

APPG for Nature – Global Deal for Nature and a Green Recovery

2 July 2020; 15:00-16:30

Online via Zoom



Chair: Barry Gardiner MP

Panelists:

- Kate Cole, East Sussex County Council and representing the Association of Local Government Ecologists
- Stephanie Wray, Managing Director of RSK Biocensus Ltd and Chair of CIEEM's Strategic Policy Panel
- Martin Harper, Global Conservation Director of the RSPB
- Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Secretariat: Jason Reeves (Head of Policy and Communications, CIEEM), Amber Connett (Policy and Communications Officer, CIEEM)

Registrations: 129

Attendees: 81

Parliamentary Attendees: Kerry McCarthy MP (APPG for Nature Officer), Baroness Young of Old Scone (APPG for Nature Officer), Lord Randall of Uxbridge (APPG for Nature Member), Jonathon Wentworth MP.

AGENDA

1. Welcome from Chair

Barry welcomed attendees to the event. He reflected on the adoption of a strategic plan for biodiversity in 2002 by the Convention on Biological Diversity, noting that the 2010 goals for biodiversity were not met in full. He added that the zero draft of a global biodiversity framework for COP15, set to take place in Kunming, China, states that the decline of biodiversity continues and is projected to continue or worsen under the current scenario.

Barry noted that after two decades of effort, the objective is now to stabilise the trends in biodiversity in 10 years and allow for recovery in next 20 years, adding there is a need for a greater sense of urgency to prevent goals being pushed into the future.

2. Introduction to the APPG

Jason introduced the APPG for Nature noting that the group hopes to hold a series of events to raise awareness of nature and biodiversity and to extend the reach of this work. He also noted that it is now possible to join as an Associate member at www.cieem.net/appgfornature.

Jason informed attendees that they are able to use the 'chat' and 'Q&A' functions throughout the event.

3. Opening Remarks from Panelists

All panelists gave a 3-minute opening remark:

- a. Kate Cole, East Sussex County Council and representing the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE)

Kate noted the need to manifest the commitments to recover from Covid-19 and address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, adding that a green recovery should ensure these crises are considered throughout all sectors. She also added that there is a need to harness changes in behaviour and the renewed public connection with natural environment.

ALGE recognise that local government authority (LGA) ecologists will play a vital role in green economic growth but only a third of local authorities have access to in-house ecologists. Kate added they are looking to deliver in partnership with others, for example local nature partnerships.

Kate set out the following asks to central government on behalf of ALGE:

- Sufficient powers and resources devolved at the local level to make healthy, thriving places.
- Implement a new sustainable land use and farming system to restore nature with sufficient funds and access.
- Increased funding to support LGAs to deliver landscape-scale habitat creation and enhancement working in collaboration with community groups.
- Biodiversity Net Gain and net zero planning and development to protect and enhance nature with a stronger biodiversity duty on LGAs
- Reform planning and NPPF to better support green infrastructure and to provide nature-rich spaces within a 5-minute walk from home
- Urgent establishment of a working group with LGAs, professional bodies and government departments to identify the skills and expertise needed to implement the 25-Year Environment Plan.
- Ensure LGAs are fit for purpose and have adequate guidance, adequately skilled staff and access to training.
- Do not downgrade protected status of species to promote growth.

Kate closed by recognising the ambition and skill of LGA ecologists and added that they will continue to work with partners to ensure delivery of the 25-year Environment Plan and net-zero carbon.

- b. Stephanie Wray, Managing Director of RSK Biocensus Ltd and Chair of CIEEM's Strategic Policy Panel

Stephanie opened by reflecting on the proposed goal in the COP15 zero draft to "live in harmony with nature" by 2050, noting that to get there, we need to understand goods and services that nature provides and husband them accordingly. She added that this affects all of government and everything that the government does should be held to that standard.

Stephanie also recognised the importance of the private sector, adding that businesses need to understand what services from nature they require and their impact on biodiversity and climate. There is a need to mainstream biodiversity assessment but also need to streamline it with a comprehensive set of indicators and protocols to measure how businesses affect natural capital and biodiversity, in particular. Making this happen will create green jobs throughout the private sector.

