DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES DATA REVIEW

FINAL REPORT

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Written by
Lynn Crowe
John Rose
Ryan Lloyd

Sheffield Hallam University

Professor Lynn Crowe
Department of the Natural and Built Environment,
Sheffield Hallam University
City Campus
Sheffield
S1 1WB

Tel: 0114 225 2927
Email: l.crowe@shu.ac.uk

Contents

SUMMARY

Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned to undertake research by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in December 2018, to collate and interpret available biodiversity data and other evidence to highlight the differences between protected and non-protected landscapes. The research was undertaken partly to inform an evidence-based response to the consultation for the UK Government's Designated Landscapes Review (undertaken by Defra, 2018). The agreed brief required a focus on the ten English national parks (including the Broads), partly due to tight timescales and partly due to the availability of data.

These are the main points derived from that analysis:

- Our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) condition assessment suggests there is no discernible difference between SSSI condition inside and outside national parks.

- Only a minority of national parks show significant improvements in favourable condition since 2003, and only three (the Broads, New Forest, and the South Downs) are currently meeting the Biodiversity 2020 targets of 50% in favourable condition. Seven national parks have a third or less of their SSSI land in favourable condition.

- Those national parks with significant upland SSSIs appear to be particularly struggling to achieve the favourable condition target, with several showing little change since 2003. This suggests that wider strategic and regulatory frameworks are limiting what can be achieved in these areas.

- Virtually all the national parks are now meeting (or close to meeting) the 95% favourable or unfavourable but recovering condition target. Whilst this demonstrates real achievement by the relevant agencies and landowners in reaching agreements to make progress on conservation status, the SSSIs in the latter category remain essentially in unfavourable condition. It is difficult to know if management interventions are having the required impact to really achieve favourable status or what real progress is occurring on the ground.

- Whilst NPAs have good management plans and can demonstrate good working partnerships with a wide range of organisations, the older management plans in particular are yet to reflect the ambitions of more recent government policy around landscape scale conservation management and nature recovery networks. Management plans are also extremely varied in their prioritisation and ambition in these areas, often placing biodiversity targets alongside more economic objectives. Plans are also extremely varied in the extent to which they include specific and measurable targets and outcomes.

- Biodiversity 2020 targets (and indeed, the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan) use SSSI condition as an indicator of success, and yet the national agency responsible for monitoring these targets (Natural England) appears significantly under-resourced to satisfactorily assess the condition of SSSIs on a regular basis. 44% of SSSIs in the national parks have not been assessed for over eight years. The monitoring programme

has declined significantly since 2012.

• Further thought needs to be given to support new policies and concepts such as landscape scale conservation management and nature recovery networks. It is not clear how the quality, quantity and connectedness of habitats will be monitored in the future and consequently how success might be measured. Broader strategic and regulatory frameworks, led and effectively resourced by central government, need to be in place to enable more ambitious biodiversity outcomes to be achieved.

MAIN REPORT - DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES DATA REVIEW

Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned to undertake research by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in December 2018, to collate and interpret available biodiversity data and other evidence to highlight the differences between protected and non-protected landscapes. The research was undertaken partly to inform an evidence-based response to the consultation for the UK Government's Designated Landscapes Review (undertaken by Defra, 2018). The agreed brief required a focus on the ten English national parks (including the Broads), partly due to tight timescales and partly due to the availability of data.

1. Objectives

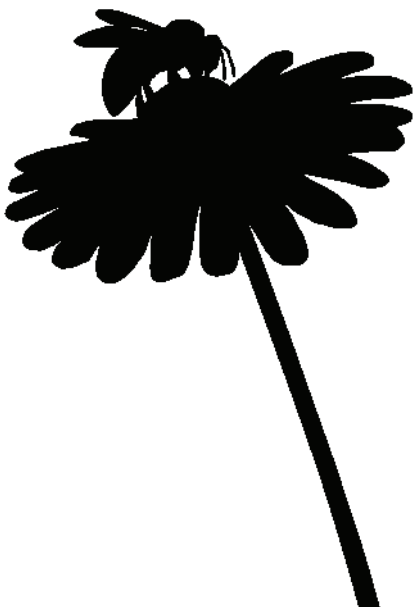
The project had the following primary objectives:

1. To examine the National Park Management Plans and asses the extent to which biodiversity is mentioned and prioritised.

2. To identify available biodiversity data which is comparable within and outside national parks.
3. To source data demonstrating the differences in condition assessments of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) between national parks and compare it to non national parks.

4. To compare the condition and biodiversity value of specific habitat types within and outside national parks e.g. Uplands and lowland grassland.

5. To attempt to examine the change in biodiversity over the past decade to test the theory that biodiversity in national parks is declining at a slower rate than biodiversity outside national parks



2. Project Methodology

The study was largely undertaken through desk top analysis of on line data available on the English National Park Authority web sites, Natural England SSSI monitoring data and any other readily accessible data sources.

