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bringing biodiversity alive in business



Action Plan

Ancient and Species-rich Hedgerows Biodiversity Action Plan

A Wildthings Habitat Action Plan
2006–2010

Introduction

Ancient and species-rich hedgerows are important habitat features. They are a primary habitat for 47 UK priority species including 13 globally threatened or rapidly declining species. This level of association with species of conservation concern is higher than that of most other key habitats. They are especially important for butterflies and moths, farmland birds, bats and dormice, and a range of wildflowers, ferns and sedges. Over 600 plant species, 1500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammals have been recorded living or feeding in hedgerows (Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report 1995). In the Bath and North East Somerset area species-rich hedgerows are often associated with Bath Asparagus, a nationally scarce plant, as well as a number of other species that have been identified as a Local Priority Species.

Hedgerows may also act as wildlife corridors for many species (eg bats, reptiles and amphibians) enabling dispersal and movement between different habitats, places and shelter and feeding grounds.

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report defines ancient hedgerows as those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts of 1720 and 1840 in Britain, and species-rich hedgerows as those which contain five or more native woody species on average within a 30m length.



Current status and distribution

Nationally, it is estimated that about 33% of hedges are species-rich, comprising a resource of about 190000km nationwide (Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report 1995). Species-rich hedgerows are in fact concentrated in the south west, and so the proportion of species-rich hedgerows is likely to be higher for the Bath and North East Somerset area, and many parishes are known to support very high proportions of ancient and species-rich hedgerow (eg Priston; Englishcombe).

Since 1945 there has been a drastic loss of hedgerows through removal and neglect throughout the UK. It is estimated that between 1984 and 1990 the net loss of hedgerows in England was about 21%. Studies during the 1990s indicated that many hedgerows were still being lost through removal or neglect. Whilst new hedgerow planting has also been underway, the best estimate is that nationally the net rate of hedgerow loss due to removal or neglect is in the order of 5% per annum. This is for all hedgerow types. The figures for loss of species-rich hedgerows for the Bath and North East Somerset area are not available. However, it is apparent that many hedgerows have been lost in the area through both removal and neglect. The rate of loss appears to have declined, but loss due to neglect or mismanagement is likely to be a growing problem.

Information on the distribution of ancient and species-rich hedgerows within Bath and North East Somerset is now becoming available through a major Field Boundaries Project. This project supported the mapping and assessment of hedgerows by volunteers, and provides our best source of local information. The distribution map shown right is derived from this project.

Current factors affecting the habitat in Bath and North East Somerset

- Neglect
- Inappropriate management – direct and indirect (too frequent cutting; spray drift etc)
- Inappropriate new planting
- Loss of hedgerow trees, and failure to encourage replacements
- Outright removal
- Land use change
- Agricultural diversification
- Agricultural intensification – increased stocking rate – increased use of fencing
- Highways maintenance
- Targeting of stewardship / agri support schemes

Current action

At a national level the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 were introduced to help prevent the direct removal of species-rich hedgerows. These regulations are implemented by the Local Planning Authority. In January 2003 DEFRA launched a public consultation exercise on the protection of countryside boundary features and amendment of the Hedgerows Regulations. The results of the consultation are still under review by DEFRA.



Current action in Bath and North East Somerset includes:

- Surveys – primarily through the Field Boundaries project designed to encourage hedgerows surveys of all Parishes in Bath and North East Somerset (& SGlos), and including a special project to provide detailed ecological surveys and site interpretation on a publically accessible hedgerow.
- Management & grant advice (including Agri-environment grants)
- Biodiversity Action Grants
- Statutory protection through the Development Control Process & Hedgerow Regulations
- New planting schemes on private land

Objectives and targets

- 1 To halt the loss of species-rich hedgerows by 2010
- 2 Establish extent and quality of species-rich hedgerows – end 2006
- 3 Sustain and bring into favourable conservation management key species-rich hedgerows – *ongoing*
- 4 Provide targeted advice based on strategic consensus of conservation needs for priority species / priorities – 2006-2010
- 5 Raise awareness of species-rich hedgerow issues – *ongoing*
- 6 Achieve new species-rich hedgerows to reduce habitat fragmentation – 2006-2010
- 7 Increase the number of recorded hedgerows with hedgerow trees by at least 10% by 2010
- 8 Identify and protect key hedgerow networks by 2008



Proposed actions with lead agencies

Action	Lead	Measurable Outputs	Objectives	Target Date
A. Support and develop Field Boundary Project	B&NES	No. of Parishes surveyed	2,5	2006-2008
B. Audit, map and review distribution of ancient & species-rich hedgerows	BRERC B&NES	Audit & map of ancient and species-rich hedgerows	2,5,6	2006
C. Survey and map priority hedgerows	B&NES BRERC	Audit of priority habitats	2,4,8	2007
D. Provide advice to land owners and managers	B&NES AWT / FWAG	No. of farm visits	1,3,4,5,6,7	On-going / Batscapes project 2006
E. Produce leaflet about biodiversity value of hedgerows and giving management advice	B&NES FWAG AWT	Leaflet	1,3,4,5,6,7	Batscapes / Dormouse project 2006
F. Influence targeting and detail of agri-environment schemes	B&NES FWAG / AWT	Better targeted schemes	1,3,5,6	Batscapes project 2006
G. Target Biodiversity Action Grants at hedgerow restoration, creation & enhancement	B&NES EN	Completed hedgerow restoration /creation projects	1,3,4,5,6,7	2006 onwards
H. Secure additional project officer resource to help existing advisors	B&NES	Additional project officer in post	all	Batscapes Project 2006
I. Promote provision and management of hedgerow trees	Forest of Avon B&NES	More hedgerow trees	7	Ongoing, focus 2007
J. Develop & support strategic planting strategy to address habitat fragmentation	B&NES Wildthings	Reduction of habitat fragmentation	1,3,6	2008
K. Ensure adequate policies for habitat protection within the local development framework	B&NES	Policy in local development framework	1,3,5,7	Review 2008
L. Ensure implementation and monitoring of planning policies	B&NES	Annual schedule of hedgerow impacts resulting from new development	1,2,3,5,7	Trialed 2006 Implemented 2007
M. Produce list of B&NES priority species associated with hedgerows	BRERC	Published list / leaflet	5	2006
N. Review & develop hedgerow management for priority species	B&NES	Management prescriptions for priority species	3,4,5	2010
O. Identify key hedgerow networks	BRERC B&NES	Strategic review of key hedgerow networks & gaps	2,4,6,8	Hedgerow database 2008
P. Promote the use of locally appropriate, local provenance native species for planting schemes	B&NES Forest of Avon	–	5,6,8	Ongoing
Q. Measure losses through hedgerow removal notices	B&NES	No. of hedgerows lost	1,5,8	Ongoing

AWT – Avon Wildlife Trust; **B&NES** – Bath & North East Somerset Council; **BRERC** – Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre; **EN** – English Nature; **FWAG** – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group; **Wildthings** – the Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership for the B&NES area