

# Environmental Strategy and the Countryside

# three

# Chapter Three Environmental Strategy and the Countryside

## Areas of International and National Importance for Nature Conservation, Landscape and Cultural Value

### RPG9 Policy:

#### EI:

Priority should be given to protecting areas designated at international or national level either for their intrinsic nature conservation value, their landscape quality or their cultural importance.

### IRF Objective(s):

#### Objective I3:

To conserve and enhance the region's biodiversity.

### Other Relevant Strategy (ies):

Action for Biodiversity in the South East (South East England Biodiversity Forum – SEEBF - 2001)

#### Target(s):

- No net loss to designated sites of international, national or strategic importance through developments (RPG9).
- Ensure that 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are in favourable condition (FC) and/or unfavourable recovering condition (URC) by 2010 (hereafter referred to as target condition, TC) (national PSA target; IRF).
- No further loss or damage to SSSIs (IRF; 'Action for Biodiversity in South East England').
- All SSSIs to be in favourable condition by 2010 ('Action for Biodiversity in South East England').

### Indicators:

**22** Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) (Hectares)\*

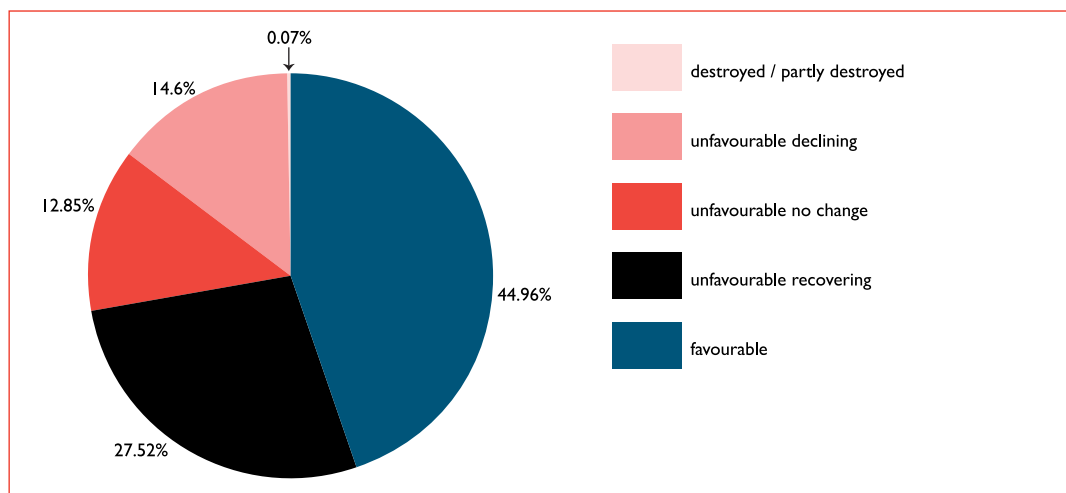
**23** Number and area of designated sites damaged/destroyed by development.

Compiled	% Area meeting PSA target				
	%Area favourable	%Area unfavourable recovering	%Area unfavourable no change	%Area unfavourable declining	%Area destroyed/part destroyed
4 October 2004	45.03%	22.35%	16.28%	16.25%	0.09%
1 September 2005	44.96%	27.52%	12.85%	14.60%	0.07%
	(↓)	(↑)	(↓)	(↑)	(↓)

\* Figure in RMR 2004 was incorrect

**Figure 21: Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 2005**

**Indicator 22**  
Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) (Hectares)  
TC: 72.48%  
(44.96% favourable; 27.52% unfavourable recovering)



Source:  
English Nature,  
1 September 2005

**Indicator 23**  
**Number and area of designated sites damaged/destroyed by development**  
**2002/03: 3.24 hectares**  
**2003/04: no data collected**  
**2004/05: 4,758 hectares <sup>01</sup>**

**Source:**

Local authority housing Survey, 2004/05

**01**

Please note that footnote from RMR 04 was incorrect as AONBs and National Parks were not mentioned.

**02**

Figures presented are for housing completions only. Source: Housing surveys. Hampshire only relates to large Sites of 10 or more dwellings gross.