Stephanie closed by urging the need to make progress on 'making space for nature' and making our protected areas bigger, better and more joined-up. She added that government cannot leap to simplifying planning and licences without associated large-scale strategic nature schemes. Effort should also go into green jobs and education for nature to reach to all of society.

c. Martin Harper, Global Conservation Director of the RSPB

Martin opened by highlighting the one million species at risk of extinction, presenting an urgent need to transform economies food and energy systems starting immediately. Martin went on to recognise that the challenge - in the context of the global pandemic – starts with the new global framework for biodiversity and maintaining momentum ahead of the delayed COP15 in China. The global framework is essential to provide strategic context and ambition for applied conservation and so the challenge is to make sure it has the right ambition of targets to address drivers, a standardised accountability framework and adequate financing.

Martin added that the UK government's pledge to establish a ground-breaking Environment Bill provides an opportunity. However, the Bill must quickly be returned to Parliament to be enacted before the UK leaves the EU and must reflect the ambition of the CBD targets. For example, the target for 30% of land area to be well protected for nature by 2030 should also be applied at the UK level.

Martin closed by recognising there is a jeopardy if decision-makers trample environmental protection to rebuild the economy. There is a possibility of causing more issues by taking short-term decisions to quickly rebuild and the economic recovery should help to address the climate and biodiversity crises.

d. Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Barry introduced Mike recognising the fact that 94% of the biodiversity for which the UK is responsible resides in the Overseas Territories (OTs) but only 5% of UK funding allocated for biodiversity goes to the OTs.

Mike began by recognising that the UK OTs hold some of the world's most outstanding ecosystems which underpins sustainable livelihoods through activities such as fishing and production of renewable energies. However, as UK OTs, they are not eligible for most international and national fund sources.

Mike added that the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum is the only organisation which solely promotes good environmental governance and the contribution of biodiversity to well-being and ecosystem services for communities across the OTs and crown dependencies. He noted the biggest threat to conservation in the OTs is lack of funding, for example, there was an 85% cut from UK Government after the banking collapse in 2008 which was never restored.

Mike recognised there is welcome temporary funding for the marine environment, but terrestrial funding is being squeezed. Support is also moving from OT bodies to UK-based government bodies which must change. Mike called for government to restore OT bodies to harness local knowledge and skilled volunteers.

4. Discussion and Q&A

Several questions came in from attendees via the chat function, including from Kerry McCarthy and Lord John Randall who then joined the call.

Kerry noted that the Environment Bill will likely not be brought back before recess and so will be constrained to get it through prior to the end of the Brexit implementation period in December. She added that items of the Bill such as the Office for Environmental Protection will struggle to be fully functioning before the new year and expressed concern that this could lead to gap in governance. Barry added that this also applies to the Environmental Land Management Scheme.

John asked Mike what impact he foresees on biodiversity in the OTs post-Brexit. He also raised the issue that many MPs are more becoming engaged with environmental issues but not specifically for biodiversity and asked how we might change that.

Mike responded noting that the council of Environment Ministers in the OTs considered this at their most recent meeting and agreed that Brexit will have a significant impact on the OTs, particularly Gibraltar. For example, relating to the loss of moderation following environmentally damaging acts by neighbouring countries through common membership of the EU. This means they will require additional diplomatic support from the UK. Leaders are encouraging the UK Government to aid Gibraltar's inclusion in other international agreements to offset that loss. Mike added that other OTs will lose status as OTCs of the EU which reduces funding opportunities and access to trade and information. External safeguards can also mitigate against internal short-term changes in governance which could harm the environment. Mike also responded to Kerry's point noting the concern that the 25-Year Plan made no mention of crown dependencies and very few of the OTs and the Environment Bill does not apply to the OTs.

Martin added that RSPB are concerned that local partners in OTs are dependent on income which has halted due to the pandemic and haven't received economic support such as the furlough scheme in the UK. Martin raised the question as to whether the UK Government wants to take responsibility for what is happening in the OTs and looking at how they provide appropriate support. He noted there is currently a gap in what is needed and what is available.

