

## West Midlands State of the Environment

### Biodiversity

**The natural environment is important for plants, animals and people. The ecosystems that support wildlife in England and Wales are a critical part of the natural processes upon which we all depend for fertile land, clean air and clean water.**

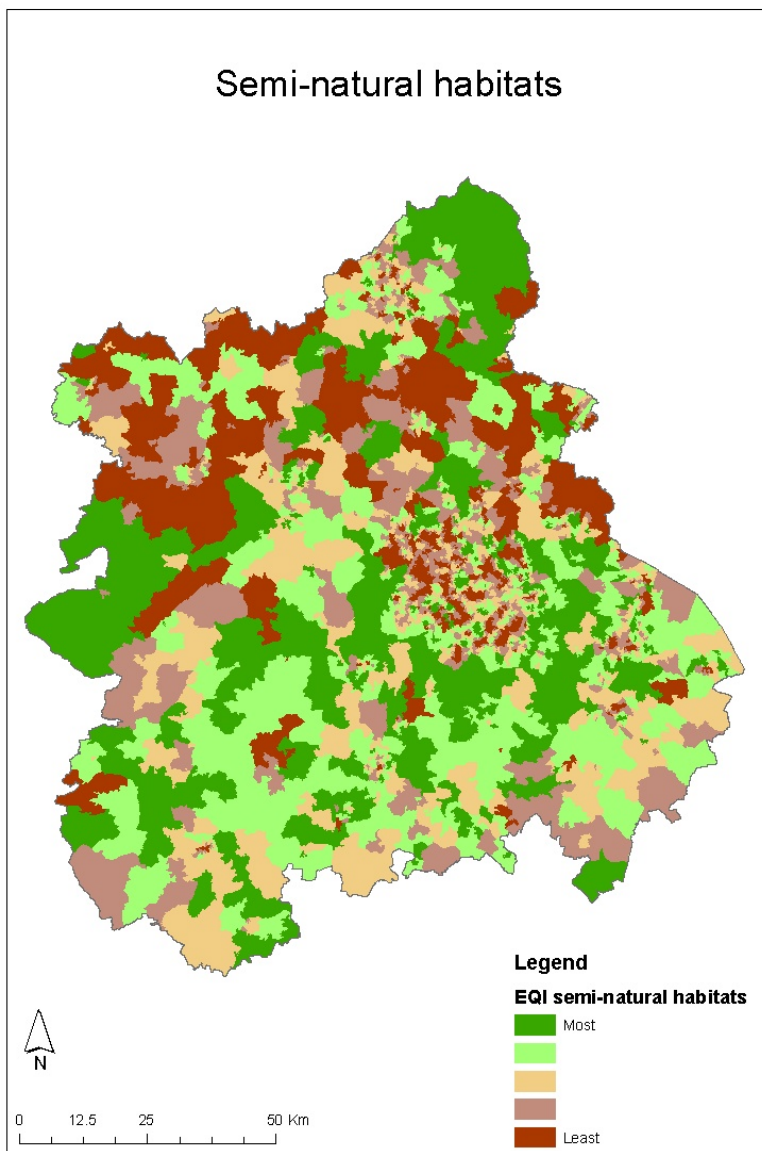
Much of the West Midlands has been developed as an important industrial region, however 80 per cent of the region is still rural. Natural or semi-natural habitats are under threat and over decades have become fragmented. We need to protect these habitats and the wildlife that depend on them, and enhance the connectivity between them so wildlife can adapt to climate change in the future.