Condition assessment data for SSSIs was obtained from Natural

England in the form of esri© Shapefiles via their Open Data page. As the shapefile did not identify the habitat types present in each SSSI in the database, it was necessary to cross reference them from a separate spreadsheet provided by Natural England via designated sites aggregate data.

Condition assessments from the SSSI shapefile were converted to Excel. The SSSI ID field was used to assign habitat type and national park to each SSSI, then reloaded to the GIS and converted to shapefile. SSSIs were then selected by location using national park boundary files obtained from the ONS Geography Open Data portal.

SSSI condition assessments were selected separately against national parks and Environment Agency regions shapefiles, and a new shapefile and table were produced and exported for further analysis in Excel. All data sources are provided in Appendix 1.

An investigation was also undertaken in to the feasibility of publicly available records for a range of taxa. Data sets were obtained for cranefly, water vole, bryophytes, bumblebees and butterflies (also provided in Appendix 1). However, a review of these data sources showed that all were presented at 1 km centres meaning that they cannot be allocated to specific sites. The data is effective in presenting national patterns of distribution but is much less effective for comparisons at a smaller scale. Data was not originally collected for this purpose. It is therefore not possible to be sure that recording effort is comparable for different areas (particularly within and outside national parks) and hence if differences were detected, whether these reflect real differences or effects of recording effort. For this reason no analyses were done on this data.

3. Findings

3.1. National Park Management Plans Assessment

All National Park Authorities (NPAs) in England are required under the terms of the 1995 Environment Act to produce a management plan (National Parks England, no date). These documents are generally regarded as being the most important strategic plan for national parks, and the `senior plan` for each NPA. Each management plan sets out shared objectives for the future management of the national park, generally over a period of 5-10 years. The plans are for each national park as a whole, not the NPA specifically, and explain how a range of organisations and stakeholders can work together to achieve these shared objectives (some are termed Partnership Plans, for this reason).

For the purposes of this study, each management plan was studied on line, and vision statements, priorities, outcomes and targets relating to biodiversity and wildlife were noted, alongside general information about the structure and size of each plan. During this process, it became clear that information about targets and monitoring around more strategic aims, was often included in further plans (such as State of the Park reports), so these plans were also included in the assessment.

Alongside this assessment of overall aims and monitoring processes, available information in the plans concerning Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) condition or trends was also collated.

Appendix 2 provides a summary of all the National Park Management Plans assessed, alongside relevant State of the Park reports (or similar documents), and any available information on SSSIs condition surveys.

Appendix 3 provides an overview of the strategic visions, priorities, and outcomes stated in each management plan in relation to biodiversity and wildlife.

ANALYSIS

i. National Park Management Plans are detailed and wide ranging documents. All the plans emphasise that they represent shared aims and objectives, often listing the stakeholders involved in developing and delivering the plans (several are called `Partnership Plans`, rather than Management Plans). They represent impressive visionary statements of how these designated landscapes might be protected, conserved and enjoyed by future generations.

ii. All the management plans list a range of initiatives which have often been led and supported by the NPAs, including several Local Nature Partnerships and other habitat and area-focused projects. The NPAs are working in very productive partnerships with other government agencies, water companies and non-governmental organisations (particularly the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), as well as local communities and landowners, to deliver their vision.

iii. All the management plans describe and explain the significance of their area's "special qualities". These special qualities always include reference to landscape character and biodiversity, habitats and wildlife. These statements make it clear why each area warrants its special protection and the attributes which make the areas so distinctive. This focus on special qualities is one of the distinctive advantages of national park designation.

iv. Each national park is distinctive, and is governed and organised quite independently from other national parks. However, it is surprising to note the difference in structures and approaches incorporated in each management plan. They differ markedly in length (the longest is over two hundred pages long; the shortest is ten pages) and in structure. This is not to make a judgement about quality on the basis of length. Some plans contain detailed descriptive information contained in other documents on other NPA web sites. Some could be described as models of brevity. But the difference in structures is very marked.

v. Most plans begin with an overall vision for the national park; they then develop their objectives in different ways - focusing on various terms such as priorities, outcomes, themes and other phrases, to narrow down their specific objectives for implementation. All the vision statements include reference to conserving and enhancing biodiversity, habitats or wildlife. However, all vision statements also include reference to their "cultural landscapes", "cultural heritage", "lived-in landscapes", "farmed landscapes" and similar phrases, alongside their statutory purposes. Supporting local communities is also generally incorporated into their vision statement and priorities. There is generally no indication that these additional objectives might be subsidiary in any sense to their statutory purposes (although some NPAs are careful to explain their legislative purposes initially). Whilst this could be a criticism, in that there is no clear statement of priority in these vision statements, it could also be argued that these statements exemplify sustainable development in their aims to integrate environmental, social and economic issues in these special places.

vi. There is considerable variation amongst the management plans as to the extent that specific and measurable outcomes or targets are included. Some plans include very detailed targets - whilst others have much more generic `aspirational` outcomes, without any indicators for achievement. Plans are also variable to the extent of

`ambition` in their proposed outcomes. Most refer to protecting and enhancing existing habitats and natural character, whilst only a small number include proposals for more recent concepts such as `nature recovery networks` or working at a `landscape scale`.

