Key Biodiversity Areas and business

Critical biodiversity information to support corporate decision-making

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Leading businesses are increasingly accountable to consumers, investors and legislators for their interactions with the natural environment. Key Biodiversity Areas are mapped by local experts using transparent standardized criteria to identify globally significant sites for biodiversity. As these become available via the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) for business, they will ensure that the majority of critical concerns are identified as early as possible.

The business case for biodiversity

Biodiversity has become a strategic consideration for businesses which increasingly recognize how biodiversity-related risk and the value of ecosystem services can impact their operations. A company's track record in managing these issues can affect access to and retention of land and other natural resources, capital, markets and skilled staff. Responsible management of biodiversity concerns can result in benefits such as opportunities to meet consumer demand for environmentally sustainable products. This applies not only to companies that depend on primary production, such as forestry, fisheries, agriculture, oil and gas development and mining, but to the private sector generally. Meanwhile, rising public awareness is increasing public demand that companies should be accountable for their impacts on biodiversity. Poor biodiversity performance can damage corporate reputations, thereby reducing consumer and investor support, complicating relations with regulators and potentially leading to increased costs and liability. In response, many leading businesses are seeking to incorporate biodiversity concerns into their investment decisions, notably into the design and implementation of their business practices and supply chain management systems.

Critical information at the site scale

When exploring new operations and assessing the risks and opportunities associated with sourcing practices, businesses need accurate biodiversity information at the site level. The location of legally protected areas is important but the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) approach represents an new, consistent methodology to identify and map biologically critical sites at the scale of practical management units—concessions and other properties as well as protected areas. They have been identified through national processes by local stakeholders using a set of transparent and globally standardized criteria. KBAs incorporate information from the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas, Plantlife International's Important Plant Areas, IUCN's Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity, and sites identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction. To meet the KBA criteria, a site must contain:

- One or more globally threatened species;
- One or more endemic species which are globally restricted to the site or surrounding region;
- Significant concentrations of a species (e.g. important migratory stops, nesting sites, nurseries or breeding areas); and/or
- Globally significant examples of unique habitat types and species assemblages.

In addition to the species and habitats triggering these criteria, KBAs will contain many other species, some of which would doubtless be recognized as conservation priorities in their own right if we had more information on their status. This is

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Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE)

An alliance of nearly 100 international, national and local conservation partners that have come together to identify the highest priority KBAs for immediate action at the global level. AZE sites hold at least 95% of the population of one or more Critically Endangered or Endangered species, meaning that if they are lost, at least one species will become extinct.
See: www.zeroextinction.org

Important Bird Area (IBA)

A site identified for bird species and populations that trigger KBA criteria. Pioneered by the BirdLife International partnership, the IBA methodology provides the original basis for the KBA concept. IBAs have been identified across most of the world, with over 10,000 sites documented in the World Bird Database and more than 100 national directories published. Updating these sites to include other biodiversity, in addition to birds, is an ongoing process.
See: www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites

Important Plant Area (IPA)

A site identified for plant species and populations that trigger KBA criteria, through the work of Plantlife International and partner organizations.
See: www.plantlife.org.uk

Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity

A site identified for freshwater species and populations that trigger KBA criteria, through the work of the IUCN Species Program Freshwater Biodiversity Unit and partner organizations.
See: cms.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/our_work/about_freshwater

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The accepted authority and database on the global conservation status of the world's species. The List is informed by a network of specialist expert groups that categorize species based on a set of explicit quantitative criteria and standards which are subject to review and continuous appraisal.
See: www.iucnredlist.org.

particularly the case for many plants and invertebrates, where knowledge of distributions is often poor and patchy. KBAs have been identified in over 170 countries, and are continuously updated and refined as new information becomes available from key sources at national and international levels. Work is underway to refine the criteria to identify critical habitats in freshwater and marine systems.

The scientific and practical value of KBAs is already reinforced by numerous laws, policies and environmental safeguards around the criteria for defining critical habitats and important sites for biodiversity conservation. In the future, KBAs could be deployed to support the efforts of business to define "High Conservation Value Forests" as components of certification for an increasing range of commodities. These factors establish KBAs as a strong foundation on which the private sector can draw when assessing potential biodiversity risks and opportunities.

Recognizing the value of KBAs to the private sector, conservation organizations (currently BirdLife International, and Conservation International, with IUCN as an observer) have partnered with UNEP and business leaders to develop the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) for business—an internet-based tool designed to facilitate corporate sector access to these critical data. Using this tool, businesses can access KBA information, integrated with other key site-scale conservation data, early in the project development cycle. This allows biodiversity concerns to be accommodated as efficiently as possible, thereby minimizing future risks and costs.

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Key Biodiversity Areas are defined by four main criteria: endemic species such as the West Nimba toad (*Nimbaphrynoides occidentalis*); globally threatened species such as Eastern gorillas (*Gorilla beringei*); contain good examples of unique biomes such as the cloud forests of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia; or represent sites important for congregating species such as Greater flamingoes (*Phoenicopterus ruber*).

Sources

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas: Best Practice Protected Areas Guidelines Series No. 15. (2007) Identification and gap analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas: Targets for comprehensive protected area systems. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. Available electronically at: www.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-015.pdf