Barry addressed John's question noting that the discussion around natural capital is helpful in this regard as it mainstreams it in economic activity. He added that there is a need to explain the importance of biodiversity and the economic losses if this is lost. Stephanie added that there is a lack of understanding about how we interact with biodiversity but there is a pressure from the electorate to protect nature. She added that we need to be more effective at driving the understanding that biodiversity underpins everything.

Martin also noted that there is not one single fix and that it requires building strategies, policies, infrastructure and financing to guide good development decisions. There needs to be a joined-up, resourced approach.

Kerry noted that the Species Champions initiative, and the pollinator neonicotinoids campaign, are both good examples of engaging MPs on biodiversity. Mike added that the OTs Conservation Forum are working to expand the Species Champions exercise to include the OTs. He also noted that it is the 20th anniversary of Environment Charters with OTs and we should be celebrating achievements and building on the review of implementation.

Kate added that the environment is often seen as a barrier to development and there is a need to change the language around biodiversity to encompass all the services it provides.

Baroness Barbara Young raised whether an equivalent of the 'zero carbon test' for all government spending and investments could be developed for biodiversity net gain, adding that we should have twin measures for the climate and biodiversity crises. Barry agreed with the importance of metrics and accountability for biodiversity gain. Martin noted there is a carbon budgeting system to judge against but there is no equivalent for nature. He added that there should be a cross-government legal target framework for species recovery etc. and the net gain measure is a tool to implement this by guiding development.

Louise Carver (attendee) raised the following question:

"I would like to know whether Kate and Stephanie have any thoughts about the arrangements of ecologists in different sectors, as various people have mentioned net gain and using metrics is key, but evidence shows (and in particular with planning decisions for housing developments and infrastructure for biodiversity and carbon respectively) there are massive imbalances in expertise that enable good planning decisions to be made. Net gain and offsetting can simply replicate the political imbalances in the planning system."

Kate agreed adding that ALGE and CIEEM are trying to raise standard of reporting so ecological impacts are clear but planning is a complicated process and if there is no ecologist, it can mean that things go through with less scrutiny. Stephanie added that hopefully new funding for a green recovery can be directed towards increasing skills and personnel in LGA as a priority. She also noted that the biodiversity net gain metric is not yet finalised and there are still issues around replacing biodiversity with the correct habitat. There is also confusion over the length of time that the biodiversity net gain policy will in place before it is replaced with environmental net gain. Stephanie also urged the need for a strategic plan for the developer funding from biodiversity net gain (BNG).

Barry noted a comment from Elizabeth Milne, ALGE, stating that "the exemption of national strategic infrastructure from the requirement to deliver a gain in biodiversity is a big flaw in the BNG plan - this is a major investment opportunity in biodiversity that is being missed" and agreed that it should be challenged.

Andy Lester (attendee) sent in "I have a son who has been sitting with me and has said: I don't see anyone doing anything new. We have come out of lockdown where people were on their bikes and enjoying nature in an amazing way. They have now gone back to business as usual. I am really worried that nothing has changed-and there is a lot of talk about change, but nothing new is happening. We are running out of time how can we work together with the wider public to do something incredible?"

Mike noted that OT bodies have expressed that governments are in desperation at loss of income from tourism and so are abandoning environmental safeguards in favour of development. He added that would be difficult to get away from that without a steer and help from UK government. Positively, the OT Conservation Forum have been working to get local populations to take responsibility for their environments e.g. in Monserrat they are working to tackle invasive species and save endemic species by getting people to adopt land and care for it. However, they are facing challenges in getting funding for full projects following pilots.

Martin added we are still in the middle of the destruction but there are interesting signs of change, for example, the £1bn intervention in New Zealand to kickstart recovery, including for nature. There

is also a United States Bill for a rescue package including conservation jobs. The UK Prime Minister has also pledged £40million investment in England. Martin also noted that we need leadership from governments during this time to help the public make changes.

