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**BEST** *Life*  
2030

# BESTLIFE2030 contributions to the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030



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## 1. Introduction

With five years left to 2030, the time window to achieve our jointly agreed biodiversity conservation targets is closing fast. At the mid-point of key international strategies, such as [the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), assessing the progress made is fundamental to understand what additional efforts might be needed.

In the European Union (EU), the main policy guiding the block's conservation effort is the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#). Released in 2020 as one of the central pillars of the EU Green Deal, the strategy consists in more than one hundred actions aimed at reversing the decline of biodiversity and tackle climate change. The strategy does not only include measures that ought to take place within the territory of the 27 Member States, but also a series of global commitments that spearhead the EU's *Green Deal Diplomacy* agenda and reaffirm European leadership at the international level.

It is exactly outside of continental Europe that most of the EU's biodiversity is located. The European Union's Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories host more than 70% of Europe's biodiversity and are at the forefront of the triple planetary crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution.

IUCN is proud to support conservation efforts in these territories and regions. [BESTLIFE2030 \(Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas\)](#) is an IUCN-led and EU-funded project that serves as a granting mechanism focusing on preserving and restoring biodiversity in the EU's Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). The project builds the successes of its previous iterations LIFE4BEST, BEST 2.0+, BEST RUP and BEST 2.0.

BESTLIFE2030 covers seven regions worldwide, Amazonia, French Caribbean, Dutch Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Macaronesia, Pacific, and North Atlantic, and engages a consortium of organisations to guide and support local actors in developing and implementing conservation projects. At the heart of the project lies a strong commitment to strengthening local capacity, fostering community engagement, and promoting meaningful knowledge exchange to drive lasting impact.

This policy brief looks at the progress made in achieving the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the contribution that overseas territories have made in this context. A selection of case studies will be used to offer a glimpse of the significant work done by grantees in addressing environmental degradation.

## 2. Policy overview

The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 provided momentum in the international environmental arena, at a time when it was crucially needed. Negotiations under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework were undergoing several challenges linked to the pandemic and environmental leadership was sought across the world. Within the broader framework of the European Green Deal, the strategy successfully convened a sense of urgency and ambition in Europe and abroad. The document is articulated around four main areas, namely:

- A coherent network of Protected Areas;
- The EU nature restoration plan;
- Enabling transformative change;
- EU external action and an ambitious global biodiversity agenda.

The first area focuses on expanding a system of well-connected protected areas, while ensuring their management effectiveness, to cover 30% of the EU's land and seas. This commitment was then also embedded in Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Nevertheless, a key difference is that the European strategy also includes a commitment to strictly protect one third of these protected areas. The focus on ensuring the quality, and not only the coverage of protected areas, was welcomed as one of the key gaps that need to be addressed in the European Union. In 2022, to guide implementation in this area, the European Commission released the [Criteria and guidance for protected areas designations](#), following a comprehensive stakeholder consultation process.

The second major outcome of the EU Biodiversity strategy is without a doubt the development and adoption of the [EU Nature Restoration Regulation](#). This is the first comprehensive and continent-wide legislation for nature restoration with the overarching objective to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. The regulation includes specific targets on wetlands, grasslands, rivers and lakes, heath and scrubs, rocky and dune habitats, marine ecosystems, urban ecosystems, agricultural ecosystems, forests, and pollinators. The regulation is directly applicable to Member States and obliges countries to develop National Restoration Plans by 2027.



The third area focuses on the enabling conditions for the strategy to be successful, in particular sustainable financing, effective governance, and strong implementation of the EU environmental acquis.

The fourth cluster looks at the EU's global commitments and places a strong emphasis on the [Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(GBF\)](#). Adopted at COP15 in Montreal after 4 years of negotiations, the GBF serves as the new 10-year strategy for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. It includes 4 overarching goals to be achieved by 2050 and 23 action-oriented targets for 2030, as well as complementary sections on supporting mechanisms, responsibility, transparency, communication, and education. The GBF takes a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach in achieving the long-term vision of *Living in Harmony with Nature*.

