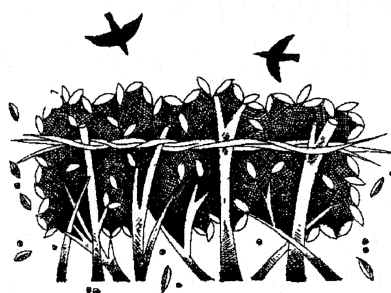


Opportunities for
**Enriching
the Vale**

A vision for habitat
restoration in the
Blackmore Vale:
Summary



HABITAT
RESTORATION
PROJECT

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Lowlands
Team

English Nature Habitat Restoration Project

A Vision for Habitat Restoration in the Blackmore Vale

Summary

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The Blackmore Vale Project - “Enriching the Vale”

The Blackmore Vale Project is part of a national Habitat Restoration Project, initiated by English Nature in April 1996. The aim is to investigate ways of increasing the variety and abundance (the biodiversity) of our wildlife by using existing Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) such as Countryside Stewardship. The Blackmore Vale is one of four Trial Areas, each of about 100km², which have been chosen to represent particular types of agricultural landscape typical of lowland England. The Project forms part of English Nature’s contribution to the UK’s Biodiversity Action Plan for achieving targets agreed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Its aims also accord with Article 10 of the EC Habitats Directive.

The Blackmore Vale is situated mainly in north Dorset extending into Somerset and Wiltshire. With the Vale of Wardour it is one of the four Countryside Character Areas (CCAs) in the Wessex Vales Natural Area. The Trial Area is in Dorset, south-east of Sherborne and south-west of Sturminster Newton. It is in the southernmost quarter of the CCA, between Yeovil Scarplands CCA to the north-west and the South Wessex Downs Natural Area to the south and east. NB. English Nature, in consultation with the Countryside Commission, has recently identified 120 Natural Areas, and 181 associated Countryside Character Areas, in England

Blackmore is a low-lying, gently undulating clay vale, which Thomas Hardy referred to as the “Vale of the Little Dairies”. It is still characterised by small dairy farms. The landscape of the Vale is typical of the English lowland pastoral countryside, composed of small, grassy fields, defined by a dense network of hedgerows, streams and small roads with colourful, flowery verges. Many small woodlands, some remnants of the former ancient Royal Forest of Blackmore, are scattered throughout the area. Although superficially the landscape does not appear to have changed radically in the last fifty years, the extent and quality of wildlife habitats has decreased considerably due largely to agricultural intensification and conifer planting on ancient woodland sites.

What the Project has done so far

- Informed farmers and other landowners about the Project and how they can become involved.
- Discussed with representatives of the statutory and non statutory countryside organisations how they might support the Project, and with them, identified existing incentive schemes which are available to farmers to help them enhance the biodiversity of their farms.
- Set up a Steering Group and an Advisory Group comprising representatives of the countryside organisations and farming community.
- Carried out a field survey of the existing wildlife with the permission of the farmers concerned and used this field survey, along with existing records from the area, to select habitats and species for priority action.
- Visited farms to discuss with landowners their experiences and opinions of habitat restoration/conservation and ELMS and, by means of a questionnaire, identify the farm constraints affecting habitat restoration.

- Combined this information to develop an idealised ‘vision’ for creating a more wildlife friendly countryside, with particular reference to Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats and species.
- Produced promotional leaflets and display boards; attended agricultural shows and arranged farm walks.

The Restoration Vision for the Blackmore Vale

The wildlife survey has shown that despite agricultural intensification, flower-rich meadows remain a very important wildlife habitat in the Vale, along with areas of ancient woodland and linking hedgerows. This survey, together with the interviews with farmers, have highlighted the following factors which need to be taken into account when planning restoration in the Blackmore Vale.

