

Tread softly: new guide for businesses working in important ecosystems

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A new handbook provides businesses with clear guidelines on how to avoid harming habitats when working in highly important areas for nature.



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By Jessica Law

Most businesses want to minimise their impact on the natural world – but it can be hard to know where to start. Luckily, the process has just got a whole lot easier with the release of a new roadmap for companies operating in some of the most biologically significant places on the planet. The report, *Guidelines on Business and KBAs: Managing Risk to Biodiversity*, was released today by the Key Biodiversity Area Partnership*: an alliance of 12 of the world’s leading conservation organisations, including BirdLife International.

The guide, and its [accompanying website](#), lays out 15 simple steps that businesses of any size or sector can adopt in order to leave as small a footprint as possible when working within Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs): sites that are deemed essential for the world’s species richness to continue. These areas may, for instance, contain a particularly staggering diversity of life, or house especially unique or threatened species.

“Ideally, businesses and governments should avoid any harmful activities at these sites,” stresses Dr Andrew Plumptre, Head of the Key Biodiversity Areas Secretariat. “However, if developments are to go ahead, then this report provides crucial advice on how to minimise negative impacts on the species and habitats for which KBAs are important.”

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One way in which the report encourages good environmental practice is by recommending voluntary sustainability standards and certification schemes for the businesses to follow. The report also shows businesses how they make a positive contribution to biodiversity by investing in local conservation projects, or sharing information they gathered while working within the KBA (for instance, environmental impact assessments) with the KBA partnership. Ultimately, the guide aims to help inform government decisions.

“It is our hope that companies and governments will embed these guidelines into their environmental policies, voluntary sustainable standards, financial safeguards and regulations,” says Patricia Zurtita, CEO of Birdlife International.

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However, the guide must not exist in isolation – rather, as part of a wider conservation network. Patricia reminds us:

“We also need other actors – local communities and policy makers, civil society and scientists – to hold business accountable and ensure that the unique biodiversity that defines Key Biodiversity Areas is safeguarded for all”.

Following the adoption in 2016 of a global standard for the identification of KBAs, the KBA Partnership was created to map, monitor and conserve the areas. More than 15,000 KBAs have been identified so far, many of which currently support commercial activities, such as farming, fisheries, forestry and mining. Although the global KBA network does not yet cover all geographical regions or species groups, the KBA Partnership is working to fill these gaps.

* The KBA Partnership is made up of 12 of the world’s leading international nature conservation organisations. In addition to [IUCN](#) and [Birdlife International](#), this includes: [Amphibian Survival Alliance](#), [Conservation International](#), [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund](#), [Global Environment Facility](#), [Global Wildlife Conservation](#), [NatureServe](#), [Rainforest Trust](#), [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#), [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) and [WWF](#).

The KBA Partnership aims to enhance global conservation efforts by systematically mapping internationally important sites and ensuring that scarce resources are directed to the most important places for nature. The impact of this vital conservation work will be enhanced by promoting targeted investment in conservation action at priority sites.