**Table 3: Area of designated sites damaged or destroyed by housing 2004/05 (ha) <sup>02</sup>**

	Nature Conservation*	AONBs and/or National Park
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	4.398
East Sussex	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	0	0.04
Oxford	Not available	Not available
Surrey	0	0.32
West Sussex	0	0
<b>South East</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4.758</b>

\*Comprises Ramsar, SPA, SAC, National Nature Reserve, SSSI, Sites of Nature Conservation Interest.

**Key Findings:**

- The condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest is improving with 72.5% in 'favourable condition' in 2005.
- There is no direct loss or damage by housing to designated sites of nature conservation. Three counties are affected by developments in AONBs and National Parks.
- Data gaps and lack of data in 2002/03 and 2004/05 make trends difficult to determine.

**EI**



**Commentary**

SSSI condition continues to move in the right direction. The reasons for sites remaining in unfavourable condition often reflects site management, which is outside the direct influence of regional policy.

The main causes of unfavourable condition include overgrazing, inappropriate burning, lack of scrub control, inappropriate forestry and woodland management, lack of appropriate ditch management and coastal squeeze. 72.8% of SSSIs in favourable or unfavourable recovering conditions are showing a progress towards the PSA target. Monitoring of the landscape quality or cultural value of protected sites presents difficulties.

# Biodiversity

## RPG9 Policy:

### E2:

The region's biodiversity should be maintained and enhanced with positive action to achieve the targets set out in national and local biodiversity action plans through planning decisions and other measures.

## IRF Objective(s):

### Objective 13:

To conserve and enhance the region's biodiversity.

## Other Relevant Strategy (ies):

Habitat specific targets in local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) and in 'Action for Biodiversity in South East England' (SEEBF)

### Target(s):

- Year on year increase in each key habitat (RPG9).
- Increase woodland area in the Rest of the South East (ROSE) from 11% to 15% by 2016 (RPG9).
- By 2010, achieve a sustained increase in the regional wild bird population index (including to reverse the historical declines in the indices of farmland and woodland species) (IRF).
- To maintain the condition and extent of all key regional habitats which are judged to be at a favourable conservation status (IRF).
- To restore and/or recreate key regional habitats so these reach a favourable conservation status (IRF).

## Indicators:

**24** Indicators are under development to reflect the conservation status of key habitats for which Biodiversity Action Plans have been established

**25** Extent of ancient woodland

**26** Population of wild birds.

**Indicator 24** Indicators are under development to reflect the conservation status of key habitats for which Biodiversity Action Plans have been established. An initial assessment of the current status of three selected habitat types has been provided by SEEBF for 2004/05.

**Table 4: Extent and condition of key habitats, 2005 (South East)**

Habitat	Extent/Area			Trend in area/extent			Condition			Trend in Condition		
Fens	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green
Saline lagoons	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green
Calcareous grassland	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green	Red	Amber	Green

### Key to Table 4:

- **Green:** available data indicate the status in the region is broadly favourable (key habitat is in a healthy state and is being conserved for the future by appropriate management)
- **Amber:** available data indicate the status in the region is unfavourable, but improving (all necessary management measures are in place to address reasons for unfavourable status)
- **Red:** available data indicate the status in the region is broadly unfavourable (key habitat is not being adequately conserved)

### Key Findings:

- Most of the larger and more significant sites of fens are SSSIs or Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCl) or equivalent. Accordingly, they are generally protected from outright loss. However, the gross fragmentation of the habitat means that many smaller sites are still vulnerable to loss, and only very limited progress has been made on re-creation to replace historical losses of fens.
- Whilst significant outright loss of saline lagoons has ceased, the regional target to re-create 40 ha by 2010 is not currently being adequately addressed.
- A large proportion of calcareous grassland habitats (approximately 68%) of the region's resource is located within SSSIs. In 2005, English Nature's condition assessment of SSSIs indicates that of the 7449ha classed as predominantly calcareous grassland, the majority (87%) is currently in a positive 'favourable' or 'unfavourable-recovering' condition. The remaining 13% that are in an unfavourable condition – suffer from a lack of appropriate management, in particular suitable grazing necessary to sustain the variety of specialised plants, and prevent scrub from developing.