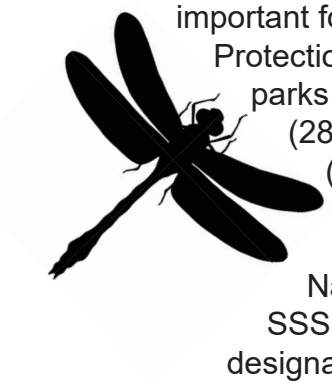
vii. Even amongst those plans with specific and measurable targets, there is also variation as to the level of target set, particularly around biodiversity. Some retain the Biodiversity 2020 targets (i.e. at least 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition, and at least 95% in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition by 2020 (Defra, 2011)) whilst others have amended these (possibly more recently).

viii. There is also considerable variation around the amount of data provided in the monitoring of the plans. Some NPAs have produced detailed State of the Park reports (or similar documents) which provide various data sets, including SSSI condition surveys and trends, and priority habitat and species monitoring. Others provide only minimal data or omit some indicators completely.

ix. The lack of a consistent and transparent approach to both target setting and monitoring of outcomes makes assessing the extent to which national parks are meeting their statutory purpose to conserve their natural heritage quite challenging.

3.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest - Condition Assessment

There are over 4,100 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England, covering around 8% of the country's land area. More than 70% of these sites (by area) are internationally important for their wildlife and designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites (Natural England, 2014). The English national parks contain a significant proportion (27%) of land designated as SSSIs, and 23% (285,787Ha) of all the land in England's national parks is designated as SSSI (National Parks England, 2010), emphasising the special importance of national parks for biodiversity and geodiversity.



Natural England is responsible for designating and monitoring the condition of SSSIs, and they make the results of their assessments publicly available on their designated site database, ENSIS (Natural England, 2013). The condition of SSSIs is assessed against standards agreed with the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and individual units in each SSSI are described as favourable; unfavourable but recovering; unfavourable no change; unfavourable declining; part destroyed; or destroyed (a detailed description of each of these categories is provided in Appendix 4).

In 2003, Natural England's precursor body, English Nature, released a national overview of SSSI condition based on their latest assessments. This raised difficult questions and challenges around the condition of these important sites across the whole country, but particularly in our most protected landscapes.

Some years later, and in response to international agreements, the UK Government agreed a new strategy for achieving better protection of wildlife and biodiversity, with specific targets to achieve 50% of SSSIs in favourable condition and 95% of SSSIs in either favourable or unfavourable but recovering condition, by 2020 (Defra,2011) - often referred to as the Biodiversity 2020 targets. This data has helped to inform the following analysis of progress in English National Parks over the last fifteen years.

Analysis

The review shows that the condition of SSSIs within national parks is variable. Figure 1 provides the overall percentages of the area of SSSI in each category, with Figure 2 providing a comparison between national parks. The percentage of the area of SSSI in Favourable Condition only exceeds 50% in three National Parks (New Forest, South Downs and the Broads). Figures are below 20% in five National Parks (Dartmoor, Exmoor, the Lake District, the North York Moors and the Peak District). The overall SSSI area in Favourable Condition, across all national parks, is 25%.

Figures for the area of SSSI in Unfavourable but Recovering Condition do compensate to a degree for the low results for Favourable Condition in those latter five national parks, so that the range of values for area in the two classes combined is small (range 84-99%), and 95% by total area. values for area in the two classes combined is small (range 84-99%), and 95% by total area.

	Dart-moor	Ex-moor	Lake District	New Forest	N York Moors	Northum-berland	Peak District	South Downs	Broads	Yorks Dales	Overall (total area)
Favourable	18.62	15.21	19.87	53.20	11.78	33.70	16.08	52.00	63.01	26.22	25.03
Unfavourable Recovering	79.30	81.03	64.60	42.73	87.63	64.69	80.79	44.92	27.00	70.22	70.35
Unfavourable No Change	0.00	3.19	11.36	2.88	0.34	0.74	2.44	2.12	7.12	3.42	3.43
Unfavourable Declining	2.08	0.58	4.17	1.19	0.17	0.87	0.67	0.90	2.87	0.14	1.18
Part Destroyed	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.02
Destroyed	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Figure 1 - National Park SSSI Condition Assessment

