

Correspondence from Abby Crisostomo, GLA Green Infrastructure manager, 27 February 2023

Preparation of the evidence base to support the London Environment Strategy showed that there is not readily available or consistent information available nationally or regionally to track trends in biodiversity across London. This situation is not unique to London and reflects the complexities of monitoring different types of species and habitats over the long-term and the significant variations in data that is available for different types of wildlife.

Since the strategy was published, we have undertaken a green cover and tree canopy cover analysis of London, which provides a baseline of the city's green areas and urban forest. We have also worked with partners to better understand the gaps in current data and monitoring in London to understand opportunities to collect this information in a more consistent way so that trends can be detected. This has included a project with University College London to review the range of data available to inform a monitoring framework. This work showed that there are significant gaps in the data available for some species and most habitats and that new technologies such as eDNA, acoustic monitoring and earth observation will be especially relevant to monitoring at a London-wide level. However, it also showed that this technology requires further development and testing before it can be routinely used in an urban environment. For example, a national reference database for eDNA monitoring requires further development and there are additional complexities to using acoustic monitoring for wildlife in noisy urban environments, which require refinement of the technology and how the data it captures is analysed.

To help further refine and test how these approaches could work in London we are trialling the use of eDNA and acoustic monitoring at Thamesmead through our CLEVER Cities programme and have funded projects that test new technology through our grants programmes – for example drone monitoring to monitor habitat changes, and camera and acoustic monitoring as part of a water vole reintroduction project on the Hogsmill River. We are looking at further opportunities for this work, and are currently scoping a project with boroughs to trial new earth observation technology to monitor habitat condition and green roofs.

Later this year the Mayor will be appointed as a Responsible Authority for the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for London. This is a new statutory requirement that was not in place when the London Environment Strategy was prepared. In this context, and given the further testing and refinement needed before we can make use of these new approaches we will now publish the framework alongside the LNRS, so that progress against the strategy can be monitored.