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Working with Wildlife

Native Woodland Habitat Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Woodland Group
Plan Author	Richard Pow
Plan Lead	Forestry Commission
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Description

Native woodland represents an important habitat type in Northumberland and the following four main native woodland types are found in the county:

- Upland Oak
- Upland Mixed Ashwoods
- Wet Woodland
- Lowland Mixed Broadleaved Woodland

Northumberland also contains a small area of Juniper woodland.

Native woodlands can be divided into two main categories: Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Other Semi-Natural Woodland (OSNW) or secondary woodland. ASNW is on the whole more valuable and important because it is woodland that has occupied the site, normally with minimal human change to the tree species composition, since at least 1600AD. It is the closest we have to natural woodland in the UK and is an irreplaceable part of our heritage. The other form of ancient woodland is Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS). This is ancient woodland that has been altered by man, normally through felling and replanting that has changed the tree species composition. Although the conservation value of PAWS is generally less than that for ASNW many of them can be effectively restored to native species.

A simple description of each of the native woodland types occurring in Northumberland is included as an appendix to this action plan.

Conservation Status

UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat (all)

Current Extent in Northumberland

A detailed survey of the ancient woodland in Northumberland was undertaken between 2003 and 2006. The final report provides detailed information on the nature, extent and condition of the County's ancient woodland and has been drawn on in compiling this HAP.

There is approximately 81,000ha (National Inventory of Woodlands and Trees, Forestry Commission, 2002) of woodland in Northumberland of which 12,500ha is broadleaved. 3,222ha or 4% is ASNW and 2,432ha or 3% is PAWS. Ancient woodland occupies just 1% of the total land area of Northumberland so represents a tiny fragment of the native woodland cover that was found prior to significant human influence several thousand years ago. The table below shows the total area of ancient woodland broken down by woodland type. The data on ancient woodland only includes woodlands greater than 2 hectares.

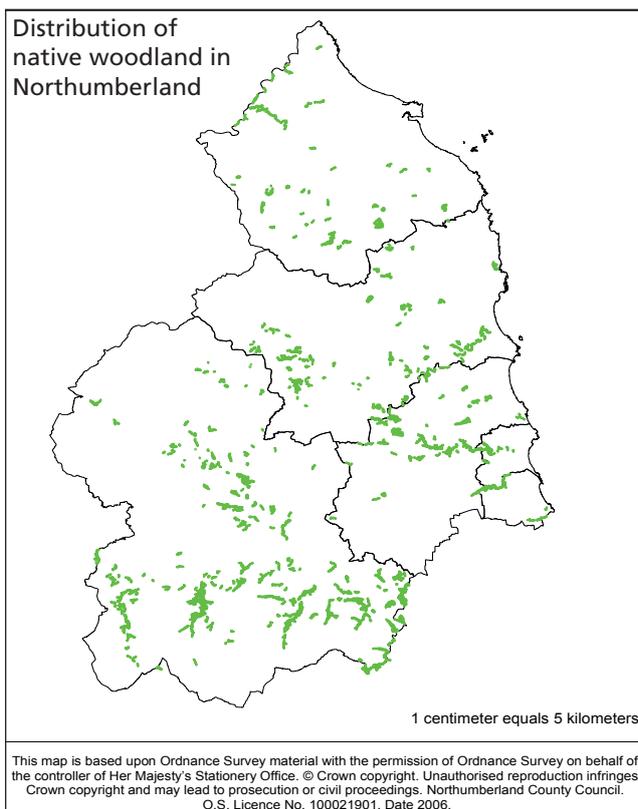
Woodland Type	ASNW (ha)	PAWS (ha)	All Ancient (ha)
Upland Oak	1444	1646	3090
Upland Ash	1205	505	1710
Lowland Mixed Broadleaf	399	270	669
Wet Woodland	163	11	174
Juniper	11		11
Total Area	3222	2432	5654

The extent of OSNW is not known but is likely to be around 2,000ha. This is made up of ancient woodlands that are less than 2ha in size and non-ancient semi-natural woodlands and includes approximately 1,000ha of new native woodlands that have been planted on formerly open land over the last 10 years.

The condition of ancient woodland in Northumberland can be summarised as follows:

- 61% of Ancient Woodland (ASNW and PAWS) is in an unfavourable declining or partially destroyed condition
- 44% of ASNW is in an unfavourable declining or partially destroyed condition
- 82% of PAWS is in an unfavourable declining or partially destroyed condition

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Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Lack of regeneration caused by inactive management and no protection from grazing animals
- Conifer canopy out competing native broadleaved species
- Invasive alien species such as rhododendron
- Regeneration of non native tree species such as sycamore, beech and most conifers
- Loss and/or fragmentation due to development
- Opencast mining

Associated Action Plans

Red Squirrel
Dormouse
Black Grouse
Farmland Birds
Trees and Hedges

Further Information

This native woodland action plan links to the lowland mixed deciduous, upland mixed ashwoods, upland oakwood and wet woodland UK BAP action plans, all led by the Forestry Commission.

