

# Key Biodiversity Areas and governments

## National conservation supporting a global strategy to meet international targets



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Governments are striving to develop comprehensive protected area networks. The approach to mapping Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) is grounded in nationally lead processes that identify globally significant sites for biodiversity. Based on existing management units, these sites are prime candidates for protection through public, private or communal management.

### A commitment to protect biodiversity

The Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) enjoined Parties to establish “a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biological diversity.” These obligations are reinforced by numerous meetings and agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals, the World Summit for Sustainable Development, and Fifth World Parks Congress. At the Seventh CBD Conference of the Parties, nations adopted a Programme of Work on Protected Areas (Decision VII/281) with “the objective of the establishment and maintenance by 2010 for terrestrial and by 2012 for marine areas of comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas”. Four main elements to achieve this were identified: implementation, governance and equity, enabling activities, and monitoring. The first goal of the first element—“to establish and strengthen national and regional systems of protected areas integrated into a global network as a contribution to globally agreed goals”—requires the identification of sites of global biodiversity importance in each country to identify gaps in existing protected area systems and prioritization of action among those sites. Such gap analyses support reporting on the “coverage of protected areas” indicator, which was provisionally adopted by the Parties for measuring progress towards the 2010 target of reducing biodiversity loss (Decision VII/30), and the implementation of Target 5 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (Decision VI/9).

Nations have already invested heavily in protected area systems but despite these efforts, recent analyses show that many serious gaps in coverage remain in the lead up to 2010. This has been in part due to reliance on simple area targets (e.g. 10% of a country or biome) which do not account for the actual presence or absence of species that these protected areas are often intended to protect. In addition, while broad directions for implementing these targets exist, specific guidance on identifying critical sites for biodiversity is urgently required to meet these important commitments as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.

### National processes to inform a global network

The Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) approach is a consistent methodology for identifying and mapping biologically critical sites at the scale of practical management units—protected areas, concessions, and properties—which can inform protected area targets and identify gaps. They have been identified at a national level by local stakeholders using a set of transparent and globally standardized criteria. KBAs build immediately from existing information, most notably the existing IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, BirdLife International’s Important Bird Areas, Plantlife International’s Important Plant Areas, IUCN’s Important Sites for

### Contacts

#### Alliance for Zero Extinction

Mike Parr: [mparr@abcbirds.org](mailto:mparr@abcbirds.org)

#### BirdLife International

Leon Bennun: [leon.bennun@birdlife.org](mailto:leon.bennun@birdlife.org)

#### Conservation International

Matt Foster: [m.foster@conservation.org](mailto:m.foster@conservation.org)

#### IUCN

Jane Smart: [jane.smart@iucn.org](mailto:jane.smart@iucn.org)

#### IUCN Freshwater Biodiversity Unit

Wil Darwall: [william.darwall@iucn.org](mailto:william.darwall@iucn.org)

#### IUCN Global Marine Species Assessment

Kent Carpenter: [kent.carpenter@iucn.org](mailto:kent.carpenter@iucn.org)

#### Plantlife International

Elizabeth Radford: [liz.radford@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:liz.radford@plantlife.org.uk)

#### UNEP—World Conservation Monitoring Centre

Jon Hutton: [jon.hutton@unep-wcmc.org](mailto:jon.hutton@unep-wcmc.org)

### 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.iucnredlist.org)

Freshwater Biodiversity, and sites identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction. These factors make KBAs relatively inexpensive and easy to identify in a fairly short time. 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 always contain many other species that may benefit from site conservation, some of which might be recognized as conservation priorities in their own right if we had more information on their status. This is particularly the case for many plants and invertebrates, where knowledge of distributions is often poor and patchy. The criteria allow identification of important sites immediately, using existing information, while allowing for continuous refinement as new information becomes available. This is especially urgent in marine and freshwater environments, where these criteria are actively undergoing testing and refinement to identify globally important sites for aquatic biodiversity. This is supported by the Global Marine Species Assessment and Global Freshwater Biodiversity Assessment, which will improve knowledge on the conservation status of species on the IUCN Red List.

### A broad constituency

These sites represent priorities for protection at local, national and international levels and are likely to possess significant social, economic or cultural value to local communities. KBAs have already been identified by local stakeholders in over 170 countries to date—two thirds of these in the developing world. KBA criteria have formed the basis for recognizing critical or special habitats by a number of governments from Ecuador to the European Union. In the Philippines and Brazil's Pará state, KBAs have been granted special protected status while in others, such as Madagascar, Liberia, and the USA, KBAs satisfy policy definitions for critical habitats. Other nations, such as Samoa, are actively using the KBA criteria to conduct gap analyses and protected area planning. Sites identified through such processes also meet the environmental safeguards and definitions of leading development banks such as the World Bank and International Finance Corporation. For governments, KBA criteria provide a tool to identify national networks of globally important sites that will be priorities both for national investment and for channeling resources from international instruments such as the Global Environment Facility and Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. While many KBAs are likely to be protected already, a significant portion will require conservation action through public, communal or private approaches.

### 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](http://www.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-015.pdf)