



## PUTTING NATURE ON THE MAP: APPLYING THE IUCN PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES IN THE UK

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### ABSTRACT

*Putting Nature on the Map* is the title of the ongoing project for applying the IUCN protected areas management categories to all protected areas in the UK under state, private, charitable or community control, in the light of IUCN's adoption of revised guidance in 2008. The standard two-stage test is applied: do the designated sites/areas conform to the IUCN definition of a protected area? And, if so, to which IUCN management category and governance type should they be assigned? The paper describes the innovative methods used, including a Statement of Compliance to test whether a designated area system complies with the IUCN definition of a protected area, and an independent Assessment Panel as a quality control on data input from originating bodies before formal submission of official data through government to the UNEP-WCMC World Data Base on Protected Areas. The benefits of the approach, both in applying international standards and providing a basis for increasing the prominence of protected areas as a key mechanism for nature conservation, are set out and interim results are presented.

**KEYWORDS:** IUCN management categories, UK, WDPA, governance types, Statement of Compliance

### INTRODUCTION

Protected areas are fundamental in safeguarding species and habitats, ecological systems, geodiversity and landscapes, and improving the stewardship of natural resources in defined sites and areas. This has been long recognised in the UK through legislation dating back more than 60 years beginning with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. But the UK remains behind many other countries in applying the international standards set by IUCN in Guidelines for Protected Areas Management Categories (Dudley, 2008). Early in 2010, the former Chair (Nik Lopoukhine) of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) challenged the UK protected areas community to rectify the situation and place the UK in a leading position globally in the implementation of the 2008 IUCN Guidelines. In response, a collaborative project was established, led by the IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom (IUCN NC UK). Funded by The Sibthorp Trust, Natural England and The John Muir Trust, the work began in mid 2010 and is due for completion in time for the World Parks Congress in 2014. After initial work undertaken by Middlemarch Environmental, the project is now being taken forward

under the guidance of a small expert group drawn from the statutory agencies and senior members of WCPA. Many organisations owning protected areas or with particular statutory responsibilities for protected areas are involved in implementation.

### THE IUCN PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES SYSTEM

The system established by IUCN is "an important global standard by facilitating the planning of protected areas and associated systems, improving information management about protected areas, and helping to regulate activities in protected areas" (Dudley, 2008). It has been adopted by the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a global standard and included in its Programme of Work on Protected Areas (POWPA) in 2004 and 2010. It is enshrined in statute in some countries, but not in the UK and its constituent parts.

The IUCN Guidelines recommend a two-stage approach: The site/area or protected area system **must** conform to the IUCN protected area definition. The revised definition now in use is as follows: "A *clearly defined*

**Table 1: Summary of Protected Area data currently held by the WDPA (2011)**

National description/designation	Purpose	Geographical area	Number of sites on data	Present IUCN category
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Statutory protection of landscape quality	E, W; NI	49	V
Area of Special Scientific Interest	Statutory protection of bio & geo features	NI	226	IV
Heritage Coast	Coastal landscape protection and access	E, W	32	V
Local Nature Reserve	Statutory nature protection and access	UK	1,372	IV
Marine Conservation Area	Voluntary for consultation	UK	2	unknown
Marine Nature Reserve	Voluntary for consultation	UK	3	IV
National Nature Reserve	Statutory strict nature protection	UK	403	IV
National Park	Statutory landscape protection, access & enjoyment	E, W, S	14	V
National Scenic Area	Statutory protection of natural beauty	S	40	V
Regional Park	Non statutory landscape protection and access	S	4	V
Site of Special Scientific Interest	Statutory protection of bio and geo features	E, W, S	6,586	IV
Biosphere Reserve	Non statutory UNESCO designation for sustainable development	UK	9	not classified
Ramsar site	International protection of wetlands and wetland species	UK	158	not classified
World Heritage Site	UNESCO designation to safeguard Outstanding Universal Significance	UK	3	not classified

**Source:** UNEP WCMC World Database on Protected Areas with purpose added for clarification

**Notes:** E = England, NI = Northern Ireland, S = Scotland, W = Wales

*geographical space, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values”* (Dudley, 2008, p.8). Sites recognised as protected areas by IUCN must adhere to a number of principles. The most important, in this context, is recognition of the multiple roles of protected areas but with nature conservation (broadly defined) as the ultimate priority: *“in the case of conflict, nature conservation will be the priority”* (Dudley, 2008, p.10).

