

Wood Pasture, Parkland and Veteran Trees

Our objective for this habitat is:

to retain the best examples in favourable management and reinstate positive management to all key areas. And, in the long term, to increase area of wood pasture by reinstating it on sites where it occurred historically.



Leighton Pasture (AONB)

Introduction

Wood pasture and parkland sites are generally associated with country estates and should not be confused with the more familiar town parks. They have been around for a long time and are the result of particular types of management rather than being a particular plant community. Parkland usually involves grazing beneath large, open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) at various densities.

A common feature of the medieval landscape of North Yorkshire was the deer park, which was a status symbol for the gentry. They were also economically important, used for hunting, pannage (pig-foraging), rabbiting, grazing for horses, the location of dog kennels and a source of local materials such as holly (winter forage). They reached their peak in the fourteenth century and many have disappeared in the intervening centuries, leaving only their outlines visible as hedge lines and boundary ditches. Each between 40-80ha in size, they were usually developed on unimproved pasture and woodland and enclosed by boundaries. Some parks in the district were originally part of the Royal Forest of Knarborough. Later 'emparkment' sometimes displaced villages and took in their surrounding cultivations.

Lowland wood pasture involves grazing within woodland. Wood-pastures have been managed by a long-established tradition of grazing, allowing the survival of multiple generations of trees, characteristically with at least some veteran trees. Most occur in the lowlands but several have been identified in the uplands of the district. Depending on the degree of canopy cover other semi-natural habitats, including grassland, heath and scrub may occur in mosaic with woodland communities.

Symbiotic fungi are important to the survival of veteran trees. Their survival, in turn, may depend on favourable treatment of the land in which trees are set (see requirements below). Many sites contain an abundance of dead or decaying wood and provide a range of cavities, hollows and rot holes which are colonised by fungi and invertebrates, as well as bats and birds.

As the creation of country estates and designed landscapes are from a past era, we are left with an ageing resource and one of the chief conservation challenges is to ensure a continuation of trees that can be managed to become the future veterans.

Many of the famous designed country estates also have impressive avenues of trees, some of which are now of considerable age.

Included in this plan are:

- Lowland wood-pastures and parklands derived from medieval hunting forests and deer parks.
- Parklands with their origins in the eighteenth century or later, where they contain much older trees derived from an earlier landscape.
- Wood-pastures derived from wooded commons and pastures containing trees.
- Sites that have been converted to other land uses such as arable, forestry and amenity land, but where parkland elements survive.
- Long established avenues of trees.
- Isolated veteran trees wherever they may occur.

Buildings within parkland and other designed landscapes are also important for wildlife. The flora of Fountains Abbey and associated ruins is reputedly among the best wall flora in England in terms of richness and diversity. Fifty species of vascular plants have been recorded including ferns, wild pink, wall flower and rue-leaved saxifrage. Mosses and lichens are also important. The use of traditional lime mortar encourages the flora. The buildings also house some of the most important bats roosts in the County.

Wood pasture sites, parkland, and similar designed landscapes sites are therefore of archaeological, historic, cultural and landscape importance. They are of major ecological importance and their continuity is important. This habitat is a UK BAP priority.

National status

There are no reliable statistics on the extent of the overall resource, nor on historical and current rates of loss or degradation of this type of habitat. The figure of 10,000 - 20,000 ha 'currently in a working condition' given in the UK BAP is the current best estimate. The habitat is most common in southern Britain. Parkland of countryside estates is of European importance.

Regional status

67 deer parks have been identified in the North Riding. Duncombe Park in the North York Moors National Park has been identified as nationally important for its veteran trees and associated wildlife. There are 40 registered historic parks in North Yorkshire.

Local status

Studley Royal has been identified as nationally important, second only in the county to Duncombe Park. Ripley Park is also probably of national significance. Many other fine examples are scattered across the district including the southern and eastern parts of Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There are 12 Registered Historic Gardens in Harrogate district, most of which have biodiversity interest associated with this habitat, although Hackfall Woods is considered in the Woodland HAP and Valley Gardens is an important in terms of 'Gardens and Urban Greenspaces'.

Veteran trees outwith parkland and woodpasture are also clearly important in the district but further work is required to fully assess their status. Veteran trees are often associated with extant or former hedgelines.

Legal status

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal is designated as a World Heritage Site. Natural England is considering designating the deer park at Studley as an SSSI. Most of the rest of the site is likely to become a SINC, as is Ripley Park.

English Heritage has sought to conserve important parkland and designed landscapes for their historic value. Parks of national importance are recorded on the 'Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England'

Bat roosts are protected under European legislation even when bats themselves are not present.

Most bird species are protected whilst nesting.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) can be placed on important trees by the Borough Council.

Local priority species:

- **Sap groove lichen** *Bacidia incompta*
- **Oak polypore** *Piptoporus_ quercinus*
- **Wild service tree** *Sorbus torminalis*
- **Lesser spotted woodpecker** *Dendropcopus minor*
- **Spotted flycatcher** *Muscicarpa striata*
- **Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
- **Saproxylic beetles (including Stag beetle)**

Status of priority species

Sap groove lichen (UKBAP) - occurs on unpolluted alkaline tree bark (primarily elm) last recorded on Fountains Abbey in 1970.