### Commentary

In 2004, SEEBF initiated a task to improve the reporting of indicators on the extent and condition of key habitats in the region. Rather than relying on the incomplete picture provided by data available on BAP habitats within the region's SSSI network (as in previous years), SEEBF collated information from a range of sources to generate an overview of the current status and trend of three key habitats – Fens, Saline lagoons, Calcareous grassland. Since 2005, SEEBF is currently working with Local Records Centres to plan and develop a regional habitats dataset for the South East.

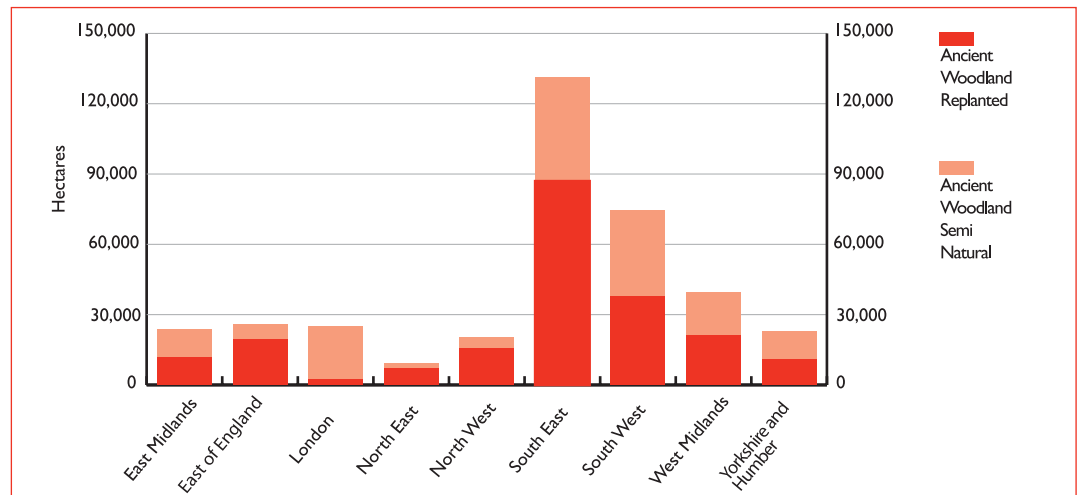
**Indicator 25**  
**Extent of ancient woodland**  
**2001: 123,607 hectares**  
**2002: 131,128 hectares**

**03**  
 Ancient Woodland Comprises Ancient Woodland Semi Natural and Ancient Woodland replanted.

**Table 5: Total ancient woodland 2001-2002**

	Total Ancient Woodland-2001	Total Ancient Woodland-2002
East Midlands	23,306	23,670
East of England	27,197	25,842
London	2,571	2,556
North East	11,849	9,123
North West	23,076	20,471
South East	123,607	131,128
South West	73,664	74,729
West Midlands	39,612	39,817
Yorkshire and Humber	23,436	23,030
<b>Total</b>	<b>348,318</b>	<b>350,365</b>

**Figure 22: Total ancient woodland areas, in 2002**



**Source:**  
 Forestry Commission

**Key Findings:**

- In 2002, the South East is the most wooded of all the English regions and has the largest area of ancient woodland.
- In the South East the area of semi natural ancient woodland area constitutes nearly twice that of ancient woodland-replanted areas.
- 2002 is the last year for which data is available.

**Commentary**

The indicator does not permit performance towards the RPG9 target to be assessed. Ancient semi natural woodland is a fixed biodiversity asset, and consequently should not be reduced.