### At a glance

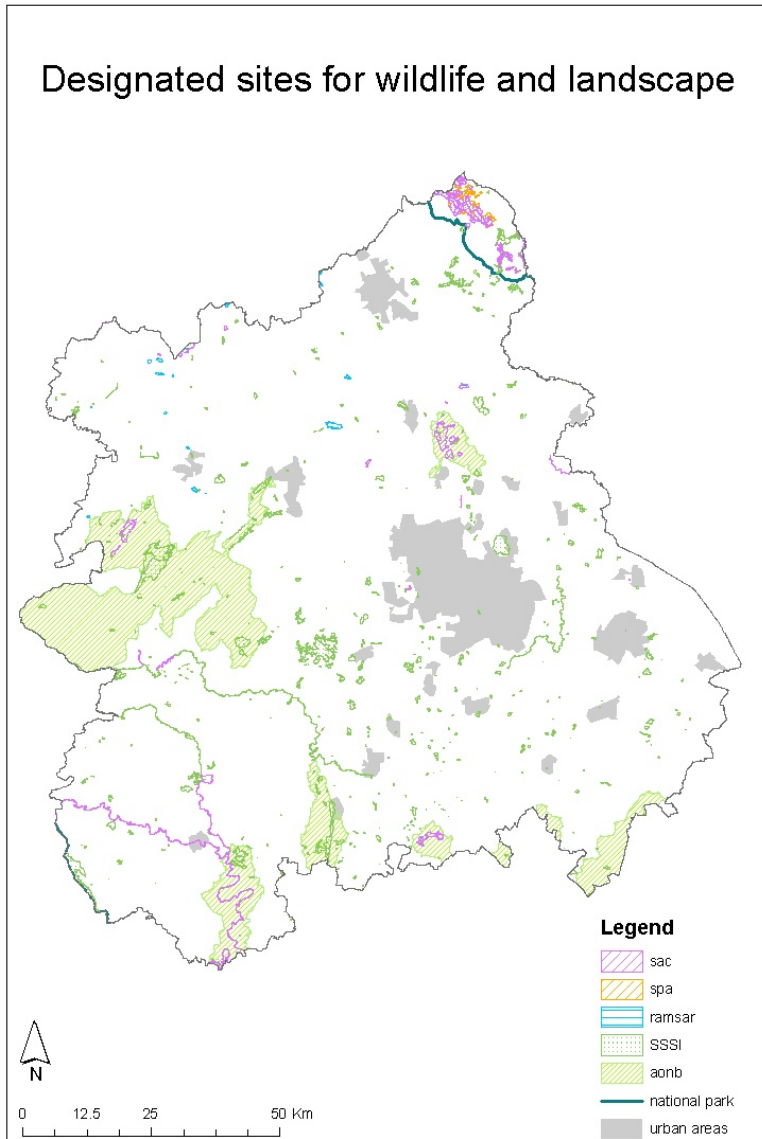
- The region has the second lowest coverage of semi-natural habitats in the country (only London has less), although nationally it is significant for having 20 per cent of England's lowland meadows and nine per cent of the country's remaining lowland heathland.
- There are two National Indicators for biodiversity: farmland and woodland birds. The West Midlands is one of only two regions where the decline in key farmland bird species has not yet been halted. Between 1994 and 2007 the population index for farmland birds declined by 18 per cent and that for woodland birds declined by 2 per cent. Some wetland birds such as lapwing, snipe and curlew are now restricted to a few sites across the region.
- Two per cent (28,000 ha) of the region is notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - the lowest cover of any region. Although by number (442) they account for 10 per cent of all England's SSSIs.
- 85 per cent of the region's SSSI land are in favourable or recovering condition.
- 22 per cent of total SSSI area are freshwater habitats comprising, of wetland, rivers and standing waters (ponds, lakes, canals).
- 44 per cent of freshwater SSSI habitat is in unfavourable condition. These are mainly rivers where there are issues with water quality and quantity, invasive species, and poor land management leading to diffuse pollution and sedimentation.
- West Midlands wetlands (Meres and Mosses, Severn and Avon Wetlands) and rivers (Teme, Mease, Severn, Avon) are particularly important for biodiversity.
- Key wetland species in the West Midlands include water vole, great crested newt, allis shad, bullhead, river lamprey, freshwater pearl mussel, and floating water plantain.

