

Opportunities for renewing Sherwood's wildlife: Summary

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English Nature Habitat Restoration Project

Opportunities for:

“RENEWING SHERWOOD’S WILDLIFE”

Summary

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The Sherwood Project - “Renewing Sherwood’s Wildlife”

The Sherwood 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. Sherwood is one of four Trial Areas, each of about 100km², which have been chosen to represent different 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. At Sherwood English Nature have formed a partnership with the Sherwood Forest Trust.

The Trial Area is situated in the northern part of the Sherwood Natural Area¹, extending from Clumber Park in the north to Clipstone Forest in the south. It is crossed from west to east by three rivers, which have created a series of valleys, surrounded by gently rolling hills. The soils are very sandy and freely draining, characterised by heathland and dry, oak dominated wood-pasture, in an arable matrix. The landscape is shared with the signs of human industry, in the form of conifer plantations and mine spoil heaps, both of which have considerable potential for sensitive habitat restoration.

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 statutory and non-statutory countryside organisations how we can work together to achieve wildlife gain, and what schemes are available to farmers and other land managers to enable them to enhance biodiversity on their land.
- Set up an Advisory Group and a Steering Group, comprising representatives of countryside organisations and the landowning community.
- Carried out a field survey of the wildlife of the Trial Area, and used the results, and existing local records, to identify priority habitats and species for action.
- Combined this information to identify opportunities for restoring a more wildlife friendly countryside, with particular reference to Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species.
- Sought opportunities to assist land managers with habitat restoration work, to publicise habitat restoration and to facilitate sharing of best practise amongst land managers.

¹ *English Nature and the Countryside Commission, have recently identified 120 Natural Areas, and 181 associated Countryside Character Areas, in England.*

The Restoration Opportunities for Sherwood

Key issues which will be taken into account when planning restoration in Sherwood:

- Nitrate sensitive areas. Payments are available to farmers in two parts of the trial Area, for a number of actions to reduce nitrate applications and increase nitrogen uptake.
- Water resources. Low winter flows, partly caused by storage of water in farm reservoirs could lead to a decrease in the flooding needed to sustain wetland habitats, although the increase in open water may benefit waterfowl.
- Leisure interests. The traditional character of the area is a tourist attraction. Good conservation management should provide benefits for the leisure business.
- Mining subsidence has led to altered flow of watercourses, destruction of channels necessary to sustain water meadows and loss of wetlands habitats. However, where cultivated land is lost, British Coal compensates farmers or restores the land. Some farmers have accepted compensation and had the land restored to wetland habitats.
- Urban fringe issues (arson, motorbike scrambling, harassment etc) threaten wildlife by direct destruction of habitat, and by constraints on management. For example grazing has decreased in the area as a result of such issues.

Ways in which, through discussion with the farming community, a more diverse wildlife rich countryside might be helped to develop:

- Extending and linking patches of semi-natural habitat on the higher ground; by restoring adjacent land, and creating buffer zones of sensitively managed land.
- Creating new areas of semi-natural habitat.
- Linking the main patches of semi-natural habitat by creating corridors or stepping stones of new or restored habitats running through the lower, arable land in the valleys.
- Enhancing frequently flooded land in the river floodplain, including areas subject to subsidence, to form corridors of wetland habitats.

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. This map is designed to help farmers and other land managers decide 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 the particular farm.

Implementing the Restoration Opportunities

We will now be consulting further over the restoration options available and how we can work together to implement them. We will:

- Consult widely to canvass opinion on the vision statement and its implementation.
- Promote habitat restoration to land managers in the farming, forestry, mining and leisure sectors.
- Provide advice and practical help, including assistance with ELMS applications, identification of other sources of funding and facilitation of access to specialist machinery, advice, labour and seeds (of local provenance where possible).
- Maintain and develop working relationships with other public sector providers of countryside management advice, and work with them to develop a consistent, coherent and efficient service for land managers.
- Organise demonstration events on restoration techniques alone and in partnership with Advisory Group members.
- Produce a newsletter about the Project and submit articles to local newspapers, farming and nature conservation publications.
- Monitor the take up of ELMS, and continue to evaluate the opinion of landowners about these schemes. Monitor the extent of wildlife habitat restored/created and the progress of reversing habitat fragmentation.

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.

Following the end of this part of the Sherwood Project in March 2000, 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.

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

KEY BAP & NA HABITATS	TARGET SPECIES	UK BAP Priority	Sherwood NA Priority
Broadleaved Woodland (oak-birch woodland on acidic, sandy soils). (NA Priority Habitat).	English and sessile oaks		*
	bluebell		
	noctule bat		*
	wood warbler**		
	bullfinch	*	
	purple hairstreak butterfly**		
Lowland Wood-Pasture and Parkland. (UK BAP & NA Priority Habitat).	English and sessile veteran oaks		*
	ling heather		
	Natterer's bat		*
	long-eared owl		*
	nightjar	*	*
	green woodpecker		*
	redstart		*
	dead-wood beetles		*
	false scorpions		*
	spiders		*
Lowland Heathland (a mosaic of lowland heathland and lowland dry acid grassland). (UK BAP & NA Priority Habitat)	ling		
	hoary ling		*
	petty whin		*
	western gorse		
	skylark	*	*
	woodlark	*	*
	nightjar	*	*
	grey partridge	*	*
	common lizard		*
	green tiger beetle		*
hazel leaf beetle	*		
Farmland Habitats (cereal field margins, ancient and/or species rich hedgerows). (Hedges, grassland and copses are NA Priority Habitats. Ancient and/ or Species Rich Hedges and Cereal Field Margins are a UK BAP Priority Habitat)	pipistrelle bat	*	
	yellowhammer		*
	linnet	*	*
	grey partridge	*	*
	tree sparrow	*	*
	song thrush	*	
	turtle dove	*	*
	skylark	*	*
bullfinch	*		

Wetland (eutrophic standing open water, rivers and streams, reed beds, wet pasture (lowland hay meadows) and wet woodlands) (Eutrophic Standing Waters, Reedbeds, Lowland Hay Meadow and Wet Woodland are UK BAP Priority Habitats. Rivers and Streams, Lakes and Wet Woodland are NA Priority Habitats)	short-leaved water starwort		*
	yellow iris**		
	marsh marigold**		
	tussock sedge**		
	common reed**		
	European otter	*	
	water vole	*	*
	gadwall		*
	pochard		*
	teal		*
	kingfisher		
	grey heron		*
	brown trout		*
	brook lamprey		*
** Other priority species within Sherwood			

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. Project has funds available to help with small restoration work and support the production of FWAG Landwise Plans
Environment Agency	Capital payments may be made for small waterside restoration projects including tree and shrub planting.
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.
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 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.
Nottinghamshire County Council	Grants up to 75% to assist with small conservation projects. This is a special rate partly funded by the Habitat Restoration Project
Nottinghamshire Heathland Forum	Help and advice with practical conservation work and sharing best practice.
Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust	Able to provide help and advise on all aspects of woodland creation and management.