Jason added several points made by attendees in the 'chat', notably:

- Public engagement and education including the GCSE in Natural History.
- Are we alienating Brexiteers?
- Do we need a single target for biodiversity, similar to the 2 degrees Celsius target for the climate emergency?

Stephanie welcomed the GCSE in Natural History but also need to get students interested to take it by incorporating it to the early years. She added that A levels and degree courses in botany and taxonomy should also be considered because these skills in understanding the natural world are critical. Funding is also required for research and PhDs, as well as training at the job level for example Ecological Clerks of Works in construction careers.

Martin responded to comments about a single target for biodiversity, noting that it is difficult, but NGOs have submitted a paper outlining key components in global plan for nature. This includes whether we are bending the curve of extinction, measured through species abundance, extinction risk and quality and extent of habitat. He added that although they support targets for protected areas by 2030, that does not include the whole story. He also recognised the need to engage all citizens to call for higher ambition, accountability and financing to ensure it translates all around the world.

Mike also added that flexibility is required because we don't know enough to set rigid targets. He noted that a lot of incidents occur out of people's control for example, natural disasters. He urged the need to maintain flexibility to react to these unpredictable issues.

COP15

Barry directed the final part of the discussion to COP15 in Kunming noting how it must feed into the Climate COP26. He asked panelists how they see the zero draft for biodiversity being improved, what are the political issues and how they see national governments responding.

Martin noted that an updated version of the draft emerged on Monday and that the draft is being designed to have four key goals around species, habitats and implementation, as well as 20 targets to address drivers. Currently the outcomes are better than the targets and work needs to be done to make them clearer with strong metrics. Martin added there is good attempts to drive links between the climate and biodiversity COPs, for example, with nature-based solutions. However, there is a need for the UK government to demonstrate action at the COP26 and have completed strong diplomacy work to ensure others are on the same path. There is a challenge for the UK government to join up the work of others to make a comprehensive plan.

Parliamentary attendees commented on the current international political situation and how this may place into our ability to work together:

Kerry noted that concerted international action is needed to avoid cultural impunity, for example, the environmental degradation of the Tibetan plateau. She added that the fact that China are hosting the COP15 could give them a platform to make positive changes.

Barbara added that a trade agreement with the United States could cause issues with the EU and China which could put us in a difficult position in terms of influence.

John noted the positives in China, for example, the creation of wetland, however, added that human rights abuses might warrant stronger action. John raised whether a different sort of diplomacy is needed to avoid further escalation and deliver an effective COP15.

Barry noted that there are areas of disjunction in international politics and noted the need of strength and that it is likely very important to China for the COP to be a success which could assist getting cooperation in COP26 in Glasgow.

Jason raised another comment from several attendees noting the suggestion in an article in *Nature* for a species extinction target of 20 per year and asked for the panel's thoughts. Stephanie recognised that there is a background rate of extinctions but was concerned about setting such a target. Kate agreed adding that we could not accept that number of extinctions. Martin did however note that climate warming is sanctioned under the climate conference so the paper in question is looking to find a realistic target. Mike added that we should not change up the nature of targets too much as it could hide losses.

5. Close

Barry thanked all panelists, attendees and Parliamentarians for attending and for the discussion. He also quoted the Dasgupta review which states that nature's resilience is being severely eroded with biodiversity declining faster than at any time in human history. In the past four decades there has been on average a 60% decline in the populations of mammals, birds, fish and reptilians".

Appendix: Questions and Discussion from the 'Chat' Function

From Ben Sykes to All panelists : Stephanie referred to education. Can she reflect on the new GCSE in Natural History championed by Mary Colwell & others, and what else may be needed in addition.

From KERRY MCCARTHY to All panelists : I asked Jacob Rees-Mogg about this at Business Qs today - I cannot see how we can get the Bill through Parliament, and the OEP up and running, by year end. The Bill is not coming back for committee until September. I also mentioned the newts! It looks as if the whole thrust of the Govt approach is away from environmental protections - so do they actually want the Bill to be enacted in current form?