- Valuable wildlife habitats are small and fragmented
- Farm businesses - finance, labour and land tenure constrain the reversal of fragmentation
- Use of Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) is crucial to implementing the reversal of fragmentation

The vision for future habitat restoration aims, in discussion with the farming community, to create a diverse arrangement of rich wildlife habitats by:

- Protecting and maintaining existing habitats
- Restoring existing unmanaged habitats
- Improving under-managed habitats for wildlife
- Buffering and extending existing habitats
- Creating linkage between remnant habitats
- Creating new habitats
- Encouraging management of farmland by less intensive methods

The preferred areas for habitat creation have been selected by prioritising:

- Areas suitable for habitat creation/ restoration, adjacent to existing semi-natural habitats
- Areas that support key Biodiversity Action Plan species.

These areas are shown graphically on the “vision” map. The “vision” map is designed to help farmers and other land managers decide for themselves which options, if any, to adopt on their land. We wish to emphasise that the information provided in this report is designed to provide factual information and advice only. The final extent and location of any new or restored habitats will depend entirely on the circumstances of each farm.

Implementing the Restoration Vision

We will now be consulting further over the vision and how we can work together to implement it. The following actions will now be taken:

- We will consult widely to canvass opinion on the vision statement and its implementation
- Visit farmers to discuss priorities for habitat restoration and the availability of practical advice to undertake the restoration. Produce short farm reports and detailed FWAG “Landwise” Plans if required.
- Assist farmers with completion of application forms for Countryside Stewardship and other ELMS, and liaise with the relevant officers.
- Fund specific biodiversity projects not eligible for funding from other sources.
- Organise farm walks and demonstrations on restoration techniques in partnership with the Game Conservancy, the Forestry Authority and other organisations.
- Deliver presentations to local group meetings of farmers, conservation organisations and arrange and attend display stands at local agricultural shows
- Produce a newsletter about the Project and submit articles to local newspapers, farming and nature conservation publications.
- Monitor the take up of ELMS to determine the number of schemes applied for, the extent of wildlife habitat restored/created and the progress of reversing habitat fragmentation.
- Monitor the quality of the habitat created and the wildlife it can support to determine whether biodiversity targets are being met.

Details of the key habitats and species and our targets for restoring them are given in Table 1. Details of available ELMS are given in Table 2.

At the end of the Project a report will be produced identifying what has been learnt from the Project and the contribution this learning can make to implementing BAP targets at a local level across the English lowlands. For further information about The Blackmore Vale Project or the Habitat Restoration Project as a whole please contact:

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Table 1 Summary of Key Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and/or Natural Area (NA) Priority Habitats within the Trial Area, indicating their associated Target Species

KEY BAP & NA HABITATS <i>with Overall Target for the Trial Area.</i>	TARGET SPECIES	UK BAP Priority	Wessex Vales NA Priority
Broadleaved Woodland (NA priority habitat) Overall TA Target ♦ To increase the area of broadleaved woodland cover from the current 600ha by 25% (150ha), by the year 2010 within the identified preferred areas.	Dormouse	*	*
	Natterer's bat		*
	Pipistrelle bat	*	
	Lesser spotted woodpecker		*
	Nightingale		*
	Song thrush	*	
	Brown hairstreak butterfly		*
	Pearl-bordered fritillary	*	*
	Small pearl-bordered fritillary		*
	Double line moth	*	
Greater butterfly orchid		*	
Lowland Wood-pasture and Parkland (BAP & NA Priority Habitat) Overall TA Target ♦ To increase the area of wood-pasture/parkland from the current <10ha by 10% (1ha) by 2010.	Natterer's bat		*
	Pipistrelle bat	*	
	Serotine bat		*
	Lesser spotted woodpecker		*
	Dead wood beetles**		
	Lichens of veteran trees		*
Ancient/species Rich Hedges & Scrub (BAP & NA Priority Habitat) Overall TA Targets ♦ 50% of poorly managed hedgerows to be restored to good management by 2005 (in conjunction with the South West target of 50% by 2005) ♦ 25% of hedgerows and scrub in the area where brown hairstreak butterfly is known to occur to be suitably managed by 2010	Dormouse	*	*
	Natterer's bat		
	Pipistrelle bat	*	
	Barn owl		*
	Bullfinch	*	
	Grey partridge	*	*
	Linnet	*	
	Nightingale		*
	Song thrush	*	
	Tree sparrow	*	
	Brown hairstreak butterfly		*
Small eggar moth**			