Focus on the relevance of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation for overseas territories

The [EU Nature Restoration Regulation](#) features specific sections on the EU's outermost regions. In particular, paragraph 71 of the preamble states: *“(71) It is appropriate to take into account the specific situation of the Union's outermost regions, as listed in Article 349 TFEU, which provides for specific measures to support those regions. As envisaged in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, particular focus should be placed on protecting and restoring the outermost regions' ecosystems, given their exceptionally rich biodiversity value. At the same time, the associated costs for protecting and restoring those ecosystems and the remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate of the outermost regions should be taken into account, in particular when preparing the national restoration plans. Member States are encouraged to include, on a voluntary basis, specific restoration measures in those outermost regions that do not fall within the scope of this Regulation”.*

Furthermore, Article 14.16 (Preparation of the national restoration plans) recites: *“When preparing their national restoration plans, Member States may take into account the diversity of situations in various regions related to social, economic and cultural requirements, regional and local characteristics and population density; **where appropriate, the specific situation of the Union's outermost regions, such as their remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, as well as their rich biodiversity and the associated costs for protecting and restoring their ecosystems, should be taken into account.**”*

Complementary to this provision, Article 15.3(o) (Content of the national restoration plan) states that: *“Each Member State shall include the following elements in the national restoration plan, using the uniform format established in accordance with paragraph 7 of this Article a dedicated section setting out tailored restoration measures in their outermost regions, as applicable.*

To know more about the relevance of the regulation for outermost regions, please refer to the BESTLIFE2030 [Nature Restoration Regulation policy brief](#).

### 3. Halfway point: Five years to 2030

The very last action of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 concerns the assessment of the implementation progress. A formal mid-term analysis of the strategy was not conducted, contrary to the previous EU biodiversity strategy, but an evaluation was included in the [mid-term review of the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme](#) of 2024. Important to note that in the mid-term review a specific paragraph is dedicated to the EU's outermost regions and overseas countries and territories. The review underscores how the European Commission (EC) supported biodiversity conservation efforts in these regions through different funding instruments included in its [renewed strategy for the EU's outermost regions](#).

In 2025, the EU Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity (KCBD) released its science for policy report "[Assessing progress in monitoring and implementing the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#)", which builds on the [EU Biodiversity Strategy Actions Tracker](#). The tracker currently counts 51 actions in the strategy have been completed, 44 are currently in progress, and 9 have been delayed. On the positive side, notable successes include, inter alia, the adoption of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, the revised Pollinators Initiative, the guidelines to identify old-growth forests, as well as progress on soil Conservation strategies.

Unfortunately, the overall results from the report paint a negative picture on the on the likeliness of achieving the targets by 2030. By dividing the EU Biodiversity Strategy in 29 sub-targets, the KCBD report estimates that only ten sub-targets are on track to be achieved, progress is stagnant for three of them, and that negative trends are shown for two of them. Most importantly, the analysis shows that progress could not be evaluated due to a lack of data for fourteen of them. These results confirms the analysis of a Birdlife Europe [report](#) released in 2024 and of the European Environment Agency's (EEA) report on [Monitoring report on progress towards the 8th EAP objectives](#).

Key challenges in the implementation rest on the lack of implementation of existing regulations, the lack of mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation all sectors (especially related agriculture, fisheries, and urban ecosystems), and on the need for additional actions. The EEA also recognises the key role that the EU Nature Restoration Regulation could play if correctly implemented.

To scale up action and to better support the monitoring of the targets, several IUCN standards can be used including the [IUCN Red Lists of Threatened Species](#), [IUCN Red List of Ecosystems](#), the [IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas](#), the [Restoration Barometer](#), and the [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions™](#). Furthermore, IUCN is implementing several projects on the ground that actively contribute to the achievement of the 2030 targets. The next section highlights key progress made through the BESTLIFE2030 initiative.

