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Protect pollinators — reform pesticide regulations

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UK biodiversity: close gap between reality and rhetoric

In a bid to position the United Kingdom as a global environmental leader before this year's United Nations biodiversity conference (COP15) and climate-change conference (COP26), the UK government has announced biodiversity initiatives to halt species declines by 2030 and to protect 30% of its land area (see, for example, go.nature.com/3x4yk1k). These plans are at odds with its current spending on conservation.

The government's conservation funding fell by 42% in real terms between 2008 and 2018 to just 0.02% of gross domestic product (GDP; see go.nature.com/2udg3od). It missed 14 of its 20 international biodiversity commitments (Aichi targets) in 2020 (see go.nature.com/3dor8ra). This year it commissioned the Dasgupta Review, which calls for economic changes to stop biodiversity loss (see go.nature.com/3jozldl).

However, even taking into account the May announcement of a 47% increase in Natural England's funding (see go.nature.com/2t96qjn), the country still spends less than other nations with comparable GDP (see A. Seidl *et al. Nature Ecol. Evol.* **5**, 530–539; 2021 and go.nature.com/2udg3od). The United Kingdom needs to reconsider its public expenditure priorities if it is to close the gap between rhetoric and reality.

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China's homeless elephants need linked reserves

Fifteen Asian elephants caught the world's attention as they trekked northwards for about 500 kilometres from Xishuangbanna prefecture in China's southwestern province of Yunnan (see go.nature.com/3wofhfc). Their epic journey is widely considered to be a quest for better resources — almost 40% of the animals' habitat in Xishuangbanna has been lost to commercial development over the past 20 years. We call for an integrated system of national park reserves for China's elephants. This should be protected and take into account their foraging habits, migration patterns and other phased activities.

Conservation efforts have nearly doubled China's Asian elephant population to about 300 individuals over 40 years (L. Zhang *et al. PLoS ONE* **10**, e0124834; 2015). However, the destruction of habitat by extensive planting of cash crops such as rubber and tea has put them in conflict with humans. The government paid out about 22 million yuan (US$3.25 million) in compensation last year alone (unpublished data).

Reconnecting, restoring and expanding existing habitats would cut the cost of such conflicts and boost profits from ecosystem services (see, for example, P. Liu *et al. Ecosyst. Serv.* **38**, 100949; 2019).

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COVID: expand use of living guidelines

Continually updated as new research findings come out, 'living guidelines' provide invaluable support for clinicians having to make timely and informed decisions in treating people with COVID-19 (see *Nature* **593**, 168; 2021 and *Nature* **593**, 182–185; 2021).

Pioneered in Australia, these living guidelines process new clinical-trial evidence into widely accessible, practice-changing recommendations within just a few weeks, without compromising standards for trustworthiness (B. Tendal *et al. J. Clin. Epidemiol.* **131**, 11–21; 2021). Living systematic reviews of network meta-analyses feed into every update. These include structured evidence summaries, and they are published in user-friendly formats.

Producing living guidelines for COVID-19 has required global collaboration and innovations in methods, processes and technology. They need to be widely used: living evidence and guidance have broad applications in health care beyond the current pandemic. Efficient implementation and evaluation of impact on delivered care will greatly enhance the evidence ecosystem (P. O. Vandvik and L. Brandt *J. Clin. Epidemiol.* **123**, 166–170; 2020).

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Protect pollinators — reform pesticide regulations

Many approved pesticides still damage pollinator health at doses used in agriculture (see, for example, A. R. Main *et al. Agric. Ecosyst. Environ.* **287**, 106693; 2020). We argue that this is due to a systemic failure in pesticide regulations (see, for instance, S. López-Cubillos *et al. Nature* **573**, 196; 2019) that has been exacerbated by weak enforcement. Stricter laws are needed that are evidence-based, override vested interests and recognize pollinators as essential contributors to food security.

Policymakers must learn from failures in neonicotinoid regulation (see, for example, F. Sgolastra *et al. Biol. Conserv.* **241**, 108356; 2020). Before approval, pesticide risk assessment should incorporate protocols that address sub-lethal effects on pollinators. These include alterations in their behaviour and fitness under ecologically realistic conditions; mandatory testing on diverse species of native pollinators and of colonies for eusocial pollinators; and toxicity evaluation when combined with other chemicals such as proprietary additives, co-occurring pesticides and environmental residues.

Long-term monitoring after approval by appropriate governmental organizations will be necessary to pick up unforeseen environmental interactions promptly.

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