

# Measuring Biodiversity - The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark

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## Introduction: the problem

Many organisations now operate environmental management systems (EMS), often certified to ISO 14000 series or EMAS (the Eco-Management & Audit Scheme). However, biodiversity issues are frequently neglected or even omitted, despite their importance. This is due to a variety of factors, including issues to do with the training of environmental managers and auditors, as well as the perception that 'biodiversity is too difficult' or even irrelevant.

It was with this background that Middlemarch Environmental began a organising a series of Biodiversity Workshops in 2002, bringing together policy makers and business practitioners to explore the barriers to biodiversity in business, and to find potential ways forward.



**Participants at the second Middlemarch Biodiversity Workshop**

Our workshops showed there are several barriers. The determination of biodiversity as a significant aspect within management systems lacks rigour in many cases, and appears in other cases to be simply overlooked. Some organisations have identified biodiversity as a significant aspect, but have had difficulty in establishing it effectively in their management programme, especially in setting targets and measuring progress. There is, however, a good business case for support of biodiversity even if it is not a significant aspect in EMS, by adding value and depth whilst demonstrating Corporate Social Responsibility.

## Developing a benchmark

As the Middlemarch workshops developed, we began looking at the idea of a 'biodiversity management standard' which would be complementary to environmental management systems. Our early consultations made us quickly realise that the compilation of a formal 'standard' would require the rigour of a long process, and might undermine existing environmental management standards. So instead we began to devise a 'benchmark' process, which closely followed the principles of ISO 14001 and EMAS, but also encapsulated aspects of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs).

It emerged that there were a number of key features that any new 'biodiversity

benchmark' would need to embrace. It should:

- Encourage company Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs);
- Be complementary to existing EMS standards;
- Be complementary to existing biodiversity initiatives (such as Business in the Environment or Making a Corporate Commitment, MACC2);
- Add additional value by assessing the quality and performance of a biodiversity management system and suggesting improvements;
- Be robust and credible, yet also readily achievable by companies, demonstrating effective biodiversity stewardship.

## Drafting and piloting

By early 2003 we had the essence of a new tool for organisations to use in measuring biodiversity performance, based on 10 key components (see table). These follow a familiar format beginning with commitment – at Board level – passing through survey and assessment to planning, implementation and monitoring. Given the multiple stakeholders in any biodiversity issue, we felt that partnerships and communication were key areas too. Finally, like any good system, there is a need to review and improve performance.

### The Benchmark's Ten Components:

1	Commitment	6	Implementation
2	Survey	7	Measurement
3	Assessment	8	Partnerships
4	Legislation	9	Communication
5	Planning	10	Review

Having prepared the framework, we had three other tasks to complete:

1. We needed to determine a simple yet robust way to implement the process for any organisation carrying out the benchmark;
2. We needed to refine and test the entire system by piloting it in a range of large and small organisations; and
3. We needed it adopted by The Wildlife Trusts – our parent charity – as their system rather than ours, for on-going management and future development as a UK-wide system.

Remarkably, we managed to complete all these potentially drawn-out processes in less than six months, thanks to significant support from our partners and colleagues.

## Launch

On 29 October 2003, The Wildlife Trusts Biodiversity Benchmark was formally launched at environment 2003, with Tony Robinson providing his support for a photograph, and key national figures adding their words of support too.



**Tony Robinson at the launch of The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark at environment 2003.** (credit P.Fermor)

"I am sure the scheme will be very helpful to the work on standards of biodiversity performance, and I wish the launch every success" **R. Hon Margaret Beckett MP**, *Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs*.

"The advantages are that it is simple yet robust and therefore should further encourage business to adopt sustainable management practices. You have our full support." **Sir John Harman**, *Chairman of the Environment Agency*

"The Business and Biodiversity Steering Implementation Group has identified benchmarking and performance criteria as a key work area... We support and welcome any initiative that helps achieve this aim."  
**Sir Martin Doughty**, *Chair of English Nature*

All the seven pilot organisations - whose assistance had improved the process significantly - received the inaugural Benchmark awards. The companies were BAA Heathrow, British Airways Waterside, Center Parcs UK, Elmwood College, Land Securities Group, Severn Trent Water Ltd and Shropshire Wildlife Trust. All of these organisations had previously supported biodiversity in their work, and had existing programmes against which to test the draft benchmark. They were also selected to represent a spread of sectors; single-site and multi-site companies; and both commercial and voluntary sector organisations.

