

SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Traditional Orchards

1 Definition of habitat

a) Ecological

Traditional orchards are the products of historic land management systems, and represent a vegetation structure rather than being a particular plant community. In Suffolk it seems likely that this structure comprises mostly large, mature or over mature open-grown fruit trees at various densities, in a grazed mown or uncut grassland, but other structures, including hedges, may be present .

b) Horticultural

A mixed plantation of fruit (and/or nut) tree varieties (or species), which may include planted hedges, with trees propagated on traditional rootstocks, or on their own roots, and grown as coppice (in the case of nuts especially), half standards or standards.

This ecosystem is likely to be of interest for invertebrates (especially the saproxylics), epiphytes, lichens, bryophytes, fungi, bats as well as Bullfinch and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Song Thrush and Spotted Flycatcher.

2 Current status

National

The UK BAP review 2005 estimated that there were 28000 ha of traditional orchards in England based on Ordnance Survey area minus area of commercial orchards in census of 2000 defined as intensive (84%) by lack of fully grassed orchard floor (Central Science Laboratory data).

Historical data gathered from England show that over the whole country orchard area has declined by 57% since 1950

Local

Based on mapping comparative areas of orchards on 1920 OS mapping and modern data it has been possible to scope the number of potential remnant traditional orchard sites. The number of sites in 2007 is estimated at 271 with an estimated area of 81.14 ha.

However, this work is at an early stage and there is a great deal of scope for follow up surveys.

In addition the specific character of orchards both in and within Suffolk appears to be highly variable. Across England as a whole traditional management styles and practices are extremely varied and within Suffolk there is some evidence to suggest this habitat falls in to several types dependent largely on soil type and economic factors.

- i. High Suffolk Clayland
- ii. Fenland
- iii. Coasts and heaths
- iv. South Suffolk

Although it is expected that a range of species (see section one) is associated with this habitat there is no direct evidence of this locally because the habitat has not been recognised and specifically surveyed. Also because the sites are small records any records from orchards are not necessarily tied to that site

Natural Areas

Traditional orchards occur in all natural areas of Suffolk although the largest number are found in the Claylands

3 Current factors affecting the species or habitats

This habitat is generally found in small patches within or adjacent to settlement therefore it is extremely susceptible to piecemeal loss from construction projects and conversion to gardens or pony paddocks

All orchard production is under considerable commercial pressure and traditional orchards are less economically viable in the current market place. However there has been some recent change with an increasing area of organic production and attempt to market some traditional varieties more aggressively. However the old small orchards especially in the claylands are under severe pressure.

Site management issues:

Neglect of trees and inappropriate pruning

Inappropriate grazing, and/or lack of tree protection from grazing animals

Poor management of grassland around the trees

Failure to replace trees as they are lost

4 Current action

Action has been limited to some initial mapping work by SBRC so far.

5 Targets

Maintain current extent as at 2007 by 2010.

Expand the habitat in Suffolk creating two new sites (of local genetic stock) by 2010.

Improve condition of one traditional orchard sites annually by implementing appropriate management.

Locate, identify and record sources of clonal material of local and traditional top fruit and nut cultivars, (following, or in parallel with, the identification and surveying of orchard sites in the county), that can be made available for propagation, and the planting of new traditional orchards.

Identify varieties and cultivar clones, traditional management methods and orchard structures that favour orchard habitat biodiversity in the county (to provide data for future advice and guidance on new planting and habitat restoration).

6 Actions

Action (apply SMART Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound) approach and include locations where relevant).	Achieve by date	Delivery partners (identify lead and support partners)
Policy & Legislation		
Develop LDF policy for traditional orchards that can be used by District Councils in their LDFs in Suffolk.	2007	SLOG, DCs, SCC, NE.
Site specific allocations should be checked against habitat data for traditional orchards.	2007-2010	SCC, DCs.
Site safeguard and management		
Integrate protection of this habitat in to the planning system at district level	2007	SCC SLOG DC's
Ensure that traditional orchard BAP data is available to planning officers through GIS layers provided by SBRC to DCs.	2007	SBRC, DCs.
Include data on the distribution of this habitat in the En Check system	2007	SCC
Develop draft criteria for Trad orchard County Wildlife Sites panel. (CWS) panel.	2010	CWS panel & EEAOP
Safeguard Traditional orchards using Tree Protection Orders where required.	2007 and ongoing	Mid Suffolk DC, DCs.

Research and monitoring		
Develop a pilot scheme to assess the type and the extent of the habitat in each Joint Character Area in Suffolk, drawing from best practice in other parts of the region.	2007 – 2010 annually	SWT, SCC SBRC
Identify a programme of survey needs engaging local volunteers in survey and identify and apply for funding if needed.	2007 ongoing	SWT, EEOAP, SCC SBRC
Form a specialist team for in depth	2008	SBRC Recorders,

survey of selected Traditional orchard sites target known areas of known potential development (this team could also be used for wood pasture)		Suffolk bat group?
Advisory		
Provide advice to owners and managers of traditional orchard concerning appropriate management	2007 -on-going	FWAG , DCs, NE, SCC, landowners and managers.
Communications and publicity		
Devise a launch event for this HAP that engages the public.	Autumn 07 or spring 2008	FWAG SCC EEAOP , SWT.
Support and work in partnership with other BAPs in the East Of England to support community lead traditional orchard initiatives.	2007 – 2010 Annual	SCC, SWT, EEAOP..

NB Lead partners who lead the particular action are in bold.

Monitoring of progress:

Reported annually on the UK BAP reporting system BARS Biodiversity Action Reporting system.

Objectives currently not achievable by the plan partners:

None identified.

List of organisations that have been or will be consulted regarding this plan and have agreed to aim to deliver their organisations commitments

Paul Read – Independent Expert
Phil Watson Suffolk County Council
Andrew Murray- Wood Suffolk County Council
Mary Norden Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership
Peter Holborn Suffolk Landscape Officers Group
Diane Ling FWAG
SBRC Martin Horlock

Martin Sanford Suffolk Naturalists and SBRC
SWT Dorothy Casey
RSPB Simon Tonkin
SCHU Lynn Allen

Others groups consulted:

Greenlight Trust
District Councils
EEOAP Martin Skipper