All sites that have been identified as ‘protected areas’ under the IUCN definition are assigned one of the six management categories and one of four governance types defined by IUCN.

### WHY APPLY THE IUCN SYSTEM IN THE UK?

The World Data Base on Protected Areas (WDPA), managed by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP WCMC), currently lists some but not all of

the designated sites/areas in the UK (Table 1) and most of them are reported under one of the IUCN Management Categories. However, the UK entry is out of date, does not conform with the 2008 Guidelines and is incomplete, thus not giving an accurate picture of the position in the UK. Many sites owned and managed by environmental NGOs are not included. Some other areas that are included may not meet the current definition of a protected area. Some types are classified generically, regardless of differences in management objectives. For example, all Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which is the main domestic designation for nature protection in the England, Scotland and Wales are considered to be Category IV, although some SSSIs have a different purpose to those of that category.

By applying the 2008 IUCN Guidelines, the quality of information on the UK’s protected areas will be greatly improved, and the data held by the WDPA will provide a much more accurate reflection of the position in the UK.



*Snowdonia National Park, Wales © Nigel Dudley*

This will help in understanding how the UK is meeting international commitments, for example in achieving the Aichi Target 11 agreed at the Nagoya session of the CBD (which set a global target to establish protected areas covering at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of marine and coastal areas by 2020) (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011), and obligations set by the European Union (EU). The revised material will help the UK Government and devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to understand how they are meeting their country-level nature conservation priorities; for example, in relation to Nature Improvement Areas and the new Biodiversity Strategy in England (Defra, 2010); and help to build on the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011). The information will also help to raise the public profile of protected areas which meet international standards, especially by giving free public access to maps and interactive computerised records (through [www.protectedplanet.net](http://www.protectedplanet.net) the website of the WDPA). Better information for land use strategies will be available through the database; local people should be able to make better informed decisions about the designation and management of protected areas; and

the information will also display the full range of places that can attract tourists seeking contact with nature and landscape. It will also identify what needs to be done to bring the management of other areas which currently do not meet the IUCN protected area definition up to international protected area standards. Finally, the outcome of the project should enable UK nature conservation to be showcased more effectively.

#### **APPROACH ADOPTED**

The basic aim of the project is to identify all the places in the UK that meet the IUCN definition of a protected area, and then to assign them to one of the six IUCN protected area management categories and one of the four protected area governance types. A Handbook (IUCN NC UK, 2012) has been prepared by the IUCN NC UK to guide the assessment process. While this Handbook is derived from the 2008 IUCN Guidelines, and should be regarded as subordinate to it, it is designed to assist UK users to apply the international guidance in the national context. It recommends a step by step approach to supplement the international guidance and make it more relevant to UK circumstances.





*Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park from Ben Lomond owned in part by NGO The National Trust for Scotland*  
© Roger Crofts

**Step 1: Determine what is, what is not, and what may be a protected area within the UK under the IUCN definition.**

For this, the material in the IUCN Guidelines (Dudley, 2008) should be used. Additional guidance is provided in the UK Handbook for some types of designation where the fit with the IUCN definition requires very careful consideration, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; this advice was generated following workshops with expert groups. Other countries could usefully use the same approach, annotating the Guidelines to help make decisions on national designations. In addition, Statements of Compliance are required to aid the assessment (see below).

**Step 2: If the site/area passes the IUCN definition, determine its management category and governance type.**

The UK Handbook presents a systematic way for assigning a site/area to the relevant IUCN category and governance type, focussing particularly on the fit with the primary objectives of each of the categories. The process involves answering the following three questions.