## 4. Contribution from the ground: The BESTLIFE2030 projects

The first call for proposal of the BESTLIFE2030 programme concluded with 57 funded projects. Based on an initial review, the programme anticipates significant direct and measurable environmental benefits across EU OCTs and ORs. While these figures provide only an initial indication based on project proposals, they represent the fundamental contribution that this initiative can bring in achieving the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 targets, as well as international commitments undertaken under the Global Biodiversity Framework:

- Area under conservation and/or restoration management: More than 15,500 hectares (155 km<sup>2</sup>) are expected to be restored, protected, or managed sustainably across terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems, notably coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, tropical forests, and island habitats. This refers to the total projected area under conservation and/or restoration management across all ecosystem types and thematic areas.  
*EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 - Target 4 (Ecosystem Restoration)*
- Species conservation impacts: Approximately 85 threatened species (IUCN Red List categories: Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable) are targeted for conservation action, including emblematic species such as the Polynesian Monarch, green turtles, hawksbill turtles, and various endemic plants.  
*EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 - Target 4 (Species Conservation Status)*
- Invasive species management: More than 30 projects include active invasive species control (e.g., feral herbivore removal, invasive plant eradication) over combined areas exceeding 4,000 hectares (40 km<sup>2</sup>).  
*EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 - Target 12 (Invasive Alien Species)*
- Carbon sequestration and climate resilience: Around 2,500 hectares of carbon-rich ecosystems (mangroves, coastal wetlands, forests) are slated for rehabilitation or improved management, contributing to carbon storage, climate resilience, and disaster risk reduction.  
*EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 - Target 4 (Ecosystem Restoration)*
- Water quality improvements: Several projects integrate watershed management, soil stabilisation, and pollution control measures, indirectly improving freshwater quality and reducing sedimentation on coral reefs.  
*EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 - Target 10 and 13 (Soil Health and Reducing Pollution)*
- Protected areas management: BESTLIFE2030 projects collectively contribute to the effective management of over 25 existing protected areas and propose the creation or expansion of at least 5 new conservation areas.  
*EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 - Target 1 (Protected Areas)*

These are just the environmental benefits, social and economic benefits have also been duly taken into consideration for all selected projects, as BESTLIFE2030 strives for a holistic approach for nature conservation that benefits both people and planet. For example, to boost community and stakeholder engagement, more than 120 local communities, indigenous groups, and civil society organisations are expected to be actively involved in the project activities.

To provide practical examples of conservation actions on the ground, this policy brief features one project from each of the BESTLIFE2030 regions. All other projects, also from previous iterations of BEST, can be found on the dedicated website.

Amazonia: [CoJaG - Coexisting with the jaguar in Guiana](#): The gradual transformation of the Amazon rainforest into urban and agricultural areas is leading to the loss and fragmentation of feline habitat in French Guiana. The increasing anthropisation of the territory is bringing these predators closer to local populations, intensifying conflicts, particularly with herders. In 2020, in response to the emergency, HISA deployed several protection devices on various farms in French Guiana, such as light devices, electric fences, and the acquisition of Kangal breed protection dogs. The project, piloted by the HISA association, aims to evaluate the effectiveness of this protection measure, with a view to offering it more widely to breeders in the region.

Dutch Caribbean: [Marine Elasmobranch Nursery Area Assessment \(MENAA\): Establishing Sint Maarten's coastal habitat and wetlands as a shark and ray nursery area](#): This innovative project combines several research techniques to investigate how many, and in which ways, shark and ray species behave in the coastal waters of St Maarten. The information gathered in will be used to aid Sint Maarten's government in effectively implementing the marine component of their Nature Policy Plan. At a transboundary level, it can facilitate the inclusion of Sint Maarten into the Yarari Sanctuary for marine mammals and sharks.

Indian Ocean: [Ecological restoration of the Bouyouni river riparian zone](#): The Bouyouni River riparian zone is now severely degraded and only partially fulfils its ecological role. The project involves the ecological restoration of the river's riparian zone through the planting of native Bouyouni plant species, with a triple environmental objective: improving the quality of aquatic habitats, conserving the animal and plant species associated with these environments, and reinforcing riparian continuity. The project is part of an overall approach to restoring natural habitats and associated functionalities on a watershed scale and is based on an ecosystemic approach to the interdependence of the area's ecological components.