From John Randall to All panelists : Mike, what impact do you see for UKOT's biodiversity post Brexit?

From Katherine Drayson : Everything the panellists has said is spot on and (sadly) nothing they have said is new. So are we all going to take responsibility for lobbying and persuading and educating those who hold the purse strings and make the decisions?

From John Randall to All panelists : Barry, I always feel while many MPs and Peers are engaged in environmental issues I am concerned that biodiversity is not as hot a topic as climate change. Do you agree and what can we do to change that?

From Liz Milne : Couldn't agree more with John Randall's comment about recognising the importance of biodiversity politically. We see this so much at the local government level where biodiversity is seen as a barrier to growth rather than an intrinsic enabler and integral part of growth - its a mindset that must be changed if we are ever going reverse the decline of biodiversity. And a mindset not helped by comments from the PM this week. Maybe a naïve ambition but good and green investment as part of the recovery could be a move in the right direction, helping many see the value and return of this.

From Andrew Blewett to All panelists : I am a ex-remainer now a rejoinder BUT I am concerned that the conversation is starting to sound as if it is unable to convert Brexit into a positive process somehow, for biodiversity as the rest off the debate. Otherwise we are setting the debate up against Brexiteers. This dichotomy is no longer helpful, it alienates Brexit supporting people from our objectives

From KERRY MCCARTHY to All panelists : I can think of two good examples of engaging MPs on biodiversity/ nature - the Species Champions initiative, and also the pollinators/ neonics campaign.

From Fran Witt : I think it is essential that we build urgency into responding to the biodiversity emergency in the post Covid recovery, Building Back Better and a green recovery. We must find a way of harnessing the people's new connection with nature and biodiversity during lockdown and the greater realisation that the world's ecology is fragile.

From Liz Milne : RSPB's postCV19 survey has very clearly shown the public's support and love of nature and the value they place in it

From Barbara Young to All panelists : The Treasury is considering a Zero carbon test for all government investment. can we ask for a net biodiversity gain test for all government and local government investment.

From Richard to All panelists : At least two of the panellists mentioned biodiversity net gain for new developments (as set out in the Environment Bill). How far do the panellists think will this measure go towards achieving John Lawton's vision of more, bigger, better, joined? All the way, somewhere near or nowhere near?

From Humphrey Crick- Natural England : if you were going to spend the PM's £5B - what would you use it for to have the same elevel of benefits for the economy - what would be your top 3 flagship projects?

From Debbie Bartlett to All panelists : there was an editorial in Nature yesterday on the arguments for a single BD metric EDITORIAL 30 JUNE 2020

Fewer than 20 extinctions a year: does the world need a single target for biodiversity?

A proposal for one, simple goal, equivalent to the 2 °C climate target, needs to be thoroughly assessed.

From Danial Winchester to All panelists : I completely agree with what Fran Witt and all panelists and contributors have said about building an urgency into responding to the biodiversity emergency in the post Covid-19 world. As an ecologist I was seriously disappointed and alarmed with the PM's comments on biodiversity being seen as a barrier to building recovery.

From Mark Prina to All panelists : I suspect that there is an assumption that 'natural capital' will provide our 'ecosystem services' without us bothering about species or habitats that are deemed not be essential for our survival or economic growth. Like newts and ancient woodland perhaps?

From Louise Carver : I would like to know whether Kate and Stephanie have any thoughts about the arrangements of ecologists in different sectors, as various people have mentioned net gain and using metrics is key, but evidence shows (and in particular with planning decisions for housing developments and infrastructure for biodiversity and carbon respectively) there are massive imbalances in expertise that enable good planning decisions to be made. Net gain and offsetting can simply replicate the political imbalances in the planning system.

From Fran Witt : I understand that agricultural subsidies are often at odds with biodiversity, often incentivising the destruction of hedgerows, woodlands, and regeneration of the natural environment. Can MPs influence agricultural subsidies so that they explicitly seek to support biodiversity?