- **Does the site meet the IUCN definition?**

If it is not immediately clear whether the site/area passes the IUCN definition some further assessment is required to determine the position. Three stages are used in the UK process: first to test the site/area against each element of the IUCN definition, second to test the site/area against the common objectives set out in the IUCN Guidelines, and third to assess the site/area against the optional additional criteria set out in the IUCN Guidelines. Descriptive text is provided in the UK Handbook to help reviewers, but it is based on the IUCN Guidelines to ensure that there is no variation from the agreed international system. If the assessment proves negative, the site/area is rejected and no further action is taken. If the assessment proves positive, the site/area is then assigned to one of the IUCN categories and governance types.

For each of the main protected area designations in the UK where there is some uncertainty about whether they generically pass the IUCN definition test, the Handbook advises that a **Statement of Compliance** is drawn up to demonstrate conformity with the IUCN definition. Since the publication of the Handbook, such statements

Table 2: A key to determine if a site is a Protected Area

1	Is the site a clearly defined geographical area?	Yes	Go to 2
		No	FAIL – Not a protected area
2	Is it recognised, dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature? NB 'nature' includes all levels of biodiversity as well as geodiversity, landforms and broader natural values (see Appendix 4 for detailed definition)	Yes	Go to 3
		No	FAIL – Not a protected area
3	Is the main management objective nature conservation? Other objectives of equal standing may be present but they do not cause conflict, i.e. nature conservation is the priority	Yes	Go to 4
		No	FAIL – Not a protected area
4	Does the designation of the site aim to prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation?	Yes	Go to 5
		No	FAIL – Not a protected area
5	Is the long-term nature conservation ensured through legal or other effective means? E.g. national or international statutory law/ agreement/convention, traditional rules or NGO policy.	Yes	This is a protected area
		No	FAIL – Not a protected area

Source: IUCN NC UK, 2012

have been developed, for example, for the domestic designations of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), National Parks, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, (SSSIs) as well as for international designations of Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Biosphere Reserves.

Each statement consists of text which addresses the following questions:

- Is the site a clearly defined geographical area?
- Is it recognised, dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature? 'Nature' includes all levels of biodiversity as well as geodiversity, landforms and broader natural values.
- Is the main management objective nature conservation? Other objectives of equal standing may be present, but when they cause conflict, nature conservation should be the priority?
- Does the designation of the site prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation?
- Does the designation of the site aim to maintain or, ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected?

- Is long-term nature conservation ensured through legal or other effective means? e.g. through national or international statutory law/agreement/convention, traditional rules or NGO policy?

In some cases, these statements may conclusively demonstrate compliance for a whole suite of sites. However, in many cases sites will need to be examined on an individual basis; for this, the Handbook provides a series of step by step keys, accompanied by a descriptive text, to aid decisions on whether these sites fit the IUCN definition (Table 2).

The Statements of Compliance for SSSIs, SPAs, SACs and Biosphere Reserves have now been reviewed by the Assessment Panel (see below for details) and approved as fulfilling the IUCN protected areas definition.

#### • What IUCN management category should the site be assigned to?

For those sites which meet the IUCN protected areas definition, the Handbook provides detailed keys and descriptive material to allow a step by step assessment of management objectives to aid the determination of the most appropriate IUCN management category.



Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*) on the Farne Island, England © Nigel Dudley

The names that IUCN attaches to the categories are not used in the Handbook, because of the confusion that can occur between these names and the national names for protected areas. In the UK, for example, all national parks are presently classified not as category II (which IUCN terms ‘national parks’) but as category V, and it seems likely that most, if not all, will remain in that category after assessment under the 2008 Guidelines. Also, not all the designations are clear cut and the example of category V is given below to highlight some of the issues to be resolved during the assignment process.

Category V poses some specific issues for the UK under the revised 2008 IUCN definition of a protected area, with its emphasis on nature conservation objectives. The Handbook gives some general guidance on this as follows: “This category has been used to classify National Parks in England and Wales, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, National Scenic Areas in Scotland, the two Scottish National Parks and some other landscape designations. Some current category V protected areas may need to re-examine their management plans in light of the revised IUCN definition of a protected area and its greater emphasis on nature conservation. The proposed Statements of Compliance for AONBs and National Parks

would provide a good basis for this.” (IUCN NC UK, 2012). Those statements are currently in the course of development.