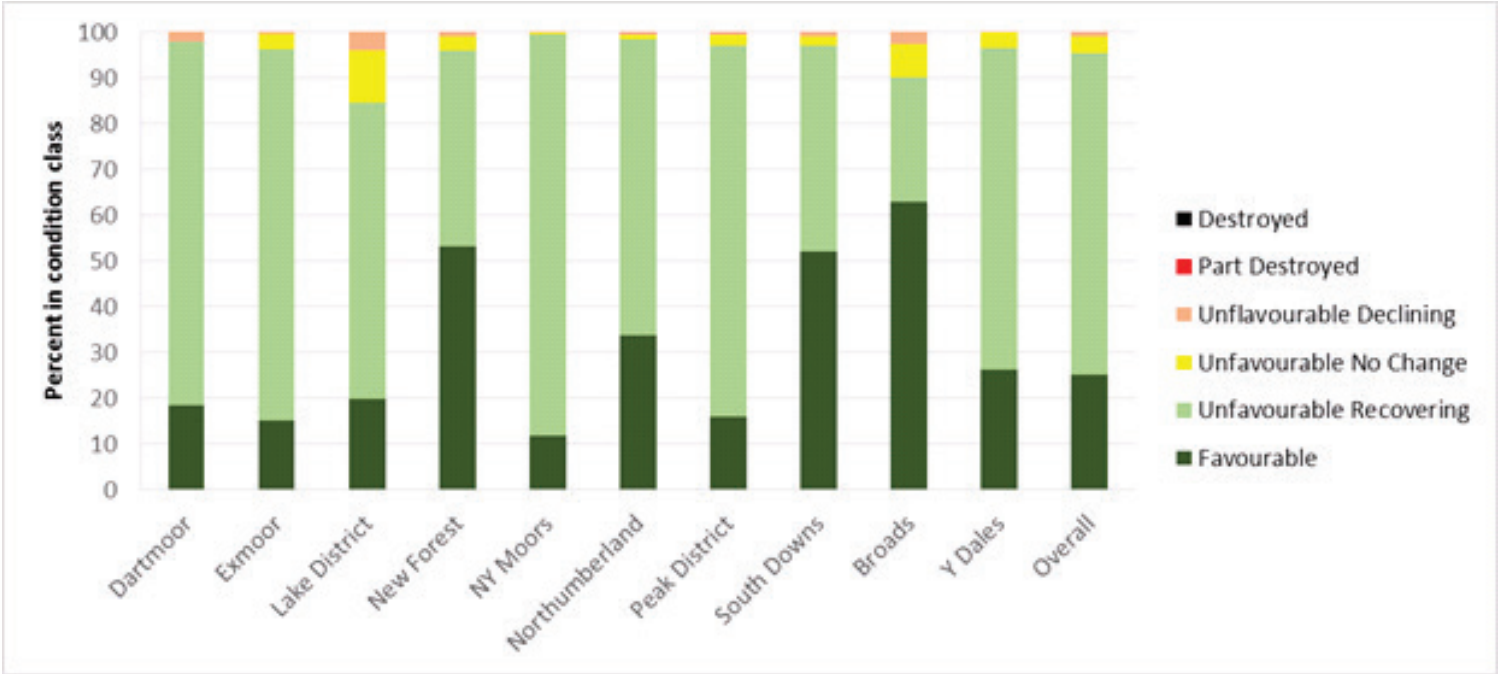


Figure 2: Condition Classes of SSSIs in National Parks

It is possible to compare the current condition assessments with those in 2003, based on the earlier English Nature figures. Figure 3 shows the improvements made in many national park areas, in particular the large shift of areas in to the Unfavourable but Recovering category over that period (note the South Downs National Park had not been designated in 2003). This demonstrates the considerable achievements of many NPAs (and others, particularly Natural England) in gaining agreements with landowners to enable areas to recover to a more Favourable status. However, it is also striking that very few national parks are achieving the Biodiversity 2020 targets for Favourable condition status, and those that are tend to be the lowland national park areas.

The large shift to the Unfavourable but Recovering category also highlights the extent to which this category could include such a broad range of SSSI conditions. As described in Appendix 1, this category includes those sites where agreements have been negotiated with landowners to improve condition status, but with no indication of what progress has been made towards that Favourable condition on the ground. This does raise the question as to how progress in these sites is being monitored and whether it is possible to assess the effectiveness of the proposed management interventions in the negotiated agreements.

