



TREND IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Modest increase over last 200 years, probably continuing.

ESTIMATED EXTENT IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Approximately 900 ha.

NATIONAL BAP HABITATS:

Upland Mixed Ash Woodland (priority habitat).

ASSOCIATED NATIONAL BAP PRIORITY SPECIES:

Pipistrelle, lesser horseshoe bat (extinct), dormouse (extinct), bullfinch, song thrush, pearl-bordered fritillary (extinct?), white-spotted pinion, waved carpet (extinct?), barred toothed-stripe, square-spotted clay, lady's slipper orchid (extinct) and possibly also common fan-foot.

ASSOCIATED PEAK DISTRICT AUDITS:

Upland Ashwoods.

INTRODUCTION

Ash is widespread on the heavier calcareous soils of the English Midlands. However it is dominant only on steep dalesides in limestone areas, notably the Mendips, Southern Pennines (Peak District), West Yorkshire and North Lancashire. The Peak District sites (restricted to the White Peak Natural Area) are the largest examples of this habitat in Great Britain and hold populations of nationally rare species. They are of international importance, being listed as a priority habitat in Annex 1 of the European Union Habitats Directive where these woods are described as *Tilio-Acerion* ravine forests.

Due to gradual clearance for agriculture, the former extensive woodland cover of the White Peak has declined over many centuries to a point where virtually all ancient woodland is restricted to the steeper and more inaccessible dalesides. Following enclosure and improvement of the plateau in the 18th and early 19th century, grazing pressure on the dales relaxed, leading to expansion of semi-natural ash woodland. Former quarries and mining areas have also re-colonised with secondary ash woodland. The area of woodland has thus been increasing over the last 200 years and is probably still continuing, so that many dales comprise a mosaic of ancient and more recent ash woodland. Apart from inappropriate grazing in a minority of sites, ash woodland is under relatively little threat in the Peak District.

Many of the older ash woodlands would have traditionally been managed as coppice for turnery, tool handles, firewood/charcoal or as high forest for planking or furniture making, from medieval times to the industrial revolution. As other materials and cheap quality timber imports became readily available their utilisation declined. Former management has left many sites with a lack of veteran trees and dead wood.

Upland ashwoods are amongst the richest habitats for wildlife in the uplands, supporting a wide range of wildlife of national importance including small and large-leaved lime, mezereon and lily-of-the-valley and an outstanding invertebrate fauna including white-spotted pinion, barred toothed-stripe and the lemon slug. More common but equally characteristic species include field maple, dog's-mercury and brome grasses. Particularly fine examples include Dove Dale, Cressbrook Dale, Lathkill Dale, the Hamps and Manifold Valleys, the Wye Valley, Matlock Woods and the Via Gellia.

The White Peak ashwoods often form part of extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation in the limestone dales with transitions to other important habitats. These include calcareous, acid and neutral grassland, heath, scrub, rock faces, lead rakes, scree and a scatter of remnant oak/birch woodland on the dale brows, and wet alder woodland along the valley floors.

This diversity of habitat also contributes significantly to the landscape and recreational value of the White Peak Natural Area. There are very limited opportunities for silvicultural management for economic gain on most sites since the ground is largely inaccessible to vehicles, with steep and often rocky slopes.

ADVERSE IMPACTS

	Historic	Current
Land Management		
Grazing and browsing – overgrazing by sheep, rabbits and (locally) fallow deer, damaging the ground flora and preventing natural tree regeneration.	✓	✓
Historical replacement of native trees with planted conifers and broadleaves up to the early 1980s.	✓✓	
Invasive Species		
Colonisation by non-native species - particularly the regeneration of sycamore and beech, leading to eventual canopy domination in some areas.	✓	✓✓
Effects of non-native shrub species dominating the ground flora e.g. snowberry.	✓	✓
Others		
Dutch elm disease has changed the structure and composition of many woods since the early 1970s, reducing tree diversity and reducing the food source for some significant species such as the white-letter hairstreak butterfly.	✓	✓✓
Loss of transitions from dale bottom wet woodland to dale brow oak/birchwood.	✓✓	
Loss of lime from dales woodlands.	✓	
<i>An impact</i> ✓ <i>Significant impact</i> ✓✓		

CURRENT ACTION

Designated Sites

- 80 % of limestone ashwood habitat (ancient woodland and other semi-natural woodland sites) within the Peak District falls within SSSIs. The majority is also within the Peak District Dales cSAC.
- Some woods receive additional protection through NNR status.
- A number of ashwoods have been identified as 'Wildlife Sites'.

New Initiatives

- Since 1999 large estates have been encouraged by the FC to manage their woodlands within long term Forest Plans.
- Since 1997 a few small areas of new native ashwood have been created by landowners, encouraged/ supported through the FC's 'New Native Woodland in National Parks Challenge Fund'. This fund is currently under review.
- The FC is producing a guidance note on the restoration of native woodland on Ancient Woodland Sites. This will encourage the restoration of ancient woodland and target resources at areas with the greatest potential.

