



South East Woodland News

Promoting thriving woodlands in England's most wooded region

Spring 2009

Woodland Butterflies are threatened in the South East

Woodland butterflies and moths are among the most threatened groups of insects in the UK, and for many species their declines have been fastest in the South East even though it's the most heavily wooded region of the country.

The decline of some species such as the Pearl-bordered fritillary is a result of widespread reduction in active woodland management.

To try and address the problem and to support and encourage woodland owners to manage their woods, Butterfly Conservation, with support from the Forestry Commission and a range of other partners, has launched its South East Woodlands Project

The Project uses threatened butterflies and moths as indicator species of well managed woodlands rich in biodiversity, aiming to encourage sustainable woodland management and halt the decline of some of our rarest species.

There are three defined target areas within the project, the Denge area in Kent, the Rother area in East Sussex and the Tytherley area on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border. Each area has dedicated staff providing advice for landowners, facilitating grant funding, carrying out surveys, offering technical workshops to woodland owners and managers, training and support for volunteers, as well as raising the profile of the regions woodlands and their rich biodiversity amongst local communities.

Examples of work currently being planned and implemented in the Tytherley area are: restoration cutting of hazel coppice; woodland ride widening; access track/ride improvements to enable access for woodland management by forestry vehicles and 4x4s; infrastructure for deer management; and the production of woodland management plans. These works are supported at enhanced rates through the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS).

To find out if you are in one of the project target areas and for details for the relevant local contacts and forthcoming events go to www.southeastwoodlands.org

The South East Woodlands Project is funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund, The Tubney Charitable Trust and many other sources.

Dr Kate Dent
Tytherley Woods Project Officer



Pearl-bordered fritillary - one of the species benefiting from Butterfly Conservation's work in the South East (Picture K Dent)

EDITORIAL

The south east of England is home to over 40% of the nation's ancient woodland. These are the richest woodlands in terms of wildlife.

This does not mean that we can be complacent as our woods and their rich biodiversity face threats and pressures from a wide range of differing issues.

Some of the key issues are:

- Huge increases in browsing pressure from deer - changing woodland structure making it less appealing to many woodland species.
- Threats from non native invasive species, such as rhododendron and plantations on ancient woodland sites.
- The widespread lack of management in woodlands leading to the decline of many species – notably woodland butterflies
- The impacts of global warming - evident in the changes to the timing of the seasons over recent decades.

Although some of these issues may seem out of our control, there are still lots of simple things that can be done to make our woods more wildlife friendly. Sensitive management maintains this diversity of habitats and can help our native woodland plants and animals to survive and thrive.

This edition of SEWN focuses on our rich woodland heritage and highlights from policy to practice what can and is being done to support woodland biodiversity across the region.

Jonathan Rau
Woodland Officer

PAWS

Since December 2005, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission have co-funded a project to restore unmanaged Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) in the High Weald. The initial timescale of the project was completed in March 2008.

In December 2005, a third of the total area of PAWS (2,821ha) in the High Weald was considered to be outside of existing delivery mechanisms (existing grant schemes, SSSIs, and FC management) and therefore probably unmanaged. The focus of the PAWS project was to develop methods that target advice, promote best practice and initiate restoration projects in these unmanaged woodlands. To support this work, the Forestry Commission provided a targeted grant for unmanaged PAWS in the High Weald AONB.

As a direct result of the PAWS Project, 465ha of previously unmanaged PAWS are now being restored to native broadleaved woodland, and the landowners of a further 1,033ha of PAWS received advice and input on appropriate restoration. A further 777ha of PAWS were surveyed and the condition of remnant ancient woodland features recorded. In addition, several training events were organised for woodland owners.



PAWS Woodland - (Picture Forestry Commission South East)

The Woodland Trust, High Weald AONB, Forestry Commission, and South Downs Joint Committee are now working in partnership on a two year project to continue to target PAWS in the High Weald AONB, and to extend the work to the South Downs proposed National Park area. As with the project in the High Weald, the South Downs work will be directed towards PAWS outside of existing grant schemes, with a strong focus on practical advice for woodland owners, linked to targeted Forestry Commission grants.