SSSI Condition	National Parks (% change since 2003)	Notes
Favourable condition - improved	Broads (+33%) New Forest (+14%) Northumberland (+3%)	
Favourable condition - declined	Dartmoor (-16%) Exmoor (- 20%) Lake District (- 6% Peak District (- 9%) Yorkshire Dales (- 6%)	In some cases, the NPAs suggest these declines reflect changes in administration and new boundaries of SSSI units - but this is difficult to assess.
Unfavourable but recovering condition - improved	Dartmoor (+73%) Exmoor (+61%) Lake District (+79%) New Forest (+18%) Northumberland (+44%) North York Moors (+70%) Peak District (+75%) Yorkshire Dales (+37%)	
Unfavourable but recovering condition - declined	Broads (-2%)	This includes significant shifts to Favourable condition
Biodiversity 2020 target - Favourable Condition (50%) - met in 2018	Broads New Forest South Downs	
Biodiversity 2020 target - for both Favourable and Unfavourable but Recovering condition combined (95%) - met in 2018	Dartmoor Exmoor New Forest North York Moors Northumberland Peak District South Downs Yorkshire Dales	Broads -90% Lake District - 84%

Figure 3 - Comparison in SSSI Condition Status between 2003 and 2018

English Nature's 2003 report on the condition of our SSSIs was a landmark report underlining the problems facing those who seek to protect and improve habitat condition and biodiversity across the country (not just in our national parks). English Nature suggested at the time that the following factors were the main issues needing to be addressed in order to reverse the situation, with over-grazing (46%) and moorland burning (24%) accounting for the majority of harmful impacts.

- Over-grazing
- Moor burning
- Drainage
- Lack of appropriate scrub control
- Forestry and woodland management
- Lack of appropriate ditch management
- Under-grazing

The English Nature report also underlined the need to work more closely with private landowners to address these issues. The more recent State of Nature (2016) report suggests agricultural improvement is a continuing major issue (a concern also highlighted by the Campaign for National Parks in their 2018 Raising the Bar report published recently).

Their analysis is supported by a comparison of the condition of upland and lowland habitats in a sample of national parks with significant upland SSSIs, as shown in Figure 4. The upland SSSIs in each area are significantly less likely to be in Favourable condition than lowland SSSIs in the same national park.

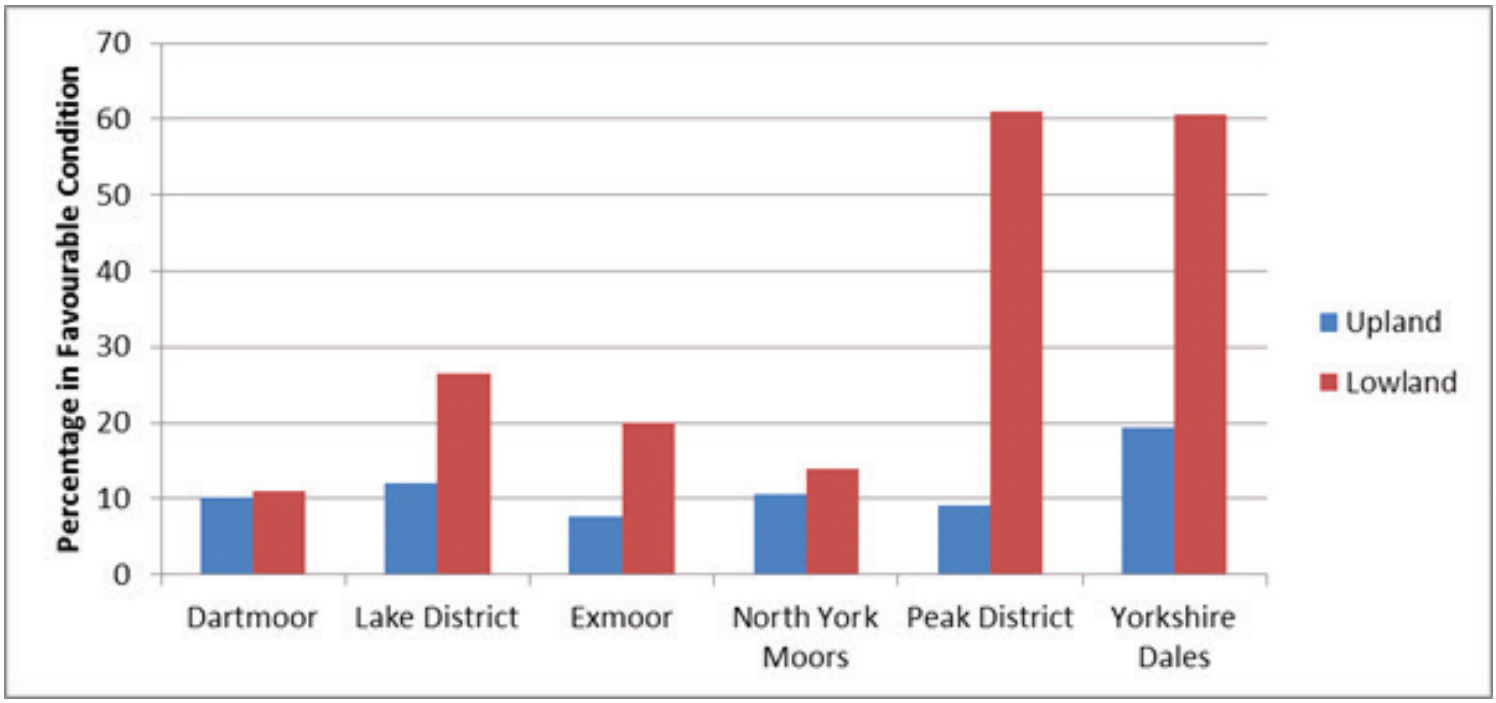


Figure 4 - Comparison of the Condition of Upland and Lowland Habitats within National Parks

