

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA)



DEFINITION

Sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. They represent the most important sites for biodiversity conservation worldwide, and are identified nationally using globally standardised criteria and thresholds.

MAP



The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), BirdLife International, Plantlife International, and Conservation International (2014)

DESCRIPTION

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are nationally identified sites of global significance. The identification of KBAs is an important approach to address biodiversity conservation at the site scale i.e. at the level of individual [protected areas](#), concessions and land management units. KBAs are identified using globally standardised criteria and thresholds, and have clearly defined boundaries. There is no maximum or minimum size of sites, because appropriate size varies according to the socio-economic criteria, such as land use and tenure.

KBAs are seen as an 'umbrella' designation, which includes globally important sites for different taxa and realms, such as:

- [Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas \(IBAs\)](#);
- [Important Plant Areas \(IPAs\)](#);
- Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity;
- [Alliance for Zero Extinction \(AZE\) sites](#).

KBAs are mapped by national conservation organizations using consistent global criteria and present an important approach to national gap analyses and prioritisation to increase effectiveness and establishment of protected areas as mandated by the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and the [Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#).¹ In particular, Aichi Target 11 calls for an increase in the coverage of protected areas “...especially of areas of particular importance for biodiversity”. KBAs can be used to identify and document such areas of biodiversity importance. However further mechanisms are needed to legally protect the KBAs once identified, if the area is to be officially designated as a protected area. They are also of particular importance to the private sector, in providing ‘watch lists’ of sites at which development activities require a particularly high level of scrutiny to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity. Other uses of KBAs include informing safeguards and offsets design and conservation investments.

SUPPORTED BY

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), BirdLife International, Plantlife International, Conservation International, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, and over 100 national/regional civil society and governmental conservation agencies.

YEAR OF CREATION

2004

COVERAGE

Global in extent, with over 13,000 sites worldwide.¹

So far, KBAs have been identified in over 200 countries with more than two thirds being in developing countries.¹ The identification and delineation of KBAs is an ongoing process, although terrestrial KBA identification is expected to plateau at around 20,000 sites worldwide. Currently, the IUCN Species Survival Commission and World Commission on Protected Areas are convening a task force, one of the objectives of which is to consolidate scientific stakeholder consensus on criteria and thresholds for KBA identification.

CRITERIA

KBAs are identified at the national, sub-national or regional level by local stakeholders using the two globally standard criteria of vulnerability and irreplaceability. These are accompanied by globally standardized sub-criteria and thresholds:¹

- **Vulnerability:** This criterion is triggered when there is a regular occurrence of a significant (exceeding a threshold) population of a globally [threatened species](#) (according to the [IUCN Red List](#)) at the site. Currently proposed thresholds comprise presence of a single individual of a [Critically Endangered](#) or [Endangered](#) species, or 30 individuals of a [Vulnerable](#) species.
- **Irreplaceability:** This criterion refers to a site that holds a significant proportion of a species' global population at any stage of the species' lifecycle. This includes:
 - a) [Restricted-range species](#) – with thresholds currently proposed as 5% of global population of species with a global range less than 50,000 km² occurring at the site.
 - b) Species with large but clumped distributions – with thresholds currently proposed as 5% of global population at site.
 - c) Globally significant [congregations](#) – with thresholds currently proposed as 1% of global population seasonally occurring at the site.
 - d) Globally significant source populations – with currently proposed threshold such that the site is responsible for maintaining 1% of the global population.
 - e) Bioregionally restricted assemblages – with thresholds to be determined.

[Important Plant Areas \(IPAs\)](#) and [Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas \(IBAs\)](#), as subsets of KBAs and have similar criteria to those above, although the thresholds for triggering their status have not yet been fully aligned. [Alliance for Zero Extinction \(AZE\) sites](#), the highest priority subset of KBAs, share similar criteria based on extreme vulnerability and irreplaceability.

IUCN is leading on the formulation of a new KBA standard to identify sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. This standard incorporates and extends existing approaches, notably BirdLife International's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites. The aim is to launch this standard in late 2014.

