

# Lowland mixed deciduous woodland

## Current UK status and trends

The area of woodland in the UK is estimated at 3.1 million hectares of which 1.3 million (42%) is in England. Since 1900 the overall area of forest cover has steadily increased from a low of 5% to 13%, although the UK remains one of the least wooded countries in Europe.

## Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

Approximately 5.2% of Northamptonshire is woodland (compared to a national average of approximately 10%), of which 57% is broadleaved and 43% coniferous, mixed, scrub or newly planted

## Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

At a national level, significant attention has been paid to developing a UK Forestry Standard (2011) and to protect, improve and expand our woodland resource. The government drive to protect woodlands focuses on ensuring that no net loss of woodland cover takes place and greater resilience to pests and diseases is considered. Improvements are made not only with better and increased management interventions, but also taking account of climate change forecasts and resilience to pest and disease threats. Woodland cover expansion is being progressed slowly through incentives, not only directly from Forestry Commission grants, but through schemes delivered by the Woodland Trust and others. Between 2008 and 2015, 250ha of new woodland were created within the county through the English Woodland Grant Scheme.

## Lead partner

Forestry Commission

## Target areas



## Habitat description

This habitat includes ancient and semi-natural woodlands that consist of at least 90% native species. Native woodland of ash, maple and hazel is the commonest type found in the county. Many of these are ancient woodlands. Lowland woodlands occur chiefly on ridge and plateau tops where extensive calcareous boulder clay deposits have historically limited agricultural expansion. Calcicolous shrubs and plants such as dogwood, privet, spindle, wayfaring-tree, guelder rose, dog's mercury and enchanter's nightshade are distinctive components of these woodlands, together



with bluebell and bramble. In such woods oak is often an artefact of planting, most of which was carried out more than 100 years ago in an attempt to convert coppice to high forest. Conversion to conifer plantation, carried out slightly later (from the 1960s to the 1990s), has destroyed many native woods. In Northamptonshire woodland includes NVC communities W7, W8 and W10.

Native oak woods are commonly associated with base-poor soils, which occur in patches and over sandstone soils in the west of the county. This type of wood lacks the base-rich indicators found in boulder clay woods. These freer-draining soils are typically dominated by pendunculate oak, birch, hazel, bracken, bramble and Yorkshire fog, with prominent displays of spring vernalis such as bluebell and greater stitchwort. Small-leaved lime can also be locally prominent.

Many subsidiary woodland habitats like ponds, grass rides and open space are key biodiversity features and should be managed to maintain or enhance them as part of the overall woodland environment.

Native woodlands can be divided into two main categories: Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Other Semi-Natural Woodland (OSNW) or secondary woodland. ASNW generally has more conservation value and is more important because it has occupied the site, normally with minimal human change to the tree species composition, since at least AD 1600. It is the closest we have to natural woodland in the UK and is an irreplaceable part of our heritage. Another form of ancient woodland is Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS). This is ancient woodland that has been altered, normally through felling and replanting, in such a way that has changed the tree species composition. Although the conservation value of PAWS is generally less than that of ASNW many of them can be restored to native species. For much of the last BAP period (2008 – 2015), any new woodland planting has resulted from incentivised woodland creation focussing on native species plantations. Some of this woodland expansion has been targeted specifically to expand existing woodland blocks, however precise figures are not known. Between 2008 and 2015 250ha of new woodland creation were planted through the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS). A large proportion of this was native lowland planting at minimum densities of 1100 stems per ha. Other woodland creation has taken place outside of EWGS funding ranging from small owner or community plantings to larger schemes funded through other means.