Forestry Commission, 2006, Northumberland Native Woodland Project, Final Report
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6w6jwj>

Forestry Commission, 2003, The Management of Semi-Natural Woodlands, Forestry Commission Practice Guides

Targets

Maintain the current extent of ASNW in Northumberland of 3,222 hectares by 2010.

Maintain the condition of the 1804 hectares (56%) of ASNW in Northumberland currently assessed as favourable by 2010.

Achieve favourable condition of 2,255 hectares (70%) of ASNW in Northumberland by 2015.

Ensure that 730 hectares (30%) of PAWS in Northumberland have been restored or are under gradual restoration by 2015.

Increase the extent of native broadleaved woodland in Northumberland by 1,000 hectares through new woodland creation by 2015.

Increase the extent of native broadleaved woodland in Northumberland by 600 hectares through the introduction of native species to plantations when restocking by 2015.

Code	Priority Actions	Date
NW A01	Encourage planning authorities to resist development impacting on ASNW in line with Planning Policy Statement 9	ongoing
NW A02	Forestry Commission and Natural England to work with partners to target support at ASNW in unfavourable declining condition	2008 onwards
NW A03	Create and distribute a leaflet on the results of the Northumberland Native Woodland Project	2007
NW A04	Provide support through the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) to encourage restocking of PAWS with native species	ongoing
NW A05	Begin to restore all Forestry Commission owned PAWS	2015
NW A06	Provide support through EWGS and Higher Level Stewardship Scheme to encourage the creation of new native woodlands in priority areas	ongoing
NW A07	Provide support through EWGS to encourage an increase in diversity in conifer plantations by increasing the proportion of native broadleaves	ongoing
NW A08	Increase the diversity of Forestry Commission conifer plantations by increasing the ratio of native broadleaves	ongoing
NW A09	Maintain the database of extent and condition of native woodland in Northumberland.	2015

Native Woodland Habitat Action Plan Appendix

All native woodland types are equally valuable, hosting a range of different dependent plant and animal species. Below are simple descriptions of each of the native woodland types occurring in Northumberland.

Upland Oakwoods

Upland oakwoods are the most common type of native woodland occurring in Northumberland. They occur on acid soils and are characterised by a predominance of oak (most commonly sessile, but locally pedunculate) and birch in the canopy, with varying amounts of holly, rowan and hazel as the main understorey species. The range of plants found in the ground layer varies according to the underlying soil type and degree of grazing from bluebell-bramble-fern communities through grass and bracken dominated ones to moss-dominated areas. Most oakwoods also contain areas of more alkaline soils, often along streams or towards the base of slopes where much richer communities occur, with ash and wych elm in the canopy, more hazel in the understorey and ground plants such as dog's mercury. Many of these woodlands are grazed and have a history of coppice management.

Upland Mixed Ashwoods

Upland mixed ashwoods are the second most common native woodland type in Northumberland. They occur on base-rich soils in upland areas. In most, ash is a major species, although locally oak, birch, wych elm and even hazel may be the most abundant species. Yew may form small groves in intimate mosaics with the other major tree species and alder may occur where there are transitions to wet woodland. Despite variations in canopy composition the ground flora remains broadly similar and is characterised by dogs mercury and ramsons (wild garlic). Most upland mixed ashwoods are probably ancient, but ash is a vigorous colonist of open ground, so upland mixed ash is a common form of secondary woodland.

Wet Woodlands

Wet woodlands are found on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, usually with alder, birch and willows as the predominant tree species, but sometimes including ash and oak on the drier riparian areas. They are found on floodplains, as successional habitat on fens, mires and bogs, along streams and hill-side flushes, and in peaty hollows. They generally only occupy small areas or small parts of other woodlands where they form part of a mosaic of different woodland types. They account for just 5% of the total area of ASNW in Northumberland. These woodlands occur on a range of soil types including nutrient-rich mineral and acid, and nutrient-poor organic ones, but all are poorly drained or frequently flooded. Most alder woods are ancient. Wet woodland combines elements of many other ecosystems and as such is important for many plant and animal species.

Lowland Mixed Broadleaved Woodland

This woodland type occurs in the lowland parts of the county such as the south-east and forms about 12% of the total area of ASNW in Northumberland. These woods are dominated by oak, ash and hazel and are typically associated with fertile moist loam and clay soils and support a rich ground flora. Where the soils are alkaline or neutral, ash normally dominates the canopy with dogs mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) the characteristic field layer. On the more acid soils oak dominates the canopy and bluebell, wood anemone, bramble, honeysuckle and bracken are often found in the understorey. Historically these woods were often managed as coppice or coppice with standards although there is often little management activity today and these woods are typically surrounded by intensively farmed agricultural land.