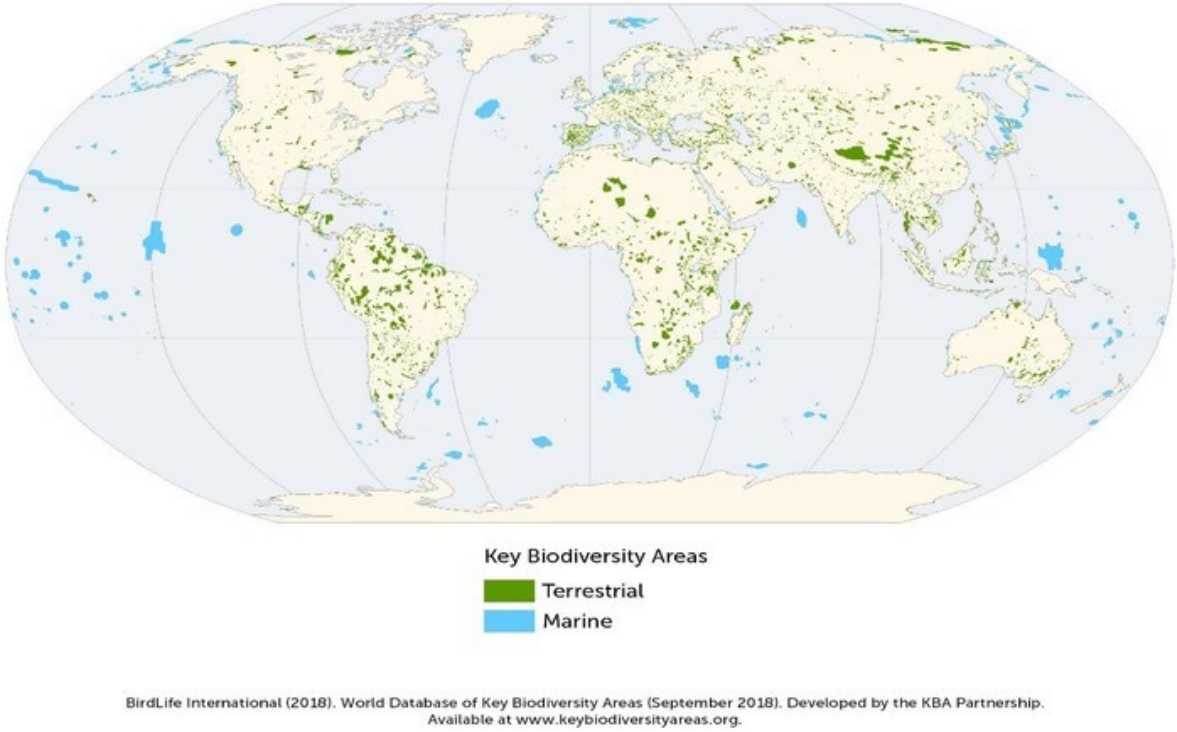
Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA)

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. Sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity, in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. They represent the most important sites for biodiversity conservation worldwide, and are identified nationally using a Global Standard from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

MAP



BirdLife International (2018). World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (September 2018). Developed by the KBA Partnership.

DESCRIPTION

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are nationally identified sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity, in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. 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. Prior to 2016, KBAs were identified using globally standardised criteria and thresholds, developed from BirdLife International's work on Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, and then expanded to cover a wider range of taxa and conservation initiatives such as Alliance for Zero Extinction Sites. In 2016, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published a Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas [1], providing criteria under which an area can be quantitatively assessed for inclusion as a Key Biodiversity Area, with the thresholds being applicable and comparable across taxonomic groups.

KBA identification should build off the existing network of KBAs, which includes:

- Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs);
- Important Plant Areas (IPAs);

- Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity;
- Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites.

KBAs can be used to support the strategic expansion ofprotected area networks by governments and civil society working towards achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (in particular Targets 11 and 12) as established by the Convention on Biological Diversity. However, if a KBA is to be officially designated as a protected area, further mechanisms are needed to legally protect it. As of 2018, 21% of KBAs are fully covered by protected areas [2]. KBAs are also of importance to the private sector, for informing safeguard policies, environmental standards, and certification schemes, and providing a watch list of sites where development activities require a high level of scrutiny to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity. Other uses of KBAs include supporting conservation planning and priority setting at national and regional levels, and providing local and indigenous communities with opportunities for employment, recognition, economic investment, societal mobilisation, and civic pride.

