

2b. Status of threatened habitats: habitats of European importance

Type: State indicator

Indicator Description

Member States of the European Union are required to report every 6 years on the conservation status of habitats and species of community interest (listed in the Annexes of the Habitats Directive). These are habitats and species for which the UK has European level conservation responsibilities.

The assessments need to conclude whether each habitat of European importance occurring in England is in a: 'Favourable', 'Unfavourable-Inadequate', 'Unfavourable-Bad' or 'Unknown' conservation status. This indicator is based on an evaluation of whether the overall results for the most recent assessment (2019) are better or worse than those for the previous assessments (2007 and 2013).

Status of habitats of European importance

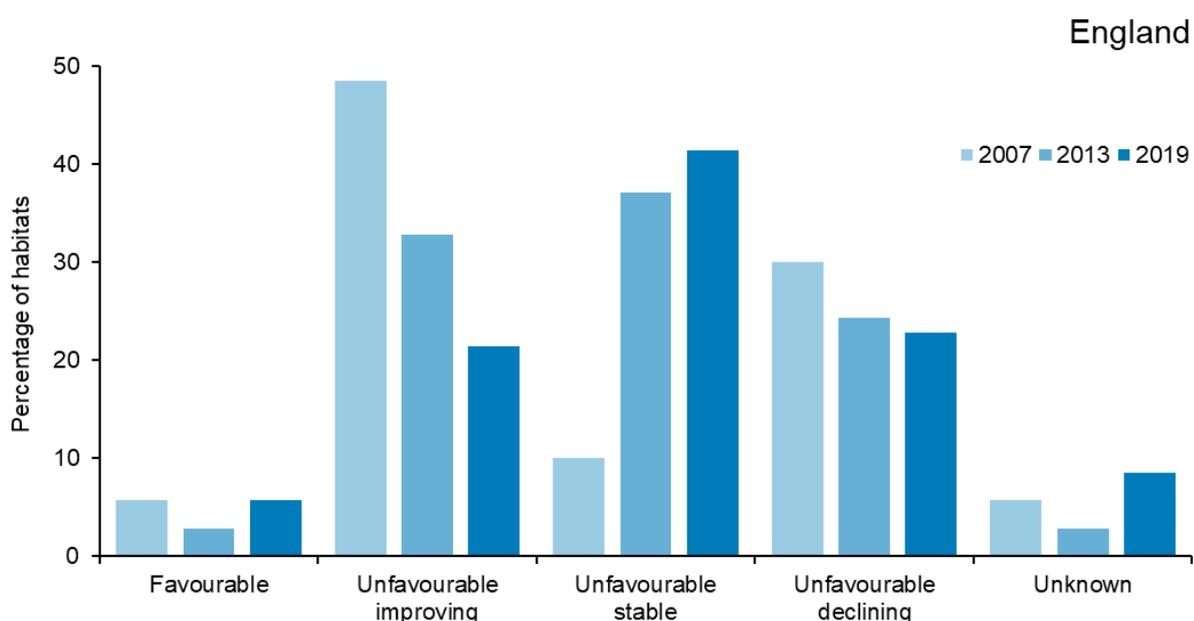
No new data since the previous publication.

In 2007, 6% of the habitats occurring in England that are listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive were in favourable conservation status, this figure decreased to 3% in 2013 before increasing again to 6% in 2019 (Figure 2b.1).

The conservation status of 49% of habitats was unfavourable-improving in 2007, it decreased to 33% in 2013 and 21% in 2019.

The conservation status of 30% of the habitats was unfavourable-declining in 2007, this decreased to 24% in 2013 and 23% in 2019.

Figure 2b.1: Conservation status of habitats of European importance occurring in England, 2007, 2013 and 2019



Note: The graph is based on the 70 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive that occur in England.

Source: UK Habitats Directive (Article 17) reports to the EU, 2007, 2013 and 2019.

Indicator assessment

Assessment of change in conservation status of habitats of European importance occurring in England based on the percentage of habitats in favourable or improving conservation status

Long term (2007 to 2019): Deteriorating; Short term (2013 to 2019): Deteriorating; Latest year: Not assessed.