- **What is the governance type?**

Once the category has been established, the type of governance should be assigned using one of the four kinds listed in the IUCN Guidelines, along with the supporting material there and in the UK Handbook.

- *Governance by government*: governance by a statutory body, such as a government nature agency or a specifically established body, such as a national park authority;
- *Shared governance*: governance by partnership of public bodies, charities and other bodies approved by government agencies because of their management capabilities, such as the National Trusts and Wildlife Trusts;
- *Private governance*: protected areas owned and managed by charities, other non-government organisations, individuals and private companies; and
- *Governance by local communities*: who own land through traditional rights or more recent acquisition, or in Scotland have acquired land through special statutory measures.



## Protected areas data flow

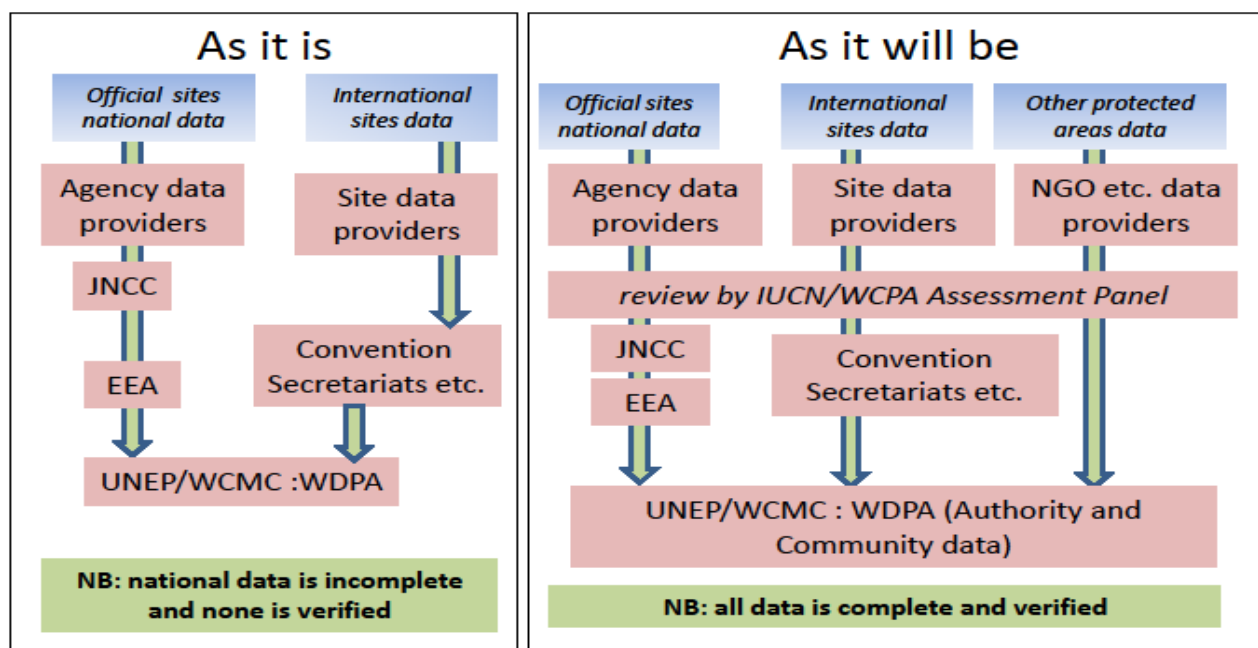


Figure 1: Current and future data flows for protected areas

IUCN is currently working on more detail understanding and assigning governance type which will be produced in 2013.

### VERIFICATION AND SUBMISSION OF THE ASSESSMENTS

It is important that the information that is generated through the project is checked for accuracy before it is entered on the WDPA. So, as part of this project, the Steering Group has developed a new approach to the verification of protected areas against the IUCN Guidelines. This follows a number of trials in other areas of the world and is part of an international effort within IUCN WCPA to increase the use of the IUCN Guidelines and to improve the accuracy of assessments using accredited members of the IUCN WCPA as an Assessment Panel (Stolton, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates the new system and how it differs from the current one in use. There are two important innovations in the new process:

- The inclusion of the IUCN WCPA Assessment Panel to verify the accuracy of the data provided by UK bodies for sites and areas to the WDPA against the published IUCN guidance; and
- The possibility being offered to NGOs etc. to provide data on their protected areas which are not currently put forward to the WDPA as they are not part of the official network of protected sites in the UK (even though many meet the IUCN definition).