Wild service tree - very rare in the district. Occurs as saplings at Studley Park. The last significant tree here fell in 1987. May have once been more widespread on the Magnesian limestone. The district has two public houses called 'The chequers' probably after the fruit of this tree which was once used to flavour beer.

Oak polypore fungus (UKBAP) - found at Ripley Park in 2004.

Lesser-spotted woodpecker - thinly distributed. Possibly 20-25 pairs in the district. Declining nationally and, presumably, also locally.

Spotted flycatcher (UKBAP) - has shown a national decline of 75 per cent in between 1974 and 1999 (Gregory), possibly as a result of adverse conditions on its migration route or wintering grounds in Africa. This decline is reflected in the district. Widely, if only thinly, distributed in district but decreasing (Mather).

Hawfinch - has shown a national decline of 25-49 per cent between 1974 and 1999 (Gregory). Habitat includes mature parkland and woodland. Wintered in good numbers (regularly up to 40 and as high as 70 in 1981) at Studley Royal until mid-1990s, but now scarce and declining alarmingly (Mather).

Saproxylic beetles including Stag beetle - the Harrogate Species Audit found that "*The inventory of rare and scarce beetles in Harrogate district is staggering and these insects provide valuable indicators of habitats of conservation importance. Of outstanding interest are the numerous rare and specialised beetles dependent upon decaying timber (saproxylics) and characteristically associated with old trees in historic parkland or wood-pasture. No less than 4 Red Data Book, 4 Nationally Scarce 'A' and 23 Nationally Scarce 'B' beetles recorded from the district are saproxylic. Intensive survey work has been concentrated on Studley Royal but several scarce saproxylic beetles have been recorded elsewhere in the district suggesting that other habitats with post-mature trees would repay specialist survey.*"

Stag beetle (UKBAP) - Harrogate district was well north of its known range but a single record at Langthorpe in 2000 was followed by discovery of a colony in two old beech trees near Studley Royal.



Veteran cherry tree (AONB)

Requirements

- Site protection and appropriate management.
- Minimal removal of standing dead wood for health and safety reasons.
- Fallen dead wood to be left in-situ.
- Appropriate grazing regimes to allow ground flora to flourish and protect trees from damage.
- Research and advice on the historical and ecological aspects of wood pasture and parkland including invertebrate requirements and fungal communities.
- Conservation of individual veteran trees.
- Planting of specimen trees that will replace the veterans in time.
- Reinstating pollarding where this form of traditional management has ceased, if feasible (n.b. not for trees which have already become veteran).
- Extension of sites through tree planting on adjacent land.

Threats

- Arable cultivation or pasture improvement leading variously to damage to the soil and to grassland fungi, tree root damage, loss of ground flora.
- Changes to traditional levels of grazing. Over-grazing leading to bark browsing, soil compaction and loss of nectar plants. Under-grazing leading to bracken and scrub invasion.
- Felling of veteran trees, either for those perceived to pose a threat to public safety or 'for tidiness'.
- Isolation and fragmentation of sites in the landscape. Many of the species dependent on old trees have poor powers of dispersal.
- Loss of trees, especially veterans, e.g. by Dutch elm disease. Leading to a skewed age structure and break in the continuity of old trees.
- Unsympathetic recreational access, leading to increased erosion or soil compaction around trees and safety felling.

- Removal of dead wood.
- Neglect of, and loss of expertise of traditional tree management techniques (e.g. pollarding).
- Changes to groundwater levels leading to stress and tree death, resulting from abstraction, drainage, neighbouring development, roads, prolonged drought and climate change.
- Atmospheric pollution causing damage to lichen communities and nitrogen application to pasture.

Current local action

- National Trust manage Studley Royal and intend to produce a Conservation Management Plan.
- The Ancient Tree Forum promotes identification and conservation of lowland wood pastures, parkland and veteran trees.
- Yorkshire veteran trees initiative and North Yorkshire Biodiversity Action Group Veteran Tree Hunt.
- Nidderdale Tree Wardens (NAONB) run a training and survey project. Over 50 per cent of parishes within the AONB have appointed tree wardens.
- The National Planning Policy Framework specifically highlights the importance of veteran trees.
- Jacob Smith Park in Scriven is managed by HBC, recognising the importance of its veteran trees.

Opportunities

- Improved understanding of the resource through working with tree wardens and parish communities.
- Environmental Stewardship options for low or no input grasslands and to buffer field trees against ploughing.
- To develop more appropriate SINC guidelines for wood pasture, parkland and veteran trees, to survey sites and to designate those that qualify.

LINKS WITH OTHER HDBAP PLANS:

Woodland HAP

(Ancient and semi-natural) hedgerows HAP

Bats SAP

The UKBAP Review, 2007, renamed 'Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland HAP' to 'Wood Pasture and Parkland HAP'

