

Hedgerows

Our objectives for this habitat are:

to protect and maintain hedgerows in the Harrogate district, especially ancient and/or species-rich examples; and

to encourage the creation of new species-rich hedgerow.



(AONB)

Introduction

This is a UKBAP priority habitat. The recent 2007 BAP Review changed the national priority habitat from 'ancient and/or species rich hedgerows' to simply 'hedgerows'. The definition was extended to cover all hedgerows consisting predominantly of at least one woody UK native species.

Ancient hedgerows, which tend to be those that support the greatest diversity of plants and animals, are defined as those which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts of 1720 to 1840. Some of the most valuable derive from early woodland clearance which left a narrow strip of 'wildwood' between adjacent woodland clearances. These can retain ancient woodland indicator species like Wood anemone, Ramsons and Primrose.

Hedgerows are a complex of sub-habitats which may include woodland, scrub, grassland, streams and ditches. Mature and veteran trees are important components of hedgerows as these often have damaged branches and peeling bark that offer opportunities for a range of animal species from invertebrates to roosting bats and nesting birds.

Under the Hedgerow Regulations (1997) 'important' species-rich hedgerows are defined as those containing (in northern England), four or more native woody species on average, in selected 30m lengths. Hedges failing to meet this criterion, but with a rich hedge bottom flora of at least three typical woodland-type herbaceous plants, are included as important. Recent, species-rich hedges less than 30 years old are not included.

Many of the straight Hawthorn hedges that characterise later parliamentary enclosures are excluded from the Regulations but may be important as a wildlife resource or corridor and would now fall within the ambit of the HAP. Single species hedges formed exclusively of non-native or non-locally native species and varieties, such as hedges of Privet, Yew, Beech etc. are excluded from this HAP. Garden hedges, are excluded from the Regulations (even though they may have been former agricultural hedges) but those consisting predominantly of at least one woody UK native species would be covered by this HAP.

Hedges have farming, landscape, cultural and archaeological importance. Ancient hedgerows are best considered as being irreplaceable, except in the very long term. The replanting of hedgerows to the same species mix as ancient hedgerows, may be species-rich but cannot be regarded as 're-created' as there is more to recreating the conditions found in ancient hedgerows than planting woody species typical of such hedgerows.

Hedgerows form a significant wildlife habitat. They are a refuge for many animal species and can act as wildlife corridors allowing migration and dispersal and provide feeding opportunities for a variety of animals including small mammals, bats and birds.

Between 1947 and 1985 about 22 per cent, or 300,000km, of hedgerows were lost in England and Wales. Between 1984 and 1990 there was an estimated loss of 21 per cent of English hedges. Prior to the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations the net loss of hedges was 1.7 per cent through removal and 3.5 per cent through neglect per annum. The 1997 Hedgerow Regulations make it an offence to remove a field hedge without permission from the local planning authority. The key threat, therefore, is neglect especially where they are not required to provide a stock-proof barrier either because of field enlargement, conversion to arable or replacement by barbed wire.

Cross-compliance, which requires farmers to meet certain standards if they are to receive their Single Farm Payments now requires farmers to cut hedges outside the main birds nesting season (March to July inclusively) and to leave a 1m strip between the field and the hedge bottom. The Environmental Stewardship Schemes (ESS) provide incentives to go beyond these basic requirements and are some of the best mechanisms for delivering the hedgerow targets in this plan.

Ecologically, hedgerows are essentially linear woodland that, depending their history and origins, may have developed historically and maintained a shade-tolerant ground flora similar to that found in woodland. This woodland ground flora can grade out into typical grassland conditions on the verge within a very short distance. This equates with a woodland edge and adds to the biodiversity of a hedgerow.



Hell Wath (HBC)

The value of a hedgerow lies in:

- its history and origins;
- the plant and animal species it contains;
- the function it performs as a corridor for animals such as bats;
- the structure and management of the hedgerow components offering shelter and providing a visual screen; and
- the landscape, aesthetic and recreational aspect.

The most valuable examples are those that are old and have retained, or have acquired, a variety of both plant and animal species. They will tend to be those that are less intensively trimmed and are relatively large and bushy. A lack of damage by fertiliser or spray drift will contribute to the development of retention of a species-rich ground flora. Roadside hedges are often important in this respect as verges are seldom sprayed.

National status

In 1995 the UK total for all hedges was estimated at 450,000km. Analysis of data from 1978 and 1990 indicates that about 42 per cent, or 154,000km, of British hedges are ancient and/or species-rich. These are concentrated mainly in south-west England and south Wales.

Regional status

The Countryside Agency (CA) estimated in 1990, that the region had 10 per cent of England's hedgerows and gave the North Yorkshire stock as 18,000km (all types).

Between 1991 and 1998 123.5km of native species hedge was planted in North Yorkshire with aid from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS).

Local status

No data.

Local priority species:

- Grey partridge
- Tree sparrow
- Yellowhammer
- Turtle dove
- Linnet
- Bats

Status of priority species

(for status of birds, see Arable Field Margins HAP, for bats, see SAP)

Requirements

Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows benefit from:

- Sympathetic management of both hedge and hedge bottom.
- The retention and sympathetic management of hedgerow trees and veteran trees in particular.
- Planted trees should be native and be of local provenance and be in keeping with local species composition.
- Hedge management, including laying or coppicing, in keeping with local custom and to prevent degradation by allowing hedges to become tall, outgrown and dying.
- Hedges to be cut infrequently e.g. every second or third year to allow berries to be produced.
- Protection from agricultural spray drift, particularly the hedge bottom flora.
- Hedges to be cut to promote branching and the development of a wide, shade casting base, as is achieved by cutting to an A-shape profile.

Threats

- Neglect of hedge cutting or laying, changes the habitat into a line of trees with gaps.
- The removal of hedges to create larger fields and to reduce hedge maintenance costs.
- Frequent or badly timed cutting leads to a build up of woody material, creates gaps, discourages certain shrub species and affects berry producing capability.



Marion cum Grafton (HBC)

- Fragmentation of the hedgerow network, reducing the overall resource and affecting species like bats that use hedges for 'commuting' as well as foraging.
- Felling of hedgerow trees and poor branch pruning.
- Agricultural spray drift killing hedge components, particularly the sensitive ground-flora.
- Fertiliser application enriching the soil and favouring certain species like Cleavers.
- Preference for alternative methods of stock control, such as wire fencing.
- Felling of hedgerow standards (particularly Ash) as a safety measure, without pursuing alternatives.
- Cultivation too close to the trunk line damaging root systems and reducing the width of headland.
- Intense grazing by stock.
- Sections not being replaced following road traffic accidents or summer verge fires.
- A poorly understood mechanism gives rise to conditions in winter that causes sections of roadside hedgerow to die, next to where puddles form.

Current local action

- Harrogate Borough Council implements the Hedgerow Regulations, which helps to safeguard this habitat.
- Local training and Advice is available from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).
- LEAF demonstration farms.
- Ancient and/or species rich hedgerows are a habitat targeted by the ESS.
- Work on techniques to evaluate and age hedgerows.
- The best examples of Ancient and species-rich hedges may meet the criteria for SINC designation.

LINKS WITH OTHER HDBAP PLANS:

Bats SAP

Arable Farmland HAP

Lowland Grassland HAP

Upland Grassland HAP

Magnesian Limestone Grassland HAP



The UK BAP Link:

Hedgerows HAP. <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5706>

Near Spofforth (HBC)