Note: The long and short-term assessments are based on a 3% rule of thumb. See [Assessing Indicators](#). Article 17 reports are only submitted once every 6 years, thus, the short-term assessment is based on a 6 year period and no latest-year change is given as this would simply mirror the short-term assessment.

Relevance

This indicator is relevant to outcomes 1, 1A and 2 in [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services \(see Annex A\)](#). It is also relevant to a number of international targets (see Annex B of the aforementioned publication for further details).

Background

The indicator shows progress towards maintaining and/or restoring favourable conservation status for habitat types listed under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. These are habitats for which the UK has European level conservation responsibilities. An assessment of status and trends for each habitat is undertaken every 6 years. Trends in unfavourable conservation status allow identification of whether progress is being made, as it will take many years for some habitats to reach favourable conservation status. The status assessments presented in this indicator are based on the 70 UK habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive that are found in England.

The first UK assessment of conservation status of habitats and species listed in the annexes of the Directive was produced in 2007; a second assessment was produced in 2013; and a third assessment was made in 2019. Each individual habitat assessment requires information on 4 parameters, which are brought together to form an overall assessment. These parameters are: range; area; structure; and functions and future prospects.

The trend in the overall assessment is based upon an integration of the trend information for the individual parameters (see links for UK approach). Each assessment concludes whether the habitat is in one of the following states:

- 'favourable';
- unfavourable-inadequate';
- 'unfavourable-bad'; or
- 'unknown'.

The UK reported on 77 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive in 2013. The conservation status assessments quoted in this indicator are for a subset consisting of 70 UK habitats that are found in England. Grouping the habitats by broad habitat types leads to the following breakdown for England:

- Marine 7
- Coastal 15
- Heaths and scrub 8
- Woodlands 9
- Grasslands 9
- Freshwater 7
- Bogs, mires and fens 9

A full list of these habitats, together with their individual assessment results for 2007, 2013 and 2019 is presented in the [dataset](#) supporting this indicator.

Assessment of change in conservation status

The indicator is based on an evaluation of whether the results obtained in 2019 are better or worse than those obtained in 2013 (short term) and 2007 (long term). It is likely to take time before habitats move from unfavourable conservation status to favourable conservation status, so for the unfavourable assessments, an assessment of trend is made to determine if the habitat is improving, declining, or showing no change. At its simplest (Figure 2b.1), this can be the proportion of habitats which are favourable, or show an improving trend (i.e. favourable, or unfavourable-inadequate but improving, or unfavourable-bad but improving). This applies to 27% of habitats assessed in 2019, 36% of habitats assessed in 2013 and 54% of habitats assessed in 2007¹; the measure is therefore assessed as declining in both the long and short term (**Footnote:** Note that the combined figures for favourable and unfavourable-improving may differ from the sum of the figures provided individually for these categories due to rounding).

Figure 2b.1 combines the unfavourable inadequate and unfavourable-bad assessments which show a similar direction of trend. In all 3 assessments, improving and declining trends were assigned where the evidence allowed a conclusion that improvements or declines in the conservation status of habitats were occurring. Thus:

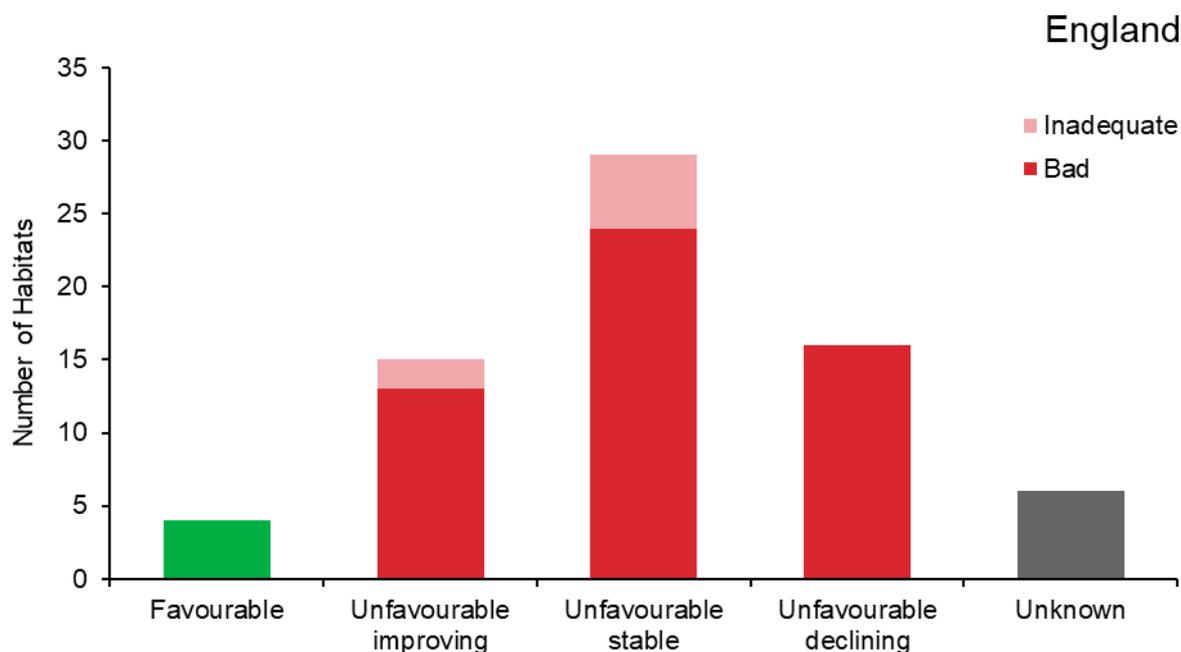
- Unfavourable-inadequate improving and unfavourable-bad improving were summed to form the category 'unfavourable improving', and
- Unfavourable-inadequate declining and unfavourable-bad declining were summed to form the category 'unfavourable declining'.

In 2007, no trend was assigned to those habitats which were neither improving nor declining. This included both habitats for which the trend was unknown, and those for which there was no evidence of change. For ease of comparison in the figures, unfavourable-inadequate and unfavourable-bad assessments with no trend conclusion in 2007 were summed to form the category 'unfavourable stable'; the same term was used for 2013 and 2019 data, but with more confidence that the trend was neither improving nor declining.

Figure 2b.2 provides a breakdown of Figure 2b.1 by showing the number of habitats in the unfavourable categories which arise from the unfavourable-inadequate or unfavourable-bad assessment categories in 2019. The picture for habitats is somewhat worse than for species (see indicator number 4c), in that relatively more habitats are in unfavourable conservation status, and relatively more habitats which are unfavourable are in unfavourable-bad status.

¹ Note that the combined figures for favourable and unfavourable-improving may differ from the sum of the figures provided individually for these categories due to rounding.

Figure 2b.2: Status of habitats of European importance occurring in England, 2019



Notes:

1. The graph is based on the 70 habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive that occur in England.
2. Darker red bars show the number of habitats within a trend which were unfavourable-bad; lighter red bars show the number of habitats within a trend which were unfavourable-inadequate.

Source: UK Habitats Directive (Article 17) report to the EU, 2019.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Natural England have carefully collated and considered a wide range of data, using a robust quality assurance protocol, to come to the conclusion for each habitat, and to ensure changes, including within category changes, have been consistently and accurately discriminated. These changes are ecologically important, as stabilising a decline in a habitat, for example, is an important conservation achievement. The information sources on which the assessments are based are quite varied – their quality is documented in the database which underpins the assessments. The changes are largely based on evidence, though expert opinion was used in cases where evidence was not available.

Web links for further information

European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (EIONET): [European guidance on making conservation status assessments;](#)

European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (EIONET): [Online report on Article 17 of the Habitats Directive: conservation status of habitats and species of Community interest \(2001-2006\);](#)

European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity (EIONET): [EEA Technical report No 2/2015: Results from reporting under the nature directives 2007-2012](#)

Joint Nature Conservation Committee: [EU Habitats Directive;](#)

Joint Nature Conservation Committee: [UK Habitats Directive Report, 2007;](#)

Joint Nature Conservation Committee: [UK Habitats Directive Report, 2013;](#)

Joint Nature Conservation Committee: [UK Habitats Directive Report, 2019](#)

Last updated: December 2019

Latest data available: 2019