This study hoped to compare the condition of SSSIs inside and outside all national parks. However, extreme caution needs to be taken when comparing the condition of SSSIs in national parks with those in the wider countryside, as they face very different pressures. But it is also difficult to draw conclusions from the national park data without any reference for comparisons. For this report, a pragmatic decision was taken to present results based on different regions (as determined by Environment Agency areas, and excluding land within national parks), in an effort

to produce a more meaningful comparison. As Figure 5 demonstrates, there are clear differences across the country in the condition of SSSIs, with the more northerly regions having far lower levels of SSSIs in Favourable Condition than elsewhere (again, suggesting there may be an issue with upland areas more generally).

In the wider countryside overall, 37% of the area of SSSIs is in Favourable condition, slightly higher than in national parks (25%). However, the percentage of the area in Unfavourable but Recovering Condition (55%) is lower, so combined proportions in these two classes are very similar.

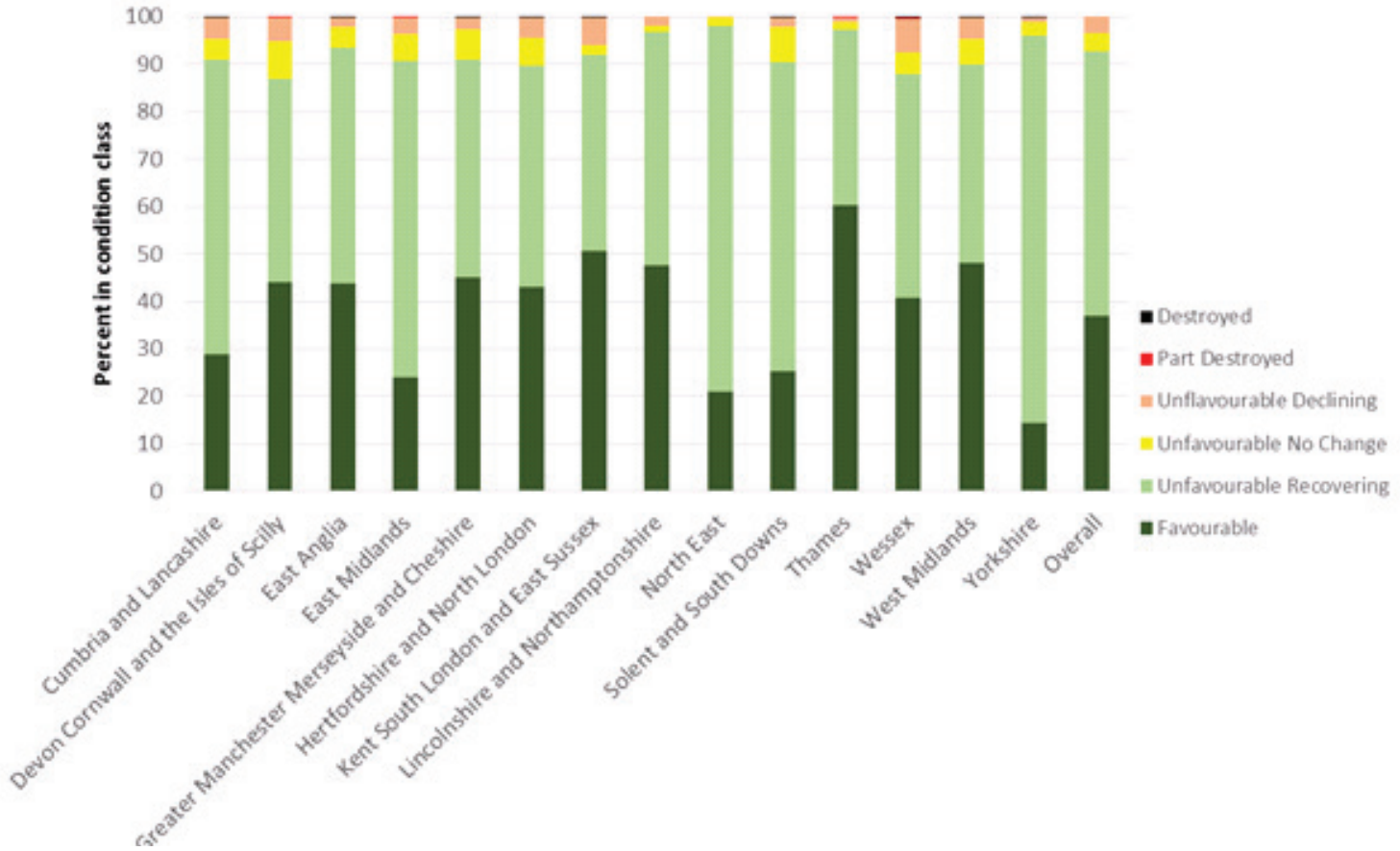
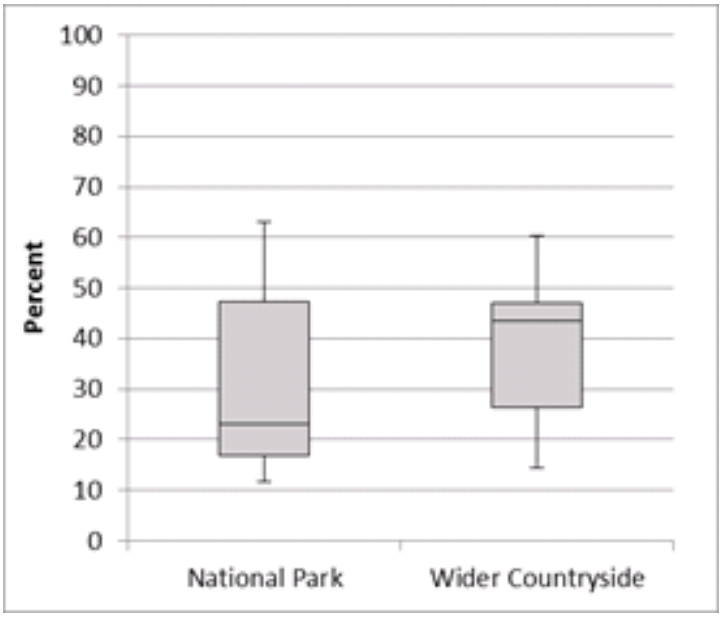