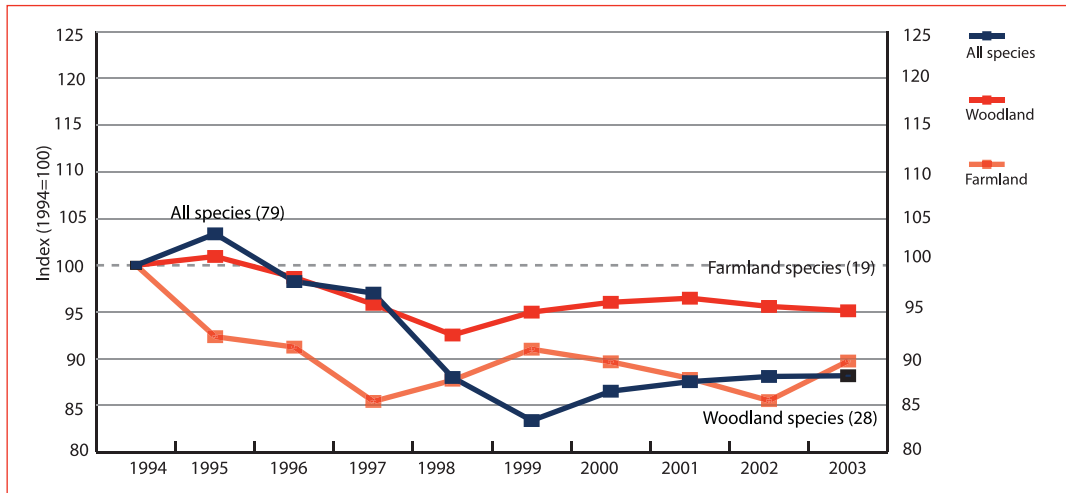
Large programmes of restoration plus natural reversion is converting plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) to Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) and therefore improving condition in some locations. Remaining areas of PAWS are in decline as ground flora is shaded by non-native species. Providing current efforts are maintained, the prospects for PAWS in the region are good as more sites are likely to be restored to ANSW.

The potential area for re-creation of ancient woodland is known and provides a target for action.

**Figure 23: Population of birds**

**Indicator 26**  
**Population of wild birds**  
**2002 (Index 100 in 1994):**  
**Farmland species = 88**  
**Woodland species = 85**  
**2003 (Index 100 in 1994):**  
**Farmland species = 88**  
**Woodland species = 89**

**Source**  
 Defra, BTO, RSPB



**Key Findings:**

- Between 1994 and 2003, the South East recorded the highest decline in both farmland and woodland bird populations compared to all English regions.
- The decline in farmland populations is believed to be the result of agricultural intensification and the resulting habitat loss and degradation.
- The index for all native bird species showed no significant change.

**E2**



**Commentary**

In the South East, the index for all species showed no significant change over the period 1994 to 2003, this differs from the national trend, which saw a slight increase over the same period. Between 1970 and 2000, there has been a 13% decline in the all species index in the South East. Though the farmland bird index has declined, the reasons for this decline are well known and are largely due to changes in agricultural practice. With the recent changes to agri-environment policy, there is now a mechanism for reversing the decline in farmland bird numbers. However, there is not yet a sufficient time-series of data to show whether this has resulted in a reversal in the fortunes of farmland birds.

Unfortunately, there is still uncertainty over the ecological mechanisms for the decline in woodland birds, though it may be linked in part to climate change.

# Air Quality

## RPG9 Policy:

### E7:

Local authorities should work with the Environment Agency and others to play a positive part in pollution control and encourage measures to improve air quality.

## IRF Objective(s):

### Objective 11:

To reduce air pollution and ensure air quality continues to improve.

### Objective 12:

To address the causes of climate change through reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and ensure that the South East is prepared for its impact.

## Other Relevant Strategy (ies):

Regional Transport Strategy: Policy T2.

### Target(s):

- Year on year improvements in pollution levels (RPG9, plus National Air Quality Strategy targets).
- To establish Air Quality Action Plans in areas which are likely to meet national air quality objectives (relevant local authorities in conjunction with partner agencies) (IRF).