KBA identification is focused on land, freshwater, and marine environments under national jurisdiction. Beyond the [exclusive economic zone \(EEZ\)](#), the identification of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) is proposed to utilize equivalent criteria to those for KBAs plus several in addition.

KBAs are identified, protected and monitored by national or regional-level stakeholders, often with the support of international conservation organisations including IUCN, Plantlife International, and BirdLife International. They are used to help set national priorities within the global context. The approach is also used to prioritise both national investment and for channelling resources for international support for globally important sites for biodiversity conservation. Some KBAs, being existing protected areas (or part of), are formally recognised although they vary in the degree of legal protection, ownership and management.² KBAs outside the protected area network vary widely in management regime.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE








Legal and compliance – Identification of an area as a KBA does not necessarily lead to legal protection or recognition by national government. However, approximately 56% of the KBAs sites identified so far overlap with an existing protected area and hence have legal protection³. The identification of KBAs can also support the designation of additional protected areas. The criteria for KBA identification are being used by several international financial institutions to objectively assess the environmental impacts of funded projects. They are, for example, aligned with the environmental safeguards standards of institutions such as the World Bank Operational Policy 4.04⁴, and the [International Finance Corporation \(IFC\) Performance Standard 6](#)⁵. These institutions have used one or more criteria of KBA identification in defining important natural and critical habitats within which adverse impacts require stringent mitigation. KBAs also feature prominently in the standards of certification schemes such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB)⁶ and the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC)⁷, as well as the Climate and Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA)⁸ standard as areas where measurable biodiversity benefits can be delivered. Furthermore, KBAs directly address the first criterion of the High Conservation Value (HCV) approach to identifying environmentally sensitive areas, which is ‘areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values’.⁹

Biodiversity importance – KBAs are important sites for biodiversity conservation priority setting and are based exclusively on the important criteria of high irreplaceability and/or high vulnerability. These areas are identified at the site-scale, sometimes based on existing protected areas, concessions and management units, and are therefore of high relevance for business in terms of mitigating and avoiding risk from biodiversity loss and identifying opportunity associated with biodiversity conservation.

Socio-cultural values – The identification criteria for KBAs do not explicitly refer to recognition of socio-cultural values. As these areas can be under a range of management regimes, local and indigenous communities may be involved in use, protection and management of these areas. For example, those identified under the subset of IBAs may be

accompanied with efforts to engage local communities in conservation efforts, and those that fall within nationally protected areas may be managed, entirely or in part, by local stakeholders and community groups.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. [Langhammer, P. F. et al. Identification and gap analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas: targets for comprehensive protected area systems Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 15. \(IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, 2007\).](#) 
2. Eken, G. et al. Key Biodiversity Areas as Site Conservation Targets. *Bioscience* 54, 1110–1118 (2004).
3. UNEP-WCMC. internal assessment (2013).
4. [The World Bank. World Bank Operational Manual. Revised Version 2013. OP 4.04 Natural habitats \(2013\).](#) 
5. [International Finance Corporation \(IFC\). Performance Standard 6: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources. 1–7 \(2012\).](#) 
6. [Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials \(RSB\). RSB Conservation Impact Assessment Guidelines, version 2.0. 1–23 \(2011\).](#) 
7. [Responsible Jewellery Council \(RJC\). Code Of Practices. \(2013\).](#) 
8. [The Climate Community and Biodiversity Alliance. Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards Third Edition. \(2013\).](#) 
9. [Brown, E. et al. Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values. \(High Conservation Value Resource Network, 2013\).](#) 



South Plaza Island, Galapagos Islands KBA,

Category:

[Biodiversity designations](#)

Related pages

[Alliance for Zero Extinction sites \(AZE\) \(Areas\)](#)

[Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas \(IBA\) \(Areas\)](#)

[Important Plant Areas \(IPA\) \(Areas\)](#)

Tools

[The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool \(IBAT\) for business](#) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas and prioritisation approaches, including Key Biodiversity Areas.

Page last updated 11 December 2014