For more information, please contact:

Patrick McKernan
SE Native Woodlands Officer
Forestry Commission
e-mail: patrick.mckernan@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Signs of Life – Bluebells

The most spectacular time to be in many southern woods is when the bluebells produce their hazy mist of blue for as far as the eye can see. Although often one of the last woodland flowers to emerge, it truly is a sign of life coming back into the bare and seemingly lifeless woods of winter. In 2008 some Surrey woods were a carpet of blue in early March but in normal years April is the month to get your camera out.



Bluebell Woods - (Picture Forestry Commission South East)

Although common in the south east, the bluebell is a rare plant elsewhere in Europe – some estimate that half the world's population is in the UK. The bluebell is a slow mover – it takes five years to flower from seed and once established can only spread at about a metre a year. Often referred to as Britain's favourite wildflower, it is not surprising that each year we hear of prosecutions against owners and others who dig up the bulbs for sale – a practice severely discouraged by the Wildlife and Countryside act (1981).

One theory for the lower incidence of bluebell in much of Europe is due to the appetites of wild boar - thus an increase in wild boar numbers in Kent and East Sussex may eventually lead to less colourful woodlands.

For such a well known plant there are few references to its medical properties – mainly because the bulb is poisonous to humans. However it may well have future potential as over 25 different compounds within the bulb remain untested for medical use. So, enjoy the world class show in your woods each year for their beauty now and maybe for the problems they solve in years to come.

Alan Betts
Regional Director

www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/plantlife-discovering-plants-bluebell-guide.html



Hyacinthoides non-scripta - Native Bluebell (Picture FC Picture Library)

Success Story... Red Squirrels and the Isle of Wight JIGSAW project

When I started working with red squirrels in 1991, one of the first things I learnt was the importance of corridors. In fact, the first report I wrote was titled 'Corridors of Hope'.

When the hurricanes of 1987 and 1990 hit the island, corridors, food supply and dreys had been lost and the number of squirrels had dropped quite dramatically. Thankfully they have recovered and found their way into virtually all woodlands on the island. In the winter of 2002/3 evidence of red squirrels was found in 89% of our woodlands over 1ha. Thanks to new woodland creation (under the JIGSAW grant schemes), in time, perhaps they will reach the other 11%.

It's gratifying to see new plantings and the speed they grow on the island as there are no deer to nibble away the young shoots. However, we do have a plentiful supply of rabbits so guards are essential for new plantings.



Red Squirrel - (Picture Forestry Commission Picture Library)

In theory, with over 200ha planted so far, the island should be able to 'carry' another 200 red squirrels; once trees are mature enough to provide seeds and the canopy closes. Dormice, other small mammals and birds will also benefit, thus redressing the balance of encroaching development and habitat loss.

Thanks to willing landowners and funding from the Forestry Commission, 'Corridors of Hope' have actually become a reality, which is definitely good news for red squirrels and other wildlife on the Isle of Wight.

Helen Butler - Project Manager
www.wightsquirrels.co.uk



New woodlands planted through JIGSAW

Ask the Expert Dead Wood and Old trees



Try to resist the urge to 'tidy up' your wood; dead wood and dying trees are very useful as homes for a large range of wildlife like bats, fungi, lichens and mosses. Around a third of woodland bird species nest in holes in trees, insects such as the rare violet click beetle are found in hollow trees, and birds such as woodpeckers feed by seeking out insects under bark. Dead wood is not a threat to the health of the remaining trees.

Standing dead trees provide a different kind of habitat from dead wood lying on the woodland floor, and it's not just completely dead trees which contribute. As trees reach old age, rot-holes, hollow trunks and dead branches all start to make these 'veteran' trees more interesting as habitats for wildlife.

If you have very old trees or dead trees in your wood, and they are not posing imminent danger to people or property, i.e. not standing near a footpath, building or road, then leave them to decay naturally. Ancient hollow trees are particularly important features to retain. Even if your wood has no old trees, dead branches in the crowns are a useful habitat and should, if possible, be left. If there is not much fallen dead wood, you could create 'habitat piles' – piles of cut wood stacked on the woodland floor and left to rot away.