Woodland is not evenly distributed across the county but historically concentrated in two areas:

- Rockingham Forest (East Northamptonshire, Corby and Kettering Districts)
- Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge (comprising Yardley Chase, Salcey and Whittlewood Forests (South Northamptonshire District)

**Key opportunities for the Forestry Commission:**

- Encourage planning authorities to resist development impacting on ASNW in line with planning policy
- Work with Natural England and other partners to target support at ASNW in unfavourable condition
- Continue to restore Forestry Commission owned PAWS to resilient native broadleaf
- Provide support through Countryside Stewardship to encourage the creation of new native woodlands in priority areas

- Increase the diversity and resilience of Forestry Commission conifer plantations by increasing the ratio of native broadleaves

### Main issues and threats

- Loss of traditional management practises, such as coppicing
- Historic afforestation of native woodland with inappropriate species
- Decline or loss of management of subsidiary habitats, such as rides and open space
- Pests, diseases and climate change
- Alterations in import/export and national timber markets that may increase or reduce the woodland management taking place
- Development schemes threatening loss of woodland cover
- Increased deer numbers leading to negative impacts on woodland structure, vegetation and regeneration

### General strategy

- Reinstate sustainable practices in neglected woodlands (to bring more woodlands into management)
- Discourage the planting of inappropriate species and encourage planting with a view to pest and climate change resilience
- Restore PAWS woodlands to native broadleaved woodland wherever possible
- Highlight the importance of subsidiary habitats such as rides, glades and edges, to encourage good forestry management
- Create new native woodland in locations where it will enhance existing native woodland – particularly ancient woods – and other priority targets, through good silvicultural practices being integral to the initial design
- Ensure there is no net loss of woodland cover in the county
- Include resilience in planning any forestry or woodland work to reflect climate change predictions and enhance LBAP species
- Work with The Deer Initiative to increase deer management in key woodland areas like Rockingham Forest

### Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of at least LWS-standard ancient semi-natural woodland
2. Maintain the current extent of at least LWS-standard native secondary woodland
3. Bring into positive management 635ha of native broadleaved woodland by 2020 (~1% per year)
4. Restore 100ha of non-native plantations on ancient semi-natural woodland sites to native woodland by 2020
5. Increase the extent of native woodland by 250ha by 2020 through a combination

of converting (restocking) existing plantations and creating native woodland on ex-agricultural land

## Actions

<b>A.</b>	Facilitate and initiate active management on woodland nature reserves, country parks, SSSI and LWS including the creation and maintenance of associated features such as glades and rides	Forestry Commission Wildlife Trust NCC Natural England
<b>B.</b>	Prevent the loss or damage of ancient woodland to development or other land uses	Local authorities Woodland Trust Wildlife Trust
<b>C.</b>	Retain existing veteran trees and identify and protect veteran trees of the future	Woodland Trust
<b>D.</b>	Identify and survey woodland identified as Local Wildlife Sites and provide management advice to landowners	Wildlife Trust
<b>E.</b>	Promote the use of woodfuel from native woodland as a sustainable source of heat and power generation and provide advice and support to landowners to establish supply chains that facilitate sustainable woodland management	Forestry Commission Woodland Trust NCC
<b>F.</b>	Identify the location of plantations on privately owned ancient woodland sites and provide support or advice to landowners about grant schemes available for conversion to semi-natural woodland	Forestry Commission Wildlife Trust Woodland Trust
<b>G.</b>	In line with established plans restore appropriate non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites on Forestry Commission owned or managed land. Target areas where there is potential connectivity to ancient and semi-natural woodlands.	Forestry Commission
<b>H.</b>	Identify target areas in the Rockingham Forest and Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge where woodland connectivity can be enhanced and ancient woodlands buffered, and promote the creation of native woodland on these sites through natural regeneration or planting of native species	Forestry Commission Wildlife Trust Woodland Trust RNP
<b>I.</b>	Encourage all BAP quality woodlands have active UKFS-compliant Woodland Management Plans	Forestry Commission
<b>J.</b>	Work with the Rockingham Forest Deer Initiative project to increase deer management and monitoring	Forestry Commission Natural England Wildlife Trust

## Flagship species



- Adder
- Barbastelle bat
- Brown long-eared bat
- Noctule bat
- White admiral
- Willow tit
- Wood white

## Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Further habitat information from the Wildlife Trust](#)
- ▶ [Further habitat information from the Woodland Trust](#)
- ▶ [Information on the UK Forestry Standard](#)
- ▶ [Management advice for invertebrates](#) (from Buglife)
- ▶ [Woodland management advice](#) (from Forestry Commission)
- ▶ [Management advice for small woods](#) (from SmallWoods)
- ▶ [Woodland management toolkit](#) (from Sylva Foundation)