Macaronesia: [DEFCON-TGL: Defending and Conserving the Last Bastion of the Tenerife Giant Lizard](#): The DEFCON-TGL project seeks to protect the critically endangered Tenerife Giant Lizard. It addresses the threats posed by invasive species, like feral cats and rodents, and promotes direct conservation actions, research, and community awareness to ensure the survival of this reptile.

North Atlantic: [Combating Invasive Plants in Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat - CIPKaN](#): The project aims to inform the Greenlandic Government about the need to regulate the import of seeds and plants, preventing future issues with invasive species and protecting native vegetation. The initiative will address invasive species like the Nootka Lupine through targeted removal efforts and engage the Nuuk community and schools, this multifaceted approach aims to foster community involvement and enhance environmental stewardship in Greenland.

Pacific: [Tetiara Atoll seabird restoration - Protecting oceanic biodiversity while building ecosystem resilience to climate impacts](#): With the eradication of invasive alien species from Tetiara, an important opportunity exists to restore lost seabird species through established seabird social attraction techniques, and provide an example for using this conservation approach on other islands. The Tetiara Atoll Restoration Programme (TARP) has been underway since 2018 and has removed invasive rats and yellow crazy ants and is now monitoring responses to these conservation interventions across terrestrial and marine ecosystems. The project proposes to use social attraction methods to re-establish populations of lost seabird species, starting with wedge-tailed shearwaters.



French Caribbean: [Restoring ecological continuity - Drawing up a TVB strategy and implementing it in the region](#): Natural areas in Guadeloupe have declined sharply in favour of agriculture and urbanization. In the commune of Saint-Claude, a priority axis has been identified on which ecological functions are degraded and in average to poor condition. The aim of the project is therefore to restore the ecological functions of the forest subframe on the commune's main priority axis between two of Guadeloupe's major reservoirs, the heart of the Guadeloupe National Park

and the coastal environment. The project will create/restore spaces that are favourable to the reception and circulation of biodiversity, increase the surface area and quality of natural spaces on the scale of the territory, protect new natural spaces, and act on the green and black weave.

## 4. Conclusions

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is the framework within which we need to act to reverse the decline in biodiversity in the European Union and in its overseas territories. While substantive progress has been made, much more efforts are required to reach the European and global targets set for 2030.

Achieving the vision of the strategy of “bringing back nature in our lives” is not a task for the European Commission alone. Member States and subnational authorities shall help facilitate the mainstreaming of biodiversity in all sectors, ensuring the highest level of environmental ambition. Civil society organisations and local communities should be provided with an enabling environment to translating policies into effective implementation on the ground. The private sector should play a key role to divert from linear economic approaches and pursue a nature-positive model. Success requires a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach.

The key actions in the next five years revolve around three areas: closing the gaps in monitoring progress, ensuring adequate funding for biodiversity conservation at all levels, and empowering local communities. In particular:

**Monitoring** - The 2025 KCBD report highlights structural gaps in monitoring the progress towards the 16 targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The IUCN tools and standards can be fundamental to develop the missing indicators in the EU Biodiversity Strategy. Informed by the results from projects on the ground, coupled with the expertise from its global network of experts, IUCN stands ready to support the EC and its scientific bodies in completing the indicators dashboard.

**Financing** - The European institutions agreed to allocate at least 7.5% of annual spending to biodiversity objectives in 2024 and 10% in both 2026 and 2027. While the objective for 2024 was reached, the European Commission itself estimates that the ones for 2026 and 2027 will not. As the European Union is discussing the next Multiannual Financial Framework, it is therefore essential that at least 10% of the EU budget is allocated to biodiversity conservation and that key nature Conservation funding instruments continue in the next programmatic period (2028-20234), notably the LIFE fund.

**Empowering local stakeholders in overseas territories** - To translate commitments into action, it is essential to equip local stakeholders with the necessary resources and tools. Granting mechanisms are essential in ensuring that solutions devised to conserve nature are socially equitable and foster ownership. Previous iterations of the BEST initiative during the past years have proven to be very successful in empowering communities in the overseas territories to deliver on the EU biodiversity commitments. A particular focus should continue to be placed on capacity building and on supporting science-based decision making at all levels.

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