodiversity by 2045.

Appendix 1 Legislation, strategies, policies and targets

International

The UN Convention on Biodiversity 2050 – Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Target of 'Living in Harmony with Nature' remains central to international thinking. Its aim is that: 'By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.'

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

'Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' (2019) identified five main direct drivers for biodiversity loss. These are:

1	2	3	4	5
Land-use change	Climate Change	Pollution	Natural resource use and exploitation	Invasive species

The Habitats Directive

The Habitats Directive is the short name for European Union Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

The Directive led to the establishing of European sites and setting out how they should be protected, it also extends to other topics such as European protected species.

In Scotland, the Habitats Directive is translated into specific legal obligations by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. This piece of legislation is usually known as the Habitats Regulations.

National

Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004

The SABAP will meet the council's statutory duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 for all public bodies to 'further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. This biodiversity duty is about taking care of nature all around us, not just in specific protected sites and for particular species.' (NatureScot,2023)

The Habitats Regulations

In Scotland, the Habitats Directive is translated into specific legal obligations by the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. This piece of legislation is usually known as the Habitats Regulations.

The Habitats Regulations cover the requirements for:

- protecting sites that are internationally important for threatened habitats and species – i.e. European sites
- a legal framework for species requiring strict protection – i.e. European protected species

The Habitats Regulations have been amended in Scotland, most recently in 2019 as a result of the UK leaving the EU. These amendments mean that we must continue to apply the requirements of the Habitats and Birds Directives to how European sites are designated and protected.

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045

This strategy sets out a clear ambition: for Scotland to be **Nature Positive** by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045. Our vision is:

By **2045**, Scotland will have restored and regenerated biodiversity across our land, freshwater and seas.

Our natural environment, our habitats, ecosystems and species, will be diverse, thriving, resilient and adapting to climate change.

Regenerated biodiversity will drive a sustainable economy and support thriving communities, and people will play their part in the stewardship of nature for future generations.

Natural Environment Bill

The Bill put in place key legislative changes to restore and protect nature, including, but not restricted to, targets for nature restoration that cover land and sea, and an effective, statutory, target-setting monitoring, enforcing and reporting framework.

National Planning Framework 4

Scotland's planning system and development have an important contribution to make towards addressing the global biodiversity crisis. This is reflected in the Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), which sets out new requirements for development to deliver positive effects, primarily under Policy 3.

Nature Networks are embedded throughout the fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) as a key means of ensuring positive effects for biodiversity from development. Across multiple policies the leading role that Local Authorities will have in facilitating the design and implementation of Nature Networks, through Local Development Plans (LDPs) for example, is clear.

Framework for Nature Networks in Scotland

By 2030 Scotland will have evolving, flexible and resilient Nature Networks connecting nature-rich areas allowing wildlife and natural processes to move and adapt to land use and climate change pressures. The networks will help build people's connection to nature, providing biodiversity-rich spaces that deliver local benefits, and meet the priorities of local communities for nature. Local Authorities up to have a spatially defined Nature Network, connecting important areas for biodiversity, by 2030.

Photography by Eric Rietveld

South Ayrshire Biodiversity Strategy 2026

Appendix 2 National Planning Framework 4 - Policy 3

a) Development proposals will contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, including where relevant, restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks and the connections between them. Proposals should also integrate nature-based solutions, where possible.

b) Development proposals for national or major development, or for development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention. This will include future management. To inform this, best practice assessment methods should be used. Proposals within these categories will demonstrate how they have met all of the following criteria:

i. the proposal is based on an understanding of the existing characteristics of the site and its local, regional and national ecological context prior to development, including the presence of any irreplaceable habitats.

ii. wherever feasible, nature-based solutions have been integrated and made best use of

iii. an assessment of potential negative effects which should be fully mitigated in line with the mitigation hierarchy prior to identifying enhancements.

iv. significant biodiversity enhancements are provided, in addition to any proposed mitigation. This should include nature networks, linking to and strengthening habitat connectivity within and beyond the development, secured within a reasonable timescale and with reasonable certainty. Management arrangements for their long-term retention and monitoring should be included, wherever appropriate

v. local community benefits of the biodiversity and/or nature networks have been considered.