All the data will be included in the WDPA and made accessible through the Protected Planet portal [www.protectedplanet.net](http://www.protectedplanet.net).

At present, the members of the Assessment Panel are several long-standing members of IUCN WCPA who have experience of the category system and its application in different countries (including the authors of this paper). The Panel reviews, first of all, the Statements of Compliance and provides feed back to the originators, and on resubmission approves them as the basis for assigning individual sites and areas to the appropriate IUCN management category. The Panel will, in future, review a series of sites and areas to judge the standard of assignments and make comments as necessary. Once the assessments of category and governance assignment are complete, the Panel will pass its views on to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) which submits the data to UNEP WCMC via the European Environment Agency (EEA), or (in the case of NGOs' data) straight to UNEP WCMC.

### INTERIM ASSESSMENT

From the work undertaken to date, we have made an interim assessment of those designation types which we consider may pass the IUCN definition test (Table 3—overleaf) and those that do not (following text). The Handbook states that a number of places with some form of protection do *not* pass the IUCN protected area test,

Table 3: Interim assessment of types of UK protected areas in relation to the IUCN Protected Areas definition

Type of site	Geographical coverage				
	UK	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
<b>International Sites (Global and EU)</b>					
Biosphere Reserves (core and buffer zone)	✓				
Biosphere Reserves (transition zone)	x				
Ramsar (wetland) site	✓				
European Union Habitats Directive: Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	✓				
European Union Birds Directive: Special Protection Area (SPA)	✓				
World Heritage site (Natural and Mixed)	✓				
<b>National or Country Level Sites</b>					
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)		✓		✓	?
Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) for biological & geological interests					✓
Heritage Coast (HC)		?		?	
Marine Nature Reserve (MNR)	✓				
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	✓				
National Park (NP)		✓	✓	✓	
National Scenic Areas (NSA)			?		
Regional Park (RP)			?		?
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)		✓	✓	✓	
<b>NGOs, Private sites etc with nature conservation as the main objective</b>					
John Muir Trust			✓		
Scottish Wildlife Trust			✓		
National Trust land held inalienably when managed for nature conservation		✓		✓	✓
National Trust for Scotland land held inalienably when managed for nature conservation			✓		
Land owned by a NGO for nature conservation	✓				

**Key:**

- ✓ Probably likely to pass IUCN Protected Area definition test
- ? Some doubt about fit with IUCN Protected Area definition
- x Unlikely to pass the IUCN Protected Area definition test

for example because nature conservation is not the primary management objective or because they are of a temporary nature. These are:

- Designations to guide decision making through the statutory Town and Country Planning system, such as Green Belt (safeguarding countryside by halting the extension of large settlements) or Areas of Landscape Value (non statutory for protecting valued local and regional landscapes), as nature conservation is not their main purpose.
- Agri-environmental and rural development instruments, such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas or areas covered by Higher Level Stewardship or Rural Development Contracts-Rural Priorities, as these are essentially temporary measures under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy to encourage environmentally sustainable farming and land-use.
- Measures to protect the built heritage, such as Listed Buildings (to force consultation on measures which may affect the quality and surroundings of buildings)



of special architectural or historical merit), Scheduled Ancient Monuments (to protect features of historical and archaeological importance) or Conservation Areas (to safeguard historically valued areas within urban settings).

- Natural Environmental Research Council Act Section 42 Priority Habitats as there is no certainty about protecting nature and the mechanism is rarely used.
- Local sites of nature conservation value determined by local government authorities (e.g. EcoSites, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites); these are not protected by legislation (or other effective means) and do not offer longer term guarantees of nature protection.
- Local Nature Reserves a statutory designation by the government nature agencies and run by local government authorities: although gaining some protection through local government, possibly including bye-laws, these sites generally do not provide guaranteed long term protection of nature.
- Any sites of the National Trust/National Trust for Scotland (charities established by statute to protect and preserve natural and built heritage properties, allow public access and enjoyment) that are not owned forever and not managed primarily for nature conservation.