Flower-rich Neutral Grassland (BAP & NA Priority Habitat) Overall TA Target To increase the extent of flower-rich grassland from the current 300ha by 25% (75ha) by 2010, at least 50% of which should be adjacent to existing semi-natural habitats. ♦ To undertake at least 5 hectares of habitat restoration for the marsh fritillary butterfly by 2010. ♦ To create 10 hectares of new habitat for marsh fritillary butterfly by 2010.	Brown hare	*	
	Barn owl		*
	Curlew		*
	Grey partridge	*	*
	Skylark	*	*
	Grass snake**		
	Marsh fritillary butterfly	*	*
	Small pearl-bordered fritillary		*
	Narrow-bordered bee hawk	*	
	Bithynian vetch		*
	Corky-fruited water-dropwort		*
	Devils-bit scabious		*
	Green winged orchid		*
Meadow thistle		*	
Arable Farmland and Improved Grass (NA Priority Habitat, Cereal Field Margins are also a BAP Priority) Targets to be determined	Brown hare	*	*
	Barn owl		*
	Corn bunting	*	*
	Curlew		*
	Grey partridge	*	*
	Lapwing**		
	Kestrel		*
	Skylark	*	*
	Song thrush	*	*
Rivers, Streams Ditches and Farm Ponds (NA priority habitat) Overall TA Target ♦ To manage 200 metres per kilometre of stream and river bank as a wildlife habitat by 2010 ♦ To ensure the suitable management, by 2010, of 75% of ponds within 500 metres of great-crested newt sites. ♦ To ensure that, by 2010, at least 5 ponds in each one kilometre square are managed for wildlife	Otter	*	*
	Water vole	*	*
	Kingfisher		*
	Reed bunting		
	Grass snake**		
	Great crested newt	*	
** Other priority species within the Blackmore Vale			

Table 2 Summary of Key Mechanisms and Incentives for Implementation

Agency	Extent of Resource
English Nature	Annual payments are made for the sympathetic management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
Environment Agency	Capital payments of up to 50% of costs are made for small waterside restoration projects including tree and shrub planting, and otter holts.
Dorset County Council Conservation Grant	Capital payments of up to 50% of costs are made for small conservation projects including tree and shrub planting, hedgerow restoration, fencing, pond restoration, pollarding and coppicing.
North Dorset District Council	Advice on local community aspects. Grant aid available
West Dorset District Council	Advice on local community aspects. Grant aiding conservation work on sites of county importance (SNCIs)
Forestry Authority Woodland Grant Scheme	Capital payments are paid in installments for the planting of new woodlands and restocking. Additional supplements are also available to assist the projects, including planting conifers or broadleaves on arable land or improved grassland, compensation for excluding stock from woodland and encouragement of natural regeneration.
Forestry Authority Woodland Improvement Grant	Capital payments of up to 50% of costs are made to enhance existing woodlands, eligible under Providing Public Recreation in Woodlands, Under managed Woods or Woodland Biodiversity options.
Forestry Authority Woodland Management Challenge	Payments are made in addition to WIG to top funding up to 100% for the Management of Small Dorset Woods.
MAFF Countryside Stewardship Scheme	Capital and annual management payments are made for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes, wildlife, historic features and public enjoyment. A wide range of payments are available. The scheme offers 10-year management agreements, and acceptance is discretionary.
MAFF Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	Annual payments for planting new woods on land currently in productive agriculture, in addition to the Forestry Authority's Woodland Grant Scheme.
MAFF Habitat Scheme	Annual payments to create or improve wildlife habitats on land that came out of the voluntary 5-Year Set-Aside Scheme in 1996, and which has not been returned to cultivation in the meantime.
MAFF Non-Rotational and Rotational Set-Aside	Annual payments for set-aside land, eligible under field margin, grassland or natural regeneration management options under the Arable Area Payments Scheme.
MAFF Organic Aid Scheme	Annual payments for the conversion to organic farming from conventional practices.