If you really can't resist the urge to tidy up, remember that it's better to stack dead wood into neat piles and leave it in the woodland than to remove it altogether. Of course these piles should not be your firewood stores because as you burn the wood all the creatures that are sheltering there are exposed to the elements.

Another feature of woods that many people try to control is ivy on trees. Contrary to popular belief, ivy does not strangle or damage trees, and in most cases can be safely left on the trees to provide nest sites, winter shelter and food for birds and insects.

Remember, you may want to keep your garden 'spick and span' but natural processes are worth encouraging in your wood. Intensive care of a wood is not necessary and may be harmful.

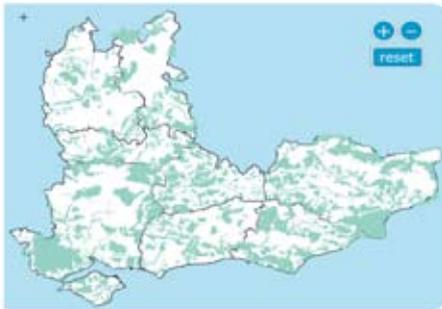


A Regional Biodiversity Strategy

February saw the launch of the South East Biodiversity Strategy which aims to provide a framework that guides and supports all those who can impact biodiversity in the region.

One aspect of the Strategy has been the production of a Regional Biodiversity Opportunity map that identifies the priority areas for restoration and creation of habitat in the South east of England. To look at the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas identified in your County, go to the web-site for the South East Biodiversity Strategy:

www.strategy.sebiodiversity.org.uk/



EWGS - New Woodland Improvement Grants (WIG) available from 1st March 2009

New, regionally targeted WIGs offering 80% contribution to costs will start to be introduced from 1st March 2009. Further details will be available shortly from regional offices but include:

- SSSI 80% widened to incorporate any work that helps SSSIs achieve and maintain favourable status
- work that benefits woodland birds and butterflies in priority areas
- new priority areas for ancient woodland
- public access provision in new priority access areas

Higher standard cost rates for WIG

The standard costs have been reviewed with the result being an average 20% increase to reflect cost trends. The new rates will be introduced from the 1st March along with an excel 'WIG cost calculator'.

www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6myjjh

Season Rhythms?

The study of the timing of naturally recurring events, phenology, has a long history in the UK and has now evolved from being a pastime for nature lovers to being recognised as a valuable tool in monitoring the impacts of climate change. Phenological observations in Britain date back to 1736.

If you would like to get involved, see the Woodlands Trust Nature Calendar which is recording information on seasonal events.

www.naturescalendar.org.uk/

Events

Moth Training

A moth-training event is being run in the Tytherley project area on Monday April 6th and a woodland flora event will be held on Saturday April 25th. For further details of these events and others in Kent and Sussex visit www.southeastwoodlands.org

National beanpole week 25 Apr - 3 May

Hampshire Coppice Craftsmens group will be promoting bean poles and other coppice products at:

- [Stansted Park Garden Centre](#) on Sunday 26th April
- [Sunnyfields](#) farmer's market at Totton on Saturday 2nd May

For further information visit:-

www.hampshircoppice.org.uk/HTML/NBPW.html

Free Woodfuel Event 7 May 2009

Lawrence Copse, West Sussex

This event is aimed to encourage businesses to install woodfuel heating systems for their premises. Come along to this free event to find out the benefits of using wood fuel and the savings your business can make.

For more information contact Julie Bolton on 01243 756888

www.westsussexsbp.org.uk/Events.aspx?ChannelID=39&PostingID=263

Managing Woodlands for Biodiversity:

- Woodland types
- Flora
- Management Planning

With: Patrick Roper (throughout 2009)

Woodland Enterprise Centre, Hastings Road, Flimwell, East Sussex, TN5 7PR

01580 879552 or 01424 775615

training@woodnet.org.uk

www.woodnet.org.uk/wec

Good Reading

The Forestry Commission publishes a wide range of information in support of sustainable forest management in Britain

www.forestry.gov.uk/publications

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