## Data and Trends

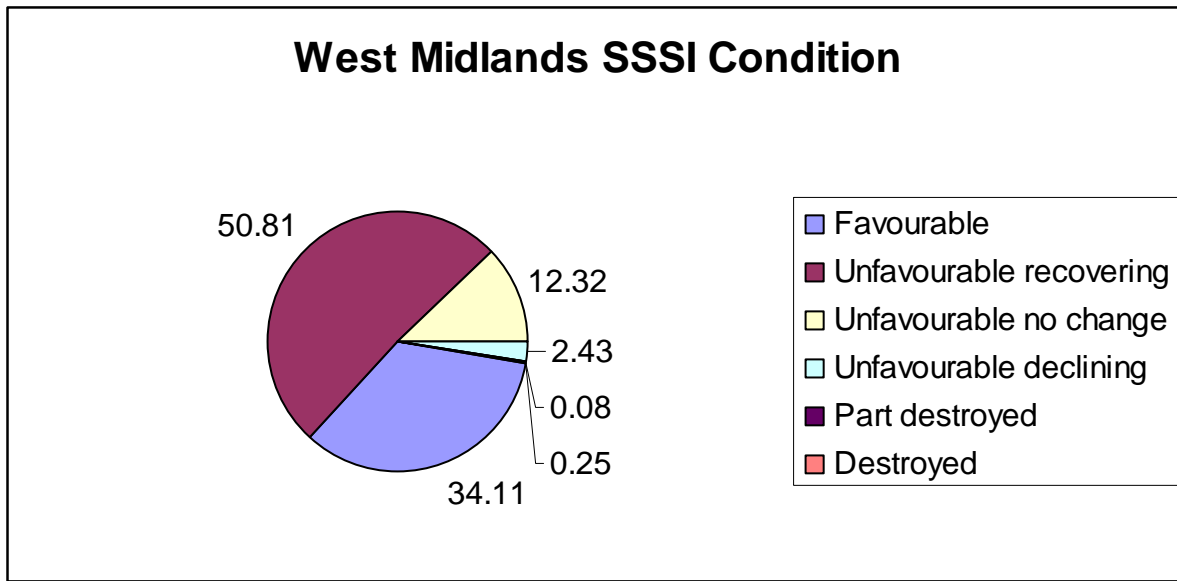
The following map shows information from the Landcover 2000 database giving percentage of semi-natural habitats for each West Midlands Lower Super Output Area (area with approximately 1500 people), mapped to five categories. The best areas may be expected to support a more diverse wildlife.



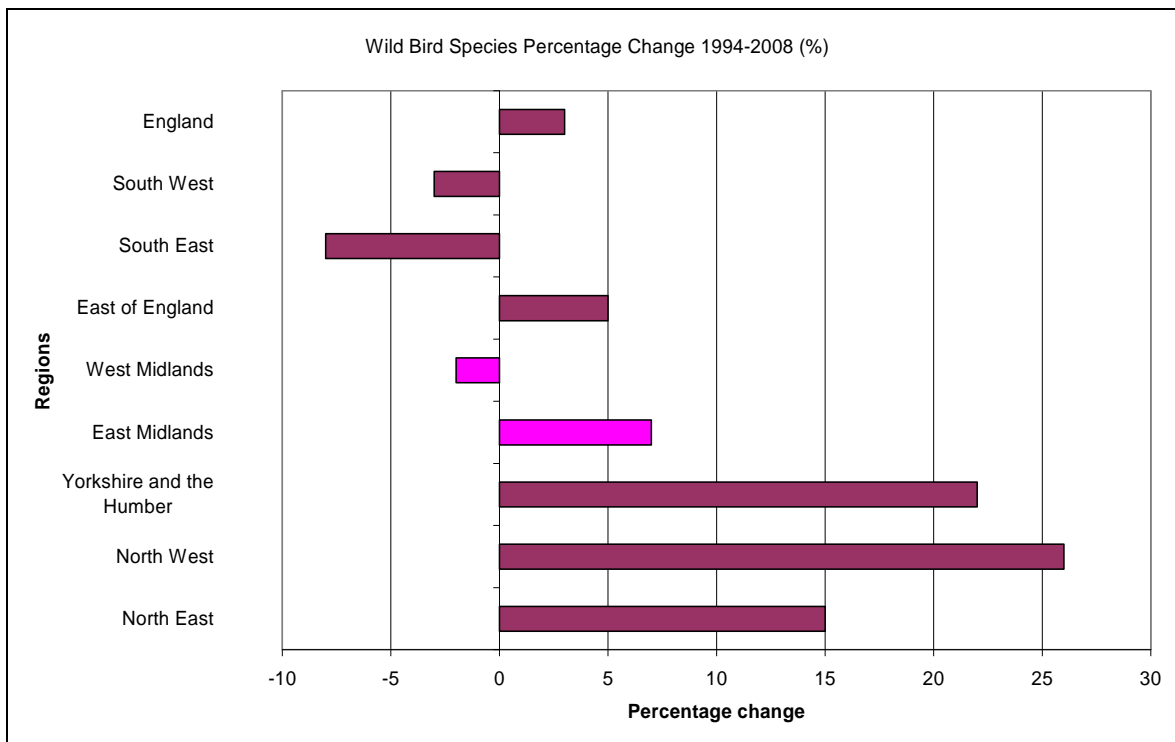
The map below of designations below shows that important habitats are located mainly in the west and in Staffordshire and that most of the 442 SSSIs are fragmented. The Staffordshire Moorlands, Cannock Chase and River Wye SSSIs are also of international importance (Special Areas for Conservation, Special Protection Areas). The Shropshire Hills, Malvern Hills, Cannock Chase and the Wye Valley are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



