

“NATURE IS WONDROUS, FASCINATING AND MAGNIFICENT BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY IT IS OUR LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM. NORTHERN IRELAND HAS SOME OF THE RAREST HABITATS IN THE UK – WE MUST DO ALL WE CAN TO CHERISH AND PROTECT THEM.”

DARA MCANULTY, 15
YOUNG CONSERVATIONIST

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STATE OF NATURE 2019 REPORT
www.nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019
#STATEOFNATURE



The *State of Nature 2019* report is a collaboration between the conservation and research organisations listed below:



STATE OF NATURE

A SUMMARY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



2019

THE STATE OF NATURE 2019: A SUMMARY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The State of Nature partnership consists of over 70 partners drawn from conservation NGOs, research institutes, and the UK and national governments. We have worked together to assess the state of the UK's wildlife, and to understand this in the light of the pressures on nature and the responses being made to recover our natural heritage.

The *State of Nature 2019* report uses data collected by tens of thousands of expert volunteers. These data are analysed using rigorous statistical methods, to report on the state of nature across the UK and in the UK's Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories and at the scale of the UK's constituent nations. Here, we summarise the report's findings for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's landscape is dominated by agricultural land, which makes up around 75% of the total area. This farmed environment is criss-crossed with a range of special habitats resulting from the wet and mild climate. There are internationally significant areas of blanket bog and large inland and coastal waterbodies, including Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles, which supports around 40,000 wintering waterbirds, and myriad lakes, fens and raised bogs.

Northern Ireland holds species found nowhere else in the UK, including the Irish Hare, Irish Damsel fly, Irish Whitebeam, Cryptic Wood White butterfly and Pollan, a fish. With 650km of coastline, the intertidal loughs, estuaries and marine environment are a significant component of Northern Ireland's biodiversity.

Further information on the state of nature in Northern Ireland, including details of the data and analyses underpinning our findings, can be found in the UK *State of Nature 2019* report:

 www.nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019

At the UK scale, the abundance and distribution of species has, on average, declined over recent decades and many measures suggest this decline continues. There has been no let-up in the net loss of nature in the UK.

KEY FINDINGS

Of the 2,450 species found in Northern Ireland that have been assessed using the IUCN Regional Red List criteria, and for which sufficient data were available, 272 (11%) are currently threatened with extinction from Ireland as a whole (Northern Ireland-specific assessments are not available).

An assessment of 185 bird species that breed or winter in the whole of Ireland placed 37 (20%) on the Red List and 90 (49%) on the Amber List. This prioritisation of species of conservation concern uses different criteria to the IUCN Red List, including historical decline, population size and range.

We have fewer robust trends in species' abundance or distribution for Northern Ireland than for the UK's other countries, due in part to the smaller human population meaning there are fewer people recording wildlife. The abundance indicators for terrestrial and freshwater species groups for which Northern Ireland-specific trends are available show varying trends over the different time periods covered.

An abundance indicator based on a restricted number (41) of breeding bird species has increased by 66% since 1994, although has shown little change over the past 10 years, and does not reflect some of

the declines known to have occurred in groups such as farmland birds. An indicator based on just five mammal species has shown an increase in average abundance of 91% since 1998, mainly due to the recovery of bat species from historical depletion.

An abundance indicator based on nine butterfly species has decreased by 43% since 2006, and an indicator of average abundance in 36 wintering waterbird species has declined by 25% since 1988, and by 24% over the past 10 years.

HEADLINES

Prior to the 1970 baseline used by the *State of Nature 2019*, we know there was widespread loss and degradation of habitats across Northern Ireland, dating back many centuries, from which the country's wildlife has not recovered.

In recent decades, pressure on Northern Ireland's diverse landscapes has resulted in both losses and gains for biodiversity. Our results show varied trends in average abundance in Northern Ireland of a suite of species since 1970, although these measures are dominated by vertebrates, many of which are rare and localised species that have recovered from low numbers.

Pressures upon wildlife come from many sources, including agricultural management, urbanisation, pollution, hydrological change, woodland management and invasive non-native species. Climate change is driving widespread changes in the abundance, distribution and ecology of Northern Ireland's wildlife, and will continue to do so for decades or even centuries to come.

Northern Ireland's seas are also subject to a range of pressures. Progress has been made on improving water quality, contaminants and eutrophication (excess nutrients) in coastal waters and some fish stocks are

showing signs of recovery. Other pressures, such as those associated with climate change and ocean acidification, are still challenging and there is evidence of change in pelagic (open sea) habitats and plankton communities. Progress has been made in expanding the network of Marine Protected Areas.

The *State of Nature 2019* report showcases just a few of the exciting conservation initiatives intended to help nature flourish across Northern Ireland, delivered through partnerships of individuals, landowners, NGOs and government.