From Liz Milne : Further to B Young's comment, the exemption of NSSIPs from the requirement to deliver a gain in biodiversity is a big flaw in the BNG plan - this is a major investment opportunity in biodiversity that is being missed

From Andy Lester to All panelists : I have a son who has been sitting with me and has said: I don't see anyone doing anything new. We have come out of lockdown where people were on their bikes and enjoying nature in an amazing way. They have now gone back to business as usual. I am really

worried that nothing has changed-and there is a lot of talk about change, but nothing new is happening. We are running out of time how can we work together with the wider public to do something incredible?"

From KERRY MCCARTHY : On fran's point, this is the central thrust of the Agriculture Bill, moving to a 'public money for public goods' approach for farm subsidies - so farmers will be rewarded for promoting biodiversity, better soil health, agroforestry, and other ecological objectives.

From Louise Carver : How can we get more into local government? And how can CIEEM help with this?

From Suzie Jackman : What role, or do you see an important role for Local Environmental Record Centres, across the country, in supporting the reporting of net gain and local government planning teams, and helping providing a picture of biodiversity for the UK

From Andy Lester to All panelists : Second item: For some encouragement...A Rocha UK who is working to equip the church on Biodiversity will be facilitating an event with Church of England and Caring for Gods Acre next year to get members of 2,500 churches recording nature next June as a way of getting communities more active in wildlife recording and hope....It will be called Churches Count on Nature. If successful will be rolled out to all 55k churches in the UK eventually!

From Chris Gannaway : As someone at the grassroots on Biodiversity and took part in the Time is Now Lobby on Tuesday, as an observation most people in the environmental sector are treating biodiversity/nature as an add on and do not realise that Nature is a tool in the armoury to help combat climate change therefore must get equal billing.

From Mel Dodd : Good to hear discussion - locally, there is a wish and an ambition to deliver MORE for biodiversity - I've been working in LPA as an ecologist for 20 years and a lot of what we are talking about and hearing from Government is similar - harping back to Biodiversity Action Plans - and we were asking for more, consistent and equal funding for LPA in 2002!!!!

From Barbara Young to All panelists : I had a session with the Acting CE of the National Infrastructure Commission on whether they should be commissioned to do a report on how biodiversity and land use strategy should be better integrated into major infrastructure planning and delivery.

From Mel Dodd : There is also a local ambition for spending biodiversity net gain off-site contributions from developments on the nature recovery network - e.g. Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire - to realise a recovery in biodiversity, support widespread species and focus on priority species that do not do well in urban areas e.g. skylarks, brown hares - and need larger areas of habitat with lower levels of disturbance.

From christine : Ensuring that new legislation does not have unintended consequences is important. Beavers were given protected status and immediately many were shot by vested interests..

From Danial Winchester : I completely agree with what Fran Witt and all panelists and contributors have said about building an urgency into responding to the biodiversity emergency in the post Covid-19 world. As an ecologist I was seriously disappointed and alarmed with the PM's comments on biodiversity being seen as a barrier to building recovery.

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From Matt Wainhouse to All panelists : is there an imbalance between BNG rhetoric and where the problem of biodiversity loss is? My concern is that with all of the excitement around BNG, we are forgetting about the 70% of UK in farmland and 10% under forestry. the current agrienvironment schemes have had some impact but nowhere near enough

From Jack Riggall to All panelists : Will they be producing that report? How did that session go?

From JILL SUTCLIFFE : Very few courses left in botany at all.

From Laura Brook to All panelists : It is interesting to see the draft British Standards for Biodiversity Net Gain consider the social impact of biodiversity loss. It suggests that it will require information

about social impact when assessing projects. Does the panel have thoughts on ways in which this info/data can be collated and assessed for Biodiversity Net Gain projects?

From Mel Dodd : Any new initiatives for biodiversity need to be adequately funded!!!

From Humphrey Crick- Natural England : I was pretty horrified by the Rounsevell et al suggestion to have a target of only 20 extinctions per year - any thoughts?

From Andrew Blewett : Re number of "acceptable" extinctions, much depends on context and quality of measurement - there is a normal background extinction rate, the question is how much we exceed that. We might be aiming to bring anthropogenic extinction down to zero.