



Biodiversity evidence for nature recovery

The NBN Trust contribution to the
Global Biodiversity Framework at COP17

OUR POSITION

Plans for nature recovery should specify the evidence needed for decisions and provide for its verification, sharing, and continuing stewardship from the outset.

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Trust supports implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework by connecting data providers and users through the NBN Atlas and linking UK data with international systems.

At COP17, we bring practical experience of UK biodiversity data infrastructure. We want to help make international evidence requirements workable for data providers and useful to decision-makers, while bringing relevant learning into UK delivery.

Dr Gareth Thomas

Chief Executive, National Biodiversity Network Trust

The case at COP17

COP17 is the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN biodiversity COP. Meeting in Armenia, it will undertake the first global review of collective progress towards implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This is an opportunity to consider how the evidence supporting implementation is produced, connected, and used.^[1]

Our mission, 'Making data work for nature', contributes to the Framework's Targets 20 and 21: capacity and technical cooperation, and access to biodiversity data and knowledge. The previous biodiversity COP, COP16, also recognised the importance of national monitoring and information systems. The Trust contributes through data infrastructure, leadership, and partnerships that connect UK observations with their use.^{[2][3][4]}

The Trust contribution

UK biodiversity evidence draws on the work of volunteer recorders, recording schemes, local environmental records centres, research institutions, conservation organisations, public bodies, ecological consultants, land managers, and other public and commercial data providers. The NBN Trust plays a key role through developing and hosting the NBN Atlas, fostering data sharing partnerships, and through the development of new technologies, helping participating organisations share data while recognising the distinct roles of local services, recording schemes, and specialist systems.^[5] The NBN Atlas brings together more than 387 million records of over 51,000 UK species, making the contributions of data providers accessible for wider use.^[10]

As the UK node for the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), we share datasets from the NBN Atlas with GBIF, with data partners' permission, so that UK records can inform research, conservation, and decision-making worldwide. Through this role and the NBN Atlas, we can help providers anticipate emerging standards and publication requirements and help users understand which data can support their decisions and where additional evidence is needed.

NBN Atlas in numbers

September 2026^[10]



387+

million records



51,000+

UK species

2025/26 annual report^[11]



192

organisations
sharing data



2.1

billion records
downloaded



143.7

million records
shared via GBIF

Practical priorities for implementation

01 Meet today's evidence needs and preserve future value

Evidence systems should support current decisions while preserving long-term records that can answer questions not anticipated when the data were collected. Planning species recovery, assessing a business impact, and reporting national progress can require different data, geographic detail, and methods. Providers and users should define these needs together and make the limitations clear. New requirements should be developed with those expected to deliver them, with proportionate demands and provision for the capacity required.

Records of where and when species were observed can inform estimates of distribution and change and, alongside other evidence, help assess wider environmental pressures, provided the analysis accounts for differences in recording effort and coverage. A gap in records may reflect recording effort rather than the absence of a species.^[6] Forecasting change or attributing outcomes to an intervention requires methods and supporting evidence suited to those questions. Access to shared data does not remove the need for appropriate surveys, local knowledge, or specialist interpretation. Making recording gaps visible can also help direct further recording and survey effort.

02 Support the people behind the evidence

Citizen science and biological recording depend on people's time, expertise, coordination, and trust. Verification, curation, and support for contributors help make evidence reliable and usable. Implementation plans should recognise the costs of this work, including contributions made by volunteers, and support the organisations and individuals who undertake it. Attribution and feedback about how records are used should be part of that relationship.^[7]

03 Connect existing systems and share data responsibly

Shared standards should be practical to adopt and proportionate to users' needs, enabling appropriate data to be reused across local decisions, national assessment, and international research. Data should retain information about its source, methods, permissions, and quality as it moves between systems.^[8] New technologies should be assessed for their ability to improve evidence and connect with existing infrastructure, alongside the work required to validate their outputs.

Sharing must respect licences, protect sensitive species and personal information, and recognise knowledge holders' rights. International work involving Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' traditional knowledge must respect free, prior, and informed consent. Cooperation should reflect national priorities.^{[3][4]}

04 Plan for continuing stewardship and use

Underlying data and the information needed to interpret it should remain accessible under appropriate permissions after projects end, allowing future reuse and re-evaluation. Funders and commissioners should provide for verification, curation, publication, secure preservation, and ongoing maintenance from the outset, with clear responsibilities and realistic provision for their costs. Support should reach the organisations that collect, verify, curate, and connect data, reflecting their respective responsibilities and costs.

Target 15 connects business assessment and disclosure with biodiversity action.^[9] In our discussions with business, we will explore how sharing commissioned data under appropriate permissions can improve environmental assessment and planning, reduce unnecessary duplication, and contribute to shared infrastructure. Businesses benefiting from that infrastructure can also help sustain it, including through partnerships supporting data quality and availability.

We call on governments, funders, and organisations delivering biodiversity commitments to plan and provide for the evidence needed to target action, assess progress, and manage environmental risks.

Reliable biodiversity evidence can inform the planning and investment decisions that support nature recovery, long-term economic security, and sustainable growth.^[12] This requires early identification of data needs, collaboration with existing recording and data infrastructure, and sustained support for the people, verification, and stewardship that make evidence useful.

The NBN Trust will use COP17 to identify emerging requirements, assess their implications for UK biodiversity data infrastructure, and agree practical priorities for follow-up with partners.

nbn.org.uk

Sources

- 01 CBD COP17 overview and first global review
- 02 CBD Decision 16/31 on the monitoring framework
- 03 CBD Target 21 and Secretariat guidance on data and knowledge
- 04 CBD Target 20 on capacity and technical cooperation
- 05 National Biodiversity Network overview
- 06 Isaac et al 2014 on interpreting opportunistic biological records
- 07 European Citizen Science Association (ECSA), 2015, Ten Principles of Citizen Science
- 08 Wilkinson et al., 2016, FAIR principles: findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data
- 09 CBD Target 15 on business assessment and disclosure
- 10 NBN Atlas record total and NBN Trust strategy species total. Accessed 24 September 2026.
- 11 NBN Trust, Annual Impact Report 2025/26, pp. 8 and 10 (data partners, downloads and GBIF records).
- 12 UK Government (2026), Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security.

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