Figure 5: Condition Classes of SSSIs in the wider countryside

Figure 6 shows that although the average values are slightly different, the ranges for national parks and the wider countryside are very similar. Overall therefore, there is no significant difference between the condition of SSSIs in national parks from that found in the wider countryside.

a. Favourable condition.



b. Unfavourable but recovering condition

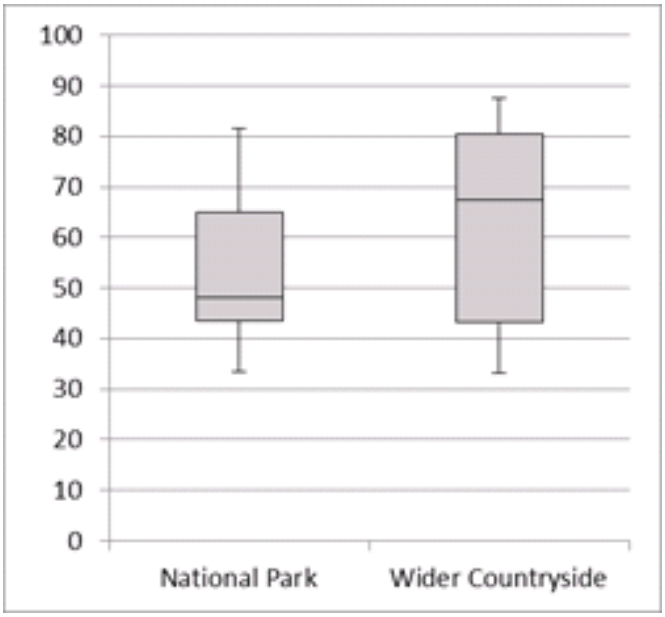


Figure 6: Variation in Condition Assessments of SSSIs in (a) Favourable and (b) Unfavourable but Recovering Condition by area

The above analyses point to a significant conclusion. The NPAs have good plans and a wide range of excellent initiatives, often working in partnership with a range of other organisations and stakeholders to achieve their aspirations. Yet, some of the challenges facing the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, particularly in the upland SSSIs, are clearly outside their control. This suggests it is broader strategic and regulatory frameworks which are limiting achievement of the Biodiversity 2020 targets inside national parks.

There is an important caveat to the whole of this SSSI condition analysis (indeed to all statements about SSSI condition, in other documents and in the NPAs' own reports). This relates to the frequency of monitoring of SSSI condition and to whether comparisons are being made on up to date survey assessments. Natural England's monitoring and reporting standards (2013) suggest they have previously aimed to undertake condition surveys of individual SSSIs on average every seven years. However the data assessed in this study indicate that a significant proportion (44%) of SSSIs in national parks has not been surveyed for more than eight years (see Figure 7).