c) Proposals for local development will include appropriate measures to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, in accordance with national and local guidance. Measures should be proportionate to the nature and scale of development. Applications for individual householder development, or which fall within scope of (b) above, are excluded from this requirement.

d) Any potential adverse impacts, including cumulative impacts, of development proposals on biodiversity, nature networks and the natural environment will be minimised through careful planning and design. This will take into account the need to reverse biodiversity loss, safeguard the ecosystem services that the natural environment provides, and build resilience by enhancing nature networks and maximising the potential for restoration." (P38)

The NPF4 provides the following definitions of terms:

"Mitigation Hierarchy"

The mitigation hierarchy indicates the order in which the impacts of development should be considered and addressed. These are:

i. Avoid – by removing the impact at the outset.

ii. Minimise – by reducing the impact.

iii. Restore – by repairing damaged habitats.

iv. Offset – by compensating for the residual impact that remains, with preference to on-site over off-site measures.

Glossary

Definitions are taken from accepted international sources where practical such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD Glossaries) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES Glossary).

Biodiversity

Short for biological diversity, the diversity of life in all its forms – the diversity of species, of genetic variations within one species, and of ecosystems.(CPD)

Conservation

The management of human use of nature so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to current generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. (CBD)

Conservation of Biodiversity

The management of human interactions with genes, species, and ecosystems so as to provide the maximum benefit to the present generation while maintaining their potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations; encompasses elements of saving, studying, and using biodiversity. (CBD)

Corridor

A geographically defined area which allows species to move between landscapes, ecosystems and habitats, natural or modified, and ensures the maintenance of biodiversity and ecological and evolutionary processes. (IPBES)

Ecosystem

Communities of organisms interacting with each other and with their non-living environment – forests, wetlands, mountains, lakes, rivers, deserts and agricultural landscapes. (CBD - modified)

Ecosystem diversity

The variety of ecosystems that occurs within a larger landscape, ranging from biome (the largest ecological unit) to microhabitat. (CBD)

Ecosystem health

Ecosystem health is a metaphor used to describe the condition of an ecosystem, by analogy with human health. Note that there is no universally accepted benchmark for a healthy ecosystem. Rather, the apparent health status of an ecosystem can vary, depending upon which metrics are employed in judging it, and which societal aspirations are driving the assessment. (IPBES)

Ecosystem services

Processes by which the environment produces benefits useful to people, akin to economic services. (CBD)

Endangered species

A technical definition used for classification referring to a species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. IUCN The World Conservation Union defines species as endangered if the factors causing their vulnerability or decline continue to operate. (CBD)

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Extinction

The evolutionary termination of a species caused by the failure to reproduce and the death of all remaining members of the species; the natural failure to adapt to environmental change. (CBD)

Extirpation

The local or regional loss of a species that stills exists elsewhere. This is sometimes referred to as local extinction.

Functional connectivity (landscape connectivity)

The degree to which the landscape facilitates the movement of organisms (animals, plant reproductive structures, pollen, pollinators, spores, etc.) and other environmentally important resources (e.g., nutrients and moisture) between similar habitats. Connectivity is hampered by habitat fragmentation (q.v.). (IPBES – for Landscape connectivity)

Genetic diversity

The variety of genes within a particular population, species, variety, or breed. (CBD)

Habitat

A place or type of site where an organism or population naturally occurs. (CBD) Habitat degradation The diminishment of habitat quality, which results in a reduced ability to support organisms. Human activities leading to habitat degradation include polluting activities and the introduction of invasive species. Adverse effects can become immediately noticeable, but can also have a cumulative nature. Biodiversity will eventually be lost if habitats become degraded to an extent that species can no longer survive. (CBD – modified)

Habitat fragmentation

Fragmentation of habitats occur when a continuous habitat has become divided into separate, often isolated small patches interspersed with other habitats. Small fragments of habitats can only support small populations and these are more vulnerable to extirpation. The patches may not even be habitable by species occupying the original undivided habitat. The fragmentation also frequently obstructs species from migrating. Habitat fragmentation stems from geological processes that slowly alter the lay out of the physical environment or human activities such as land clearing, housing, urban development and construction of roads or other infrastructure. Adverse effects sometimes are not immediately noticeable and sufficient habitats may ostensibly be maintained. However inbreeding, lack of territories and food shortage are some of the problems small populations can encounter. Fragmentation of habitats is therefore expected to lead to losses of species and genetic diversity in the longer term. (CBD – modified)