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, with the KBA Partnership launched in 2016.

COVERAGE

Global in extent, with over 15,000 sites worldwide covering approximately 4% of the world's surface. KBAs have been identified in over 200 countries with more than two thirds being in developing countries [3]. In January 2018, 21% of KBAs were estimated to be completely covered by protected areas, while 35% had no protection through systems of protected areas. The identification and delineation of KBAs is an ongoing process.

CRITERIA

KBAs are identified at the national, sub-national or regional level by local stakeholders using the Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas published by IUCN [1].

Sites qualify as global KBAs if they meet one or more of 11 criteria, clustered into five categories:

A. Threatened Biodiversity

- A1 Threatened Species
- A2 Threatened Ecosystem Types

B. Geographically Restricted Biodiversity

- B1 Individual Geographically Restricted Species
- B2 Co-occurring Geographically Restricted Species
- B3 Geographically Restricted Assemblages
- B4 Geographically Restricted Ecosystem Types

C. Ecological Integrity

D. Biological Processes

- D1 Demographic Aggregations
- D2 Ecological Refugia
- D3 Recruitment Sources

E. Irreplaceability

The KBA criteria can be applied to species and ecosystems in terrestrial, inland water and marine environments. Although not all KBA criteria may be relevant to all elements of biodiversity, the thresholds associated with each of the criteria may be applied across all taxonomic groups (other than micro-organisms) and ecosystems.

Anyone with appropriate scientific data may propose a site to qualify as a KBA, although consultation with stakeholders at the national level (both non-governmental and governmental organizations) is required during the proposal process. KBA identification should build off the existing network of KBAs (including Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and Alliance for Zero Extinction sites) and new data should seek to strengthen and expand the network of these sites. Any site proposal must undergo independent scientific review. This is followed by official site nomination with full supporting documentation. Sites need to be confirmed by the KBA Secretariat to qualify as KBAs.

Prior to 2016, KBAs were identified using two globally standard criteria of vulnerability and

irreplaceability, accompanied by standardized sub-criteria and thresholds.

MANAGEMENT

KBAs are identified, protected, and monitored by national or regional-level stakeholders, often with the support of international conservation organisations. The KBA Partnership, comprising 12 nature conservation organisations (see Supported By section), aims to map and document KBAs worldwide, and promote targeted conservation action in KBAs. BirdLife International manages the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas [4] on behalf of the KBA Partnership. Some KBAs are formally recognised through being partly or entirely inside protected areas, although they vary in the degree of legal protection, ownership and management [5]. 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, on average, 47% of each terrestrial, 44% of each freshwater, and 15.9% of each marine KBA are within protected areas [2] and hence have legal protection. The identification of KBAs can also support the designation of additional protected areas. The criteria for KBA identification have been used by several international financial institutions to objectively assess the environmental impacts of funded projects. They were, for example, aligned with the environmental safeguards standards of institutions such as the World Bank Operational Policy 4.046, and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standard 6 [7]. 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 have also featured prominently in the standards of certification schemes such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) [8] and the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC)[9], as well as the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) [10] 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’ [11]. Furthermore, IUCN has developed guidance for the private sector to define how businesses of all sizes and sectors should operate in and around KBAs [12].

Biodiversity importance – KBAs are important sites for biodiversity conservation priority setting and are based exclusively on criteria around biodiversity value. 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 opportunities 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 previously 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. IUCN. (2016). A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas, Version 1.0. First edition. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
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8. Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB). (2011). RSB Conservation Impact Assessment Guidelines, version 2.0. 1–23.
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10. The Climate Community and Biodiversity Alliance. (2013). Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards Third Edition.
11. Brown, E. et al. (2013). Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values. High Conservation Value Resource Network.
12. The KBA Partnership. (2018). Guidelines on Business and KBAs: Managing Risk to Biodiversity. Gland: IUCN. 24pp.
13. World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas

South Plaza Island, Galapagos Islands KBA, Ecuador. BlueOrange Studio/Shutterstock.com

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) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas and prioritisation approaches, including Key Biodiversity Areas.

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