## Indicators:

**27** Days when air pollution is moderate or high (rural and urban)

**Figure 24: Days when air pollution is moderate or high, 1997-2004 (South East)**

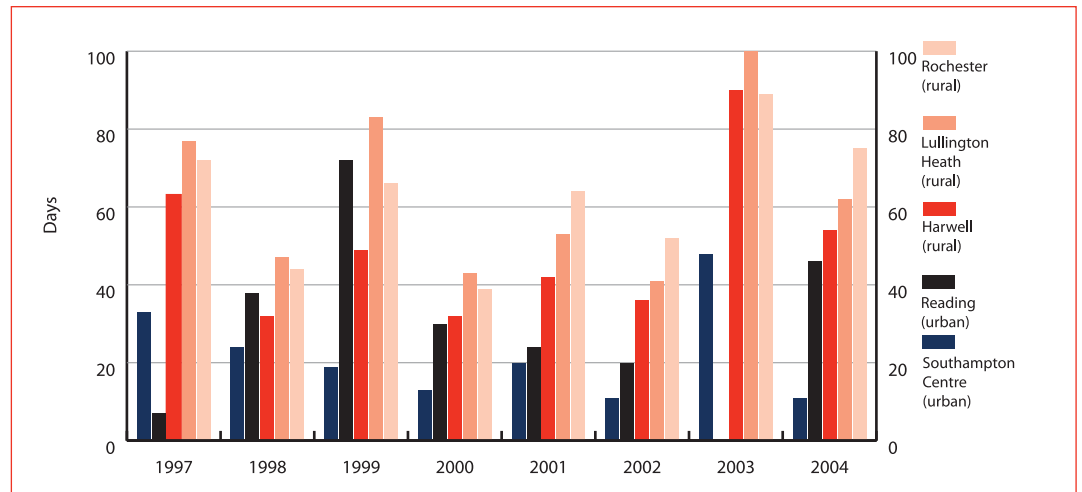
**Indicator 27**  
Days when air pollution is moderate or high<sup>04</sup> (rural and urban)

**Source**  
Environment Agency

**04**  
Pollution is moderate or higher depending on five pollutants: Ozone, Particulate matter (PM10), Carbon monoxide (CO), SO<sub>2</sub>, and NO<sub>2</sub>. Air pollution levels are classified as:

**Moderate:**  
Mild effects, unlikely to require action. May be noticed amongst sensitive individuals.

**High:**  
Significant effects may be noticed by sensitive individuals and action to avoid or reduce these effects like spending less time at polluted areas may be needed.



### Key Findings:

- In 2004 all the sites recorded lower levels of pollution than in 2003 in terms of number of days when air pollution was high or moderate in comparison to previous years.
- The rural stations of Lullington Heath (near the East Sussex coast), Rochester, and Harwell experienced the highest number of days when air pollution was moderate or high.
- Air quality is measured at five national Automated Monitoring Network sites across the South East. Local authorities have an extensive network of air quality monitors, but this data is not currently collated at a regional or national level.



Most air quality problems in summer are caused by higher concentrations of ozone, generated by hot and sunny conditions, especially in rural areas. This caused a marked increase in poor air quality recorded in 2003. The influence of weather on air quality can affect year on year comparisons. However the impact of climate change, which is predicted to be increasingly felt in the South East with even hotter, drier summers, may in the future increase air quality problems.

A range of emissions from various sources also affects air quality, including transport and industry, which also contributes to climate change through carbon dioxide emissions. Heavy traffic is a major cause of local pollution. Hotspots of local pollution are being tackled through Air Quality Management Plans.

Indicator 27 is limited as historically it relies on data from only five sites in the region as part of the UK Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN), for this reason many local differences are hidden. Comparisons with previous years should be treated with caution, as some monitoring stations have closed down.

See also Chapter 7, Climate Change.

### **Implications for policy and implementation**

Protection of important wildlife sites is provided through strong national and international legislation. The draft South East Plan therefore focuses on the need to enhance the quality of sites and habitats, and promotes delivery of biodiversity targets through identifying priority areas for action across the region. Delivery will be most effective through integration of and development of synergies between sectoral policies for agriculture, flood management and development with those for biodiversity conservation. There is a necessity to help restore habitats, increase their extent and connectivity, and also improve their management.

The draft South East Plan also includes specific policy on air quality, identifying measures that may be taken and seeks an overall reduction in pollution over the Plan period.