### The Wildlife Trusts Biodiversity Benchmark

In order to achieve the new Benchmark, an organisation must demonstrate a convincing biodiversity programme containing each of the ten components. Achievement of the Benchmark is a simple two-stage process. The first stage involves a self-assessment using a Benchmark pack obtainable from The Wildlife Trusts. This gives the organisation ownership of the process, and time to check that it does have the systems in place to support its further progress.



The second stage is an independent verification process by Wildlife Trust-appointed assessors. This process involves a site visit, though with multi-site companies this clearly includes visits to several sites. Having studied the self-assessment report, the audit team seeks verification of commitment or achievement against each of the ten criteria.

One of the great advantages of the Benchmark over a formal standard is that in addition to certifying compliance, the audit team is also able to offer advice for improving performance against any of the criteria. Whether or not the assessors recommend that Benchmark can be awarded, an assessment providing suggestions is included in the review report. Organisations awarded the Benchmark are accredited for two years, subject to an interim self-assessment after one year. At the end of the second year, a re-accreditation process begins, where demonstrable action and improvement against each criteria is required. Throughout accreditation, The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark logo can be profiled as a public statement of biodiversity management commitment.

### Endorsements for the Biodiversity Benchmark

We were very encouraged from the feedback from all pilot participants.

Dave Farebrother, Assistant Director of Environmental Services of the Land Securities Group has the problem of addressing environmental issues at over one thousand varied locations. As a result of participation in the pilot, a new scheme for assessing the biodiversity potential of each site was implemented. He commented that: "Land Securities is very pleased to be taking part in this pilot scheme and to have been awarded the Benchmark. Within days of having our management plan being accepted, the scheme was already starting to be implemented. The programme has been enthusiastically received and we are confident that this process will enable us to bring about some real improvements."

John Salter, the Environmental Manager at Elmwood College explained that: "as a predominantly land-based college Elmwood has always placed sustainability and, more specifically, biodiversity, at the heart of its educational programmes. The college has developed its land holdings as a living, working, classroom, promoting biodiversity and delivering this as an integral part of the curriculum for all of our students intending to make a career in land management. The Biodiversity Benchmark gives us recognition for this ongoing effort."

Kevin Morris, Environmental Manager with British Airways noted that "British Airways ecological management processes have definitely benefited from this new methodology. The benchmark process has provided us with a new and improved tool to measure biodiversity change and better understand and help promote biodiversity improvements."

The Benchmark also contributes to the published biodiversity objectives of DEFRA, English Nature, the Environment Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Countryside Council for Wales, JNCC and, of course, The Wildlife Trusts.

### Conclusions

Most of the key information about the Biodiversity Benchmark is available from its website at [www.biodiversity-benchmark.org](http://www.biodiversity-benchmark.org), including a list of Benchmark organisations and statements of support. The Wildlife Trusts' UK Office is now in the process of setting up a UK Technical Committee to oversee the development of the Benchmark in a revision cycle, to ensure that the standard remains rigorous, robust and independent. Already several companies and other organisations have begun the self-assessment process, and two have progressed so rapidly as to gain the Benchmark following a successful audit: BAA Stansted, Beacon Press, Seacourt (a design and print company) and Wetland Creations Ltd.

We look forward to an increasing uptake of the Biodiversity Benchmark over the next few years, as knowledge of it spreads throughout the environmental sector. We will also be able to assess how much it has helped in raising profile and improving performance in organisations with biodiversity management issues. A particular area of development in the future will be with those organisations where biodiversity impacts are indirect, through supply chains, purchasing decisions, and other stakeholder involvement. For now, we have a new way to measure an organisation's impact on biodiversity – and a world first for an auditable biodiversity benchmark.

### References

Details of the benchmark can be obtained from:  
The Wildlife Trusts' Biodiversity Benchmark, The Kiln, Mather Road,  
Newark NG24 1WT [www.biodiversity-benchmark.org](http://www.biodiversity-benchmark.org)

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