Date of last condition survey	Area (hectares)	Percentage
2003-2010	147277.31	44%
2011-2015	164336.50	49%
2016-2018	2888.45	7%

Figure 7 - Date of SSSI Condition Surveys

This raises some difficult questions in terms of the whole SSSI monitoring programme and whether it can be effectively utilised to provide a fair and consistent representation of biodiversity protection and enhancement. Recent responses to official Parliamentary Questions (Hansard, 2018) have emphasised the reduction in resources for Natural England to complete its monitoring work since 2012, and this appears to have had a particularly significant impact in the last three years.

In addition to concerns around the level of adequate monitoring of SSSI condition generally, it is also relevant to ask if the Biodiversity 2020 targets for SSSI condition (and consequently, the monitoring of these targets) effectively reflect new thinking about biodiversity protection and improvement. Changing policies will require evidence concerning the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats, rather than snapshots of specific sites. A small number of National Park Management Plans do reflect these current ambitions around landscape scale biodiversity action and nature networks, although others could raise their ambitions in the next reviews of their plans. But it is also important to ask whether our national environment agencies and national park authorities are in a position to effectively monitor these attributes, any more than they are the current approach to biodiversity monitoring.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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National Parks England (2010) England's National Parks - Beacons for Biodiversity 2010. Available on line - http://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/720533/Englands-National-Parks-Beacons-for-Biodiversity.pdf

RSPB and others (2016) State of Nature UK. Available on line - https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/stateofnature2016/

APPENDIX 1 - DATA SOURCES

Data sources for the SSSI Condition assessment

SSSI Data: © Natural England copyright. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right [2018].

https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=2778e6d7622b43d4bd47fe282f062b0a

http://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/df607d4ffa124cdca8317e3e63d45d78_1?geometry=-18.32%2C52.274%2C15.057%2C56.734

EA regions: https://data.gov.uk/dataset/539671e0-7eed-43a1-8e4f-549c91a82375/administrative-boundaries-environment-agency-and-natural-england-public-face-areas

Data sources for the species assessment

1. Cranefly - https://registry.nbnatlas.org/public/show/dr683 - Biological Records Centre (2018). Cranefly (Diptera; Tipuloidea) records for Britain to 2016. Occurrence dataset https://doi.org/10.15468/wggm3t accessed via GBIF.org on 2018-12-13.

2. Watervole - https://registry.nbnatlas.org/public/showDataResource/dr953 People's Trust for Endangered Species (2018). National Water Vole Monitoring Programme (NWVMP). Occurrence dataset https://doi.org/10.15468/l5l7yp accessed via GBIF.org on 2018-12-13.

3. Bryophyte - https://www.gbif.org/dataset/84d99434-1938-4583-8fc6-069b0b5bf69d - British Bryological Society (2017). Bryophyte data for Great Britain and Ireland from the British Bryological Society held by BRC: data compiled post-Atlas. Occurrence dataset https://doi.org/10.15468/ttzehy accessed via GBIF.org on 2018-12-13.

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APPENDIX 4

NATURAL ENGLAND SSSI CONDITION CATEGORIES (2013)

Favourable condition	The designated feature(s) within a unit are being adequately conserved and the results from monitoring demonstrate that the feature(s) in the unit are meeting all the mandatory site specific monitoring targets set out in the FCT. The FCT sets the minimum standard for favourable condition for the designated features and there may be scope for the further (voluntary) enhancement of the features / unit. A unit can only be considered favourable when all the component designated features are favourable.
Unfavourable recovering condition	Often known simply as 'recovering'. Units/features are not yet fully conserved but all the necessary management measures are in place. Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the unit/feature will reach favourable condition in time. At least one of the designated feature(s) mandatory attributes are not meeting their targets (as set out in the site specific FCT).
Unfavourable no-change condition	The unit/feature is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to the site management or external pressures and this is reflected in the results of monitoring over time, with at least one of the mandatory attributes not meeting its target (as set out in the site specific FCT) with the results not moving towards the desired state. The longer the SSSI unit remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery. At least one of the designated feature(s) mandatory attributes and targets (as set out in the site specific FCT) are not being met.
Unfavourable declining condition	The unit/feature is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to site management or external pressures. The site condition is becoming progressively worse, and this is reflected in the results of monitoring over time, with at least one of the designated features mandatory attributes not meeting its target (as set out in the site specific FCT) with the results moving further away from the desired state. The longer the SSSI unit remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.
Part destroyed condition	Lasting damage has occurred to part of the designated feature on the unit such that it has been irretrievably lost and will never recover (no amount of management will allow the feature to ever reach favourable condition). Conservation work may be needed on the residual interest of the unit. If more than one feature occurs in a unit, but only one is considered part destroyed, consideration should be given to reunitising out the destroyed area.
Destroyed condition	Lasting damage has occurred to an entire designated feature on the unit such that the feature has been irretrievably lost (no amount of management will bring this feature back). This feature will never recover in the unit. E.g. a finite mineralogical feature has been totally removed from its surroundings without consent and is therefore lost forever.