Habitat loss

The outcome of a process of land use change in which a ‘natural’ habitat-type is removed and replaced by another habitat-type, such as converting natural areas to production sites. In such process, species that previously used the site are displaced or destroyed. Generally this results in a reduction of biodiversity. (CBD – modified)

In situ conservation

A conservation method that attempts to preserve the genetic integrity of gene resources by conserving them within the evolutionary dynamic ecosystems of the original habitat or natural environment. (CBD)

Invasive species

Invasive species are those that are introduced – intentionally or unintentionally – to an ecosystem in which they do not naturally appear and which threaten habitats, ecosystems, or native species. These species become invasive due to their high reproduction rates and by competing with and displacing native species that naturally appear in that ecosystem. Unintentional introduction can be the result of accidents (e.g. when species escape from a zoo), transport (e.g. in the ballast water of a ship); intentional introduction can be the result of e.g. importing animals or plants or the genetic modification of organisms. (CBD)

Keystone species

A species that has a disproportionately large effect on its environment relative to its abundance. (Paine 1995, the term's originator.)

Landscape

An area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction or natural and/or human factors. (EU – European Landscape Convention)

Mitigating measures (mitigation)

Measures that allow an activity with a negative impact on biodiversity, but reduce the impact on site by considering changes to the scale, design, location, process, sequencing, management and/ or monitoring of the proposed activity. It requires a joint effort of planners, engineers, ecologists, other experts and often local stakeholders to arrive at the best practical environmental option. An example is the unacceptable impact on biodiversity of the construction of a certain road that is mitigated by the construction of a wildlife viaduct. (CBD – modified)

Native species

Plants, animals, fungi, and micro-organisms that occur naturally in a given area or region. (CBD)

Nature (natural environment)

All living and non-living things, and processes that occur naturally on Earth. (CBD – modified)

Nature-based solution

Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human wellbeing and biodiversity benefits. (IUCN)

Nature network

A Nature Network connects together naturerich sites, including restoration areas and other environmental projects, through a series of areas of suitable habitat, habitat corridors, and stepping-stones. Nature-positive Halting and reversing nature loss by 2030, measured from a baseline of 2020. (Locke et al. 2020.)

Red List

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species provides taxonomic, conservation status and distribution information on taxa that have been globally evaluated using the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. This system is designed to determine the relative risk of extinction. (CBD – modified)

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Regeneration

The process of assisting the recovery of ecosystem processes serving and/or enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. This may not necessarily be the original habitat type or include the original species communities. In woodland, regeneration is the spontaneous recovery of native tree species that colonise and establish in abandoned fields or natural disturbances; this process can also be assisted through human interventions such as fencing to control livestock grazing, weed control, and fire protection. (Crouzeilles et al. 2017.)

Restoration

The process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem towards or to good condition, as a means of conserving and/or enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem resilience; for habitat types listed in Annexes I and II, restoration means the process of assisting their recovery to the highest level of condition attainable. (EU – proposed)

Restoration measure

Any measure assisting ecosystem recovery actively or passively towards or to good condition and enhancing biodiversity, including measures taken for the improvement of the condition of an ecosystem or for the re-establishment of natural and semi-natural ecosystems, as well as measures to improve the connectivity of natural and seminatural ecosystems, and to enhance species populations, also across national borders. (EU – proposed)

Species

A group of organisms capable of interbreeding freely with each other but not with members of other species. (CBD)

Species diversity

The number and variety of species found in a given area in a region. (CBD) Sustainable development Development that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generation without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations. (CBD from Bruntland Commission Report, 1987.)

Wild species

Organisms captive or living in the wild that have not been subject to breeding to alter them from their native state. (CBD)

Wildlife

Living, non-domesticated animals. Some experts consider plants also as part of wildlife. (CBD)

30 by 30

Target 3 in the Global Biodiversity Framework "Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories". For Scotland 30 by 30 sites are made up of Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

Get in touch with us about the strategy by emailing sustainable.development@south-ayrshire.gov.uk

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