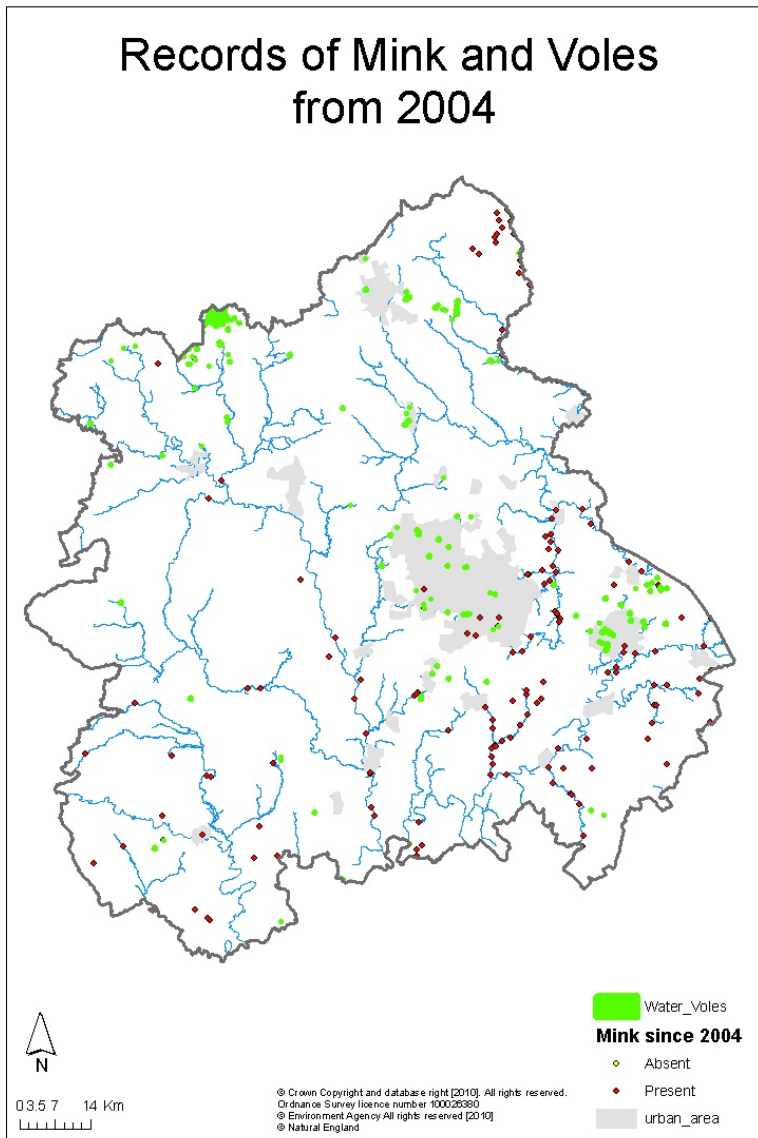
The chart below shows that 85 per cent of SSSIs in the West Midlands are favourable or recovering.



The National Indicator for wild bird species which includes farmland and woodland birds has shown populations in the West Midlands have declined since 1994. Only the South West and South East regions have declined more than the West Midlands. The decline in the West Midlands is worse than the national average for England as shown in the graph below.



In common throughout England, the West Midlands have seen reductions in water vole populations. The map below shows that the distribution of records of water voles is mainly to the north and east of the region. Mink are thought to impact on water voles which appear to be more common in the south of the region. However surveys are not carried out routinely and the records may not reflect the true distribution.



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## Our role

The Environment Agency has an important role in conservation and ecology. We have a duty to improve biodiversity under the Environment Act 1995, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and international legal obligations such as the Habitats, Birds and Environmental Liability Directives.

- We work in partnership with others particularly Natural England and take a lead role in many habitat and species action plans notably those dependent on the aquatic environment.
- In freshwater, wetland and coastal areas, we help to protect wildlife habitats by controlling pollution and regulating the amount of water taken from rivers, lakes and groundwater.
- Our work on flood risk protects vulnerable habitats and creates new places for biodiversity.
- We have a specific duty to conserve and maintain the diversity of freshwater fish, salmon, sea trout and eels.
- We also monitor the numbers and health of fish in rivers and the number of salmon and sea-trout returning from the sea.

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