It should be noted that some of the above will sometimes be designated as SSSIs or under other effective nature conservation legislation, in which case they will be recognised as protected areas.

## CONCLUSION

A new approach has been developed in the UK to enable all sites that meet the IUCN definition of a protected area to be identified and formally included in the WDPA, replacing the current unreliable data, thus allowing the UK to declare that its protected areas meet internationally recognised standards. A collaborative approach has been used in the development of a comprehensive Handbook to aid users of the system prepared under the aegis of the IUCN NC UK. The development of Statements of Compliance and the setting up of an Assessment Panel of UK based experts represent innovations that could be replicated elsewhere.

The completed data will be available to everyone with an interest in protected areas, hopefully in time to present to the 2014 World Parks Congress. It will also help promote the value of protected areas in the UK internationally, nationally and locally. It is hoped that this practical

approach in the UK will be of interest to other countries in applying the 2008 IUCN Guidelines for Protected Areas Management Categories.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Helen S. Miller CEnv MIEEM, project manager for *Putting Nature on the Map* and Principal Technical Ecological Consultant at Middlemarch Environmental Ltd, and the late Andy Tasker Director at Middlemarch Environmental Ltd and also the Director of the GLOBE Program, for their work as consultants on drafts of the Handbook. Thanks to Sue Stolton, Nigel Dudley, Richard Partington and Chris Mahon, our colleagues on this project.

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## RESUMEN

Putting Nature on the Map (Poner a la naturaleza en el centro) es el título del proyecto en curso para la aplicación de las categorías de gestión de áreas protegidas de la UICN para todas las áreas protegidas del Reino Unido bajo control estatal, privado, de beneficencia o comunitario, a la luz de las definiciones modificadas por la UICN en sus Directrices de 2008. Se formulan dos preguntas: ¿Se ajustan las áreas o sitios designados a la definición de la UICN de un área protegida? Y, en caso afirmativo, ¿a qué tipo de categoría de gestión y gobernanza de la UICN deben asignarse? En el documento se describen los métodos innovadores utilizados, incluyendo una Declaración de cumplimiento para comprobar si un sistema de áreas designadas cumple con la definición que hace la UICN de un área protegida, y un Grupo de evaluación independiente para efectos de control de calidad de los datos suministrados por los órganos que los originan antes de la presentación formal de los datos oficiales por conducto del gobierno a la Base de Datos Mundial sobre Áreas Protegidas del PNUMA-CMCM. Se exponen los beneficios de este enfoque, tanto para la aplicación de las normas internacionales como para proporcionar una base para aumentar la importancia de las áreas protegidas como un mecanismo clave para la conservación de la naturaleza, y se presentan los resultados provisionales.

## RÉSUMÉ

Putting Nature on the Map est le titre d'un projet en cours visant à appliquer les catégories de gestion des aires protégées de l'UICN à toutes les aires protégées au Royaume-Uni – que ce soient des aires contrôlées par l'état, des organismes privés, à but non-lucratifs ou communautaires – à la lumière des Lignes directrices de l'UICN révisées en 2008. Le test standard en deux étapes est appliqué : les sites/aires désignés sont-ils conformes à la définition de l'UICN d'une aire protégée ? Si oui, dans quelle catégorie de gestion et type de gouvernance se classent-ils ? La présente étude décrit les méthodes innovantes utilisées, notamment une Déclaration de conformité, qui permet de tester la conformité d'une aire désignée par rapport à la définition de l'UICN d'une aire protégée, et un Groupe d'évaluation indépendant qui contrôle la qualité des données provenant des institutions, avant leur envoi formel par le gouvernement à la Base de données mondiale sur les aires protégées du PNUE-CMAP. Cette approche permet d'appliquer les normes internationales et offre une base pour accroître l'importance des aires protégées en tant que mécanisme principal pour la conservation de la nature. Les avantages et les résultats intermédiaires de cette approche sont présentés dans la présente étude.