

Wet woodland in the East of England



What is a wet woodland?

Wet woodland habitat is nationally and locally rare. It occurs on poorly drained soils and seasonally wet soils associated with river valleys, flood plains, flushes and plateaus. The stand types contain a range of National Vegetation Classification types [www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2656], and the dominant tree species are alder, willow (especially grey, goat and crack willow) and birch, although other tree species may be present. These species vary locally.

It is an important habitat for many associated animal and plant groups: mammals such as otters, water voles and bats;

invertebrates such as moths (including Netted and Waved carpet moth), craneflies, and weevils; birds including the marsh warbler, spotted flycatcher and song thrush; and bryophytes such as lichens, mosses and liverworts.

Wet woodland is a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plans, and the Regional Woodland Strategy. There are Regional Habitat Action Plan targets to maintain 100% of existing wet woodland, restore 200 hectares and to create 150 hectares by 2010. Local Biodiversity Action Plans detail wet woodland Habitat Action Plan targets, with named responsible agencies and timetables for achieving action. In our Region the achievement of these targets is critical as, between 1997 and 2002, 180 hectares of wet woodland have been removed with felling licences to create reed bed or fen habitat. In the same period, only 17 hectares of new wet woodland were created through the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme.

The Regional Woodland Strategy

- The Regional Woodland Strategy [www.woodlandforlife.net] has a series of actions relating to wet woodland:
 - NE 2a. Develop criteria to identify where floodplain woodland establishment is acceptable, appropriate and in keeping with the wildlife interest, landscape character and flood defence requirements.
 - NE 2b. Prepare opportunity and constraints maps for the region to determine areas where woodland planting should be promoted or resisted on the grounds of impact on soil quality, water quality and water quantity.
 - NE 2c. Target woodland planting on those areas defined in the mapping exercise.
 - NE 3b. Identify and communicate actual and potential sites for wet woodland restoration.
 - NE 3c. Target woodland management and establishment at those areas identified in these mapping processes.
- In order to begin to tackle these issues at a regional scale, a series of small scale, targeted catchment projects have been initiated to fulfil these actions by collaborative working with local partners.

Case study example – Peterborough

The first such project in the region has been based in Peterborough. The Wet Woodland Project has created a Peterborough Wet Woodland Inventory which in turn has identified 78 hectares of Wet Woodland habitat across 73 sites in the Peterborough District. Of these sites, the majority were less than 1 hectare in size. The sites were mainly distributed along the River Nene and River Welland and around waterbodies in old quarry sites.

114 hectares of potential areas for wet woodland creation have also been identified and the project has liaised with landowners to take forward these areas. If these areas come forward then the project will have more than doubled the area of wet woodland in the district.

Wet woodland is a Priority Habitat type under the Cambridgeshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan because it has been subjected to many pressures in the past leading to its decline. These pressures include agriculture, industrial and residential development, the lowering of water tables through drainage, river management, and flood prevention measures. Wet woodland now only exists as small or localised patches of habitat in river valleys, on ground surrounding bogs or mires, on the transition between open water and drier ground, and beside small streams.

The project has been developed through a partnership between English Nature, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Peterborough City Council, Peterborough Environment City Trust and The Wildlife Trust.

The partnership employed a dedicated wet woodland Project Officer. She mapped and assessed the woodland, then working with members of the partnership, visited owners of land with potential new wet woodland sites. Many of these owners have come forward to plant or regenerate land for wet woodland, including some notable ex-mineral extraction sites as part of restoration plans and arable land coming into the Forestry Commission's [English Woodland Grant Scheme](#) (EWGS).

From the information obtained from this project, actions have been identified to help deliver and take forward wet woodland habitat creation in the Peterborough District. The partners have now employed a second phase project officer to liaise with landowners to take forward opportunities for wet woodland expansion or improved management for biodiversity. Some 18 hectares of wet woodland will be created in Peterborough as a result of this project, and up to a further 24 hectares may be possible.

Moving forward

Using the Peterborough model, four further wet woodland projects are underway in the region, based in Huntingdon, Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Each project involves a similar group of partners, and they vary in their format depending on local skills and needs. What each project has in common is that results are achieved by action on the ground. These projects are currently showing demonstrable success in identifying, improving and increasing the area of quality wet woodland and the Forestry Commission, East England Conservancy is proposing to roll out this process throughout the region.



Wet woodland developing on a formal mineral working



Wet woodland projects in the East of England

Forestry Commission contacts

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