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## **Important Invertebrate Areas and the Putting Bugs on the Map project**

**Important Invertebrate Areas are nationally and internationally significant places for the conservation of invertebrates and the habitats upon which they rely. They will be a vital tool for the conservation of our most threatened species and the maintenance of sustainable populations of declining species.**

The **Putting Bugs on the Map** project will identify and map the UK's most Important Invertebrate Areas, then inspire, inform and deliver real change on the ground for our most scarce and threatened invertebrates. This five year project will shape invertebrate conservation at a national level, reaching and influencing a wide range of stakeholders. Putting Bugs on the Map will provide a framework to direct and focus conservation efforts and initiatives in the UK. This project will inform the future work of Buglife and others to make sure that resources are more effectively focussed, and that action is taken in the right areas at the right time.

The project will build partnerships and feed into existing initiatives and influence policies, helping to facilitate the development of landscape and ecosystem-scale approaches to conservation.



Glen Feshie (c) Anne-Marie Smout



**Important Invertebrate Areas (IIAs)** are the most important sites for the conservation of invertebrate biodiversity within a given geographical region. Identifying IIAs will provide easily accessible information on the locations of, and threats to, the best sites for invertebrates and their habitats. This information can then be used to ensure that specialists, conservation practitioners, decision makers and other stakeholders have accurate, sound data on which to prioritise local, national and international conservation projects.

**IIAs** are natural, semi-natural or naturalised sites which:

- support a nationally or globally important population of a species of conservation concern,
- exhibit exceptional species richness or a particularly rare or restricted (e.g. highly specialised) invertebrate assemblage, or
- feature an exceptional example of a habitat of national or global importance to invertebrate conservation.

IIAs are not legal site designations but are a framework for identifying and highlighting the very best sites for invertebrates, which can be used to support conservation actions and initiatives. As such the identification of IIAs could be used to inform the notification of statutory sites such as SSSIs.

IIAs provide a unique opportunity to consider the best sites for invertebrates in a broader context, and facilitate the development of landscape scale approaches to conservation that buffer sites that are at risk from edge effects or other pressures, address habitat fragmentation, and improve site or species ability to cope with the impacts of climate change.

The project will be based on Birdlife International's successful Important Bird Areas Project (IBAs), and Plantlife's Important Plant Areas (IPAs) programme. The IBA programme has identified, to date, over 3,000 sites across Europe, and has provided much needed information and action on threat status and site protection. Plantlife and their partners have identified 150 IPAs in the UK and the IPA network now extends to 66 countries worldwide.

The Putting Bugs on the Map project will seek to develop criteria and analysis protocols to ensure that IIAs are compatible with, and provide useful data for the IUCN Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) programme.

The IIA programme will initially concentrate on the UK, but will be developed with the intention of expanding the geographical coverage to the whole of Europe. The longer-term aim of the IIA programme is to identify and protect a network of the best sites for invertebrates and their habitats around Europe and to ensure their long term survival.

## Next steps

Putting Bugs on the Map will work with specialists to develop criteria for the identification of IIAs which are of relevance on both a national and international scale.

Criteria will follow international and regional guidelines (adapting those already developed by the IUCN, Birdlife International, Plantlife and others) to ensure consistency and will be based on three criteria: threatened species, species richness/diversity and threatened habitats.

Following the development of IIA selection criteria Buglife will work with our conservation partners in the UK to identify a network of IIAs within the UK.

This network will be widely promoted to conservation stakeholders and decision makers to ensure that IIAs are afforded adequate protection. Sites considered to be at risk and in need of immediate intervention in terms of management, research, or protection from development will be identified and appropriate action will be taken.

The Putting Bugs on the Map project will also work with the Bat Conservation Trust led Biodiversity in Planning initiative – providing maps and data on IIAs to support the development of new spatial planning tools, and improve the consideration of biodiversity in the planning process [www.biodiversityinplanning.org](http://www.biodiversityinplanning.org).

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