

More than one in 10 UK species threatened with extinction, new study finds

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Credit: freeimages.com (Juha Soininen)

Some of the UK's leading nature experts have delivered a clarion call for action to help save many of the nation's native wildlife species from extinction.

A critical new report, called "State of Nature 2016" and published today (Wednesday), delivered the clearest picture to date of the status of our [native species](#) across land and sea. Crucially, the report attributes much of the imposing [threat](#) to changing agricultural land management, [climate change](#) and sustained [urban development](#). These threaten many of Britain's best loved species including water voles – the fastest declining mammal.

The startling report reveals that more than half (56%) of UK species studied have declined since 1970, while more than one in ten (1,199 species) of the nearly 8000 species assessed in the UK are under threat of disappearing altogether.

The report, produced by a coalition of more than 50 leading wildlife and research organisations and specialists including Dr Fiona Mathews from the University of Exeter, demands immediate action to stave off the growing threat to Britain's unique wildlife.

Dr Mathews, an Associate Professor in Mammalian Biology at the University of Exeter and Chair of the

Mammal Society, who helped write the report, said many British mammals are under pressure from house building and intensification of agriculture.

She said: "The reality is that our human population is expanding and we need urgently to work out how we can live alongside our wildlife. For example, water voles are one of our fastest declining species, and many thousands of kilometres of their habitat are affected by development every year.

"We are therefore researching ways to ensure their survival, supported by our water vole appeal fund. In the summer, we launched best-practice guidance on looking after [water voles](#) during development, and these are now being followed by industry, helping to ensure that "Ratty" survives on ponds, rivers and canals throughout the UK."

As the UK Government and devolved administrations move forward in the light of the EU Referendum result, there is an opportunity to secure world leading protection for our species and restoration of our nature. Now is the time to make ambitious decisions and significant investment in nature to ensure year-on-year improvement to the health and protection of the UK's nature and environment for future generations. The Mammal Society is currently drawing up a 'Red List' of the most threatened species, to help ensure that scarce funds are directed to the animals most in need.

Dr Mathews added: "The findings emphasise that whole ecosystems, not just one or two species, are under threat.

"We are a nation of nature-lovers – just look at the success of "Countryfile" and "Springwatch". Every week thousands of volunteers are out recording wildlife and helping with practical habitat management. We also depend on the natural environment for a huge number of goods and services, not to mention our own health and wellbeing.

"Yet successive governments have cut funding for the environment, and conservation concerns are all too often vilified as a barrier to urban development, infrastructure projects or efficient food production. This is a moment to reflect on what sort of country we want for our children – a sustainable future for them depends on our decisions now."

The State of Nature 2016 UK report will be launched by Sir David Attenborough and UK conservation and research organisations at the Royal Society in London this morning [Wednesday, September 14], while separate events will be held in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast over the next week.

Sir David Attenborough said: "The [natural](#) world is in serious trouble and it needs our help as never before. The rallying call issued after the State of Nature report in 2013 has promoted exciting and innovative conservation projects. Landscapes are being restored, special places defended, struggling species being saved and brought back. But we need to build significantly on this progress if we are to provide a bright future for nature and for people.

"The future of nature is under threat and we must work together—Governments, conservationists, businesses and individuals—to help it. Millions of people in the UK care very passionately about nature and the environment and I believe that we can work together to turn around the fortunes of wildlife."

In order to reduce the impact we are having on our wildlife, and to help struggling species, we needed to understand what's causing these declines. Using evidence from the last 50 years, experts have identified that significant and ongoing changes in agricultural practices are having the single biggest impact on nature.

The widespread decline of nature in the UK remains a serious problem to this day. For the first time scientists have uncovered how wildlife has fared in recent years. The report reveals that since 2002 more than half (53%) of UK [species](#) studied have declined and there is little evidence to suggest that the rate of loss is slowing down.

Mark Eaton, lead author on the report, said: "Never before have we known this much about the state of UK nature and the threats it is facing. Since the 2013, the partnership and many landowners have used this knowledge to underpin some amazing scientific and conservation work. But more is needed to put nature back where it belongs – we must continue to work to help restore our land and sea for wildlife.

"There is a real opportunity for the UK Government and devolved administrations to build on these efforts and deliver the significant investment and ambitious action needed to bring nature back from the brink.

"Of course, this report wouldn't have been possible without the army of dedicated volunteers who brave all conditions to survey the UK's wildlife. Knowledge is the most essential tool that a conservationist can have, and without their efforts, our knowledge would be significantly poorer."

Derek Crawley, Atlas Office for the Mammal Society, said "New technology now enables volunteers to share information more easily than ever before. Our MammalTracker app is freely available from the App Store, or sightings of mammals can be recorded via our [website](#). We will also be sharing information on how to make the most of volunteer programmes at a [special meeting](#) in the autumn.

More information: For a full copy of the State of Nature 2016 report and to find out how you can do your bit to save UK wildlife – www.rspb.org.uk/son

Provided by University of Exeter

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