

UK carbon emissions drop at fastest rate in the world

By Isabella Cipirska

The UK has been decarbonising at a faster rate than anywhere else in the world over the last decade, a new report says.

Carbon emissions from the power sector have fallen by around two thirds over the last ten years, from 161 million tonnes in 2010 to 54 million metric tonnes in 2019.

It comes as the country's generators transition away from coal and natural gas to renewable energy sources.

In the electricity sector, a decrease in demand for power proved to be the biggest driver of the decline in emissions, according to the report by Imperial College London for Drax Electric Insights.

Demand fell by 13 per cent, even as the population grew by seven per cent and GDP rose by a quarter, as measures such as more energy efficient lighting, manufacturing and other efficiency measures took hold.

Report author Dr Iain Staffell said: "Several factors made significant contributions to falling emissions including carbon prices, coal retirements, conversions to biomass and the growth in wind capacity. But reductions in electricity demand dwarfed all the others - helping to push down power prices and environmental impacts.

"If this pace of change can be maintained, renewables could provide more than half Britain's electricity by the end of this decade and the power system could be practically carbon free."

The report found sustainable biomass generated more power than solar energy and provided a bigger reduction in wholesale power prices, while wind energy delivered a quarter of the reduction in carbon emissions.

Better air quality helps wildlife to buck decline

By Emily Beament

Some insects, lichen and mosses are bucking the trend of UK wildlife declines with the help of measures to improve air and water quality, research suggests.

Scientists looked at the distribution of thousands of species from dragonflies to ants and lichen which have not been closely studied, to see if they were suffering the declines seen in UK birds, butterflies and mammals. They found that while there was evidence of "concerning declines" including for spiders, some groups such as freshwater insects found in rivers, lakes and ponds were undergoing a recovery.

The findings suggest efforts to improve air and water quality in recent decades could be paying off for some wildlife, the researchers said. The research measured how more than 5,000 species of invertebrates such as moths and spiders, bryophytes such as mosses, and lichens, were faring by analysing the range of where they were found from 1970 to 2015.

It included millions of records of where a species has been found at a certain time and place. Overall, across the 5,214 species studied, distribution was 11 per cent higher in 2015 than in 1970, the study published in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution* found. The levels of wildlife seen in 1970 are likely to be considerably lower than earlier in the century and should not be seen as targets to be reached again, the study warned.

Dr Charlie Outhwaite, lead author from University College London, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and the RSPB, said: "We found evidence of concerning declines, but also found some groups, particularly freshwater insects, appear to be undergoing a strong recovery."



Beavers 'reduce flooding risk'

By Emily Beament

Beavers living wild on an English river have reduced the risk of flooding for local people and boosted wildlife, a five-year trial has found.

The mammals living on the River Otter in Devon have caused some localised problems for several landowners, but these could be addressed successfully with "active management", the study said.

Other wildlife, including fish, water voles, amphibians and birds, have benefited from the presence of the beavers living on the river and creating new habitat. Beavers were hunted to extinction more than 400 years ago.