Land Management

- National Forestry policy includes a presumption against clearance of broad-leaved woodland for conversion to other land uses, and in particular seeks to maintain the special interest of ancient semi-natural woodland. Felling licences from the FC are normally required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by them.
- Important areas of ash woodland are managed within grant scheme agreements.
- The NT, WTs, PDNPA and EN own significant areas of ash woodland.

Research and Surveys

- A substantial amount of biological information is held but there is a need to collate data. However information for non-SSSI and non-ancient woodland is limited.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National Targets

- Maintain the current extent of ancient semi-natural woodland (considered to be 40000 - 50000 ha) and the total extent and distribution of upland mixed ashwood.
- Initiate measures intended to achieve favourable condition in 100 % of upland mixed ashwoods within SSSIs and SACs, and in 80 % of the total resource by 2004, and achieve favourable condition over 70% of the designated sites and 50 % of the total resource by 2010.
- Initiate restoration to upland mixed ashwood cover at least 2400 ha. Complete restoration to site-native species over half this area by 2010 and all of it by 2015.
- Initiate colonisation or planting of 6000 ha of upland mixed ashwood on unwooded or ex-plantation sites. Complete establishment of half of this by 2010 and all of it by 2015.

A Vision for the Peak District

Hugging the steeper slopes of the limestone dales ashwoods are an integral and dramatic component of the rich mosaic of habitats found within these steep rocky valleys and, as such, are a characteristic feature of the White Peak.

The future for upland ashwoods in the Peak District lies in a woodland resource where the current extent, range and quality of the habitat is not only protected, but where initiatives are instigated to bring more of the available habitat into favourable conservation condition. Opportunities will also be pursued to expand and link woods in order to create a robust and well connected ash woodland network, as part of the varied landscape of successional daleside habitats ranging from open grassland through scrub to woodland.

Peak District targets have therefore been set to reflect the opportunities which are perceived to exist locally to fulfil this vision. In recent times the area of ash woodland has increased with a reduction in the levels of grazing. Many woodlands are now either bounded by extensively farmed calcareous grassland of high nature conservation value on the steeper slopes or areas of agriculturally improved and intensively farmed grassland on the more moderate slopes. Due to this situation the main opportunities for an increase in the nature conservation value of these woods lie with bringing the existing ashwood resource into favourable condition (Objectives 1 and 2) and restoring areas of plantation woodland to native cover (Objective 3). The targets set for these objectives are in line with the proportions expected from the national BAP targets. Local objectives have also been set to identify sites for potential expansion of ashwoods onto un-wooded sites, although it is recognised such opportunities may be limited to small areas- for example, quarry restoration schemes. As such, area expansion figures have not been set and these targets will necessarily be less ambitious than expected from the national BAP.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Objective 1

Maintain the overall extent of limestone ashwoods, bringing all existing semi-natural ancient woodlands into favourable condition.

Target

Initiate measures by 2010 to achieve favourable condition in 70 % of ashwoods on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) and within SSSIs and cSACs.

Objective 2

Bring important examples of non-ancient semi-natural ash woodland into favourable condition.

Target

Initiate measures by 2010 to bring 100 ha of ashwoods which are not on the AWI into favourable condition.

Objective 3

Convert Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS) back to ash woodland where this is a priority.

Target

Introduce appropriate management regimes over 50 % of relevant PAWS by 2010, to restore site-native species over appropriate time spans.

Objective 4

Identify opportunities for expansion of upland ash woodland and associated woodland types on non-wooded sites.

Target

Produce a register, by 2005, of potential areas of ashwood expansion to be achieved by natural colonisation, and set a target for initiating such expansion.

Main Factors Likely to Affect Achievement of Targets

Land Management

Implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Resources and Financial Incentives

Availability/adequacy of financial incentives for woodland management.

Planning and Regulation

Planning policy.

Invasive Species

Dominance locally of sycamore or beech and their ability to regenerate in this situation.

Conflicts with Other Priorities

Competition with agricultural grant schemes and agricultural support payments.

Limited scope for expansion due to the conservation value of adjoining habitats such as calcareous grassland and species-rich scrub in the dales.

Conflict with landscape or archaeological priorities.

Practical Difficulties and Lack of Knowledge

Deer grazing preventing natural regeneration.

Extreme terrain may limit felling and removal of invasive species from certain sites.

Pollution and Climate Change

Climate change.

Others

Opportunities for woodland expansion through quarry restoration, where appropriate.

The remarkable capacity of ash to regenerate naturally both in woodland and non-woodland situations.

Public perception.

ACTIONS

Key to the achievement of the proposed targets is the securing of appropriate financial incentives to bring ashwoods into good condition and restoring priority ancient woodland sites. Key actions within the Plan include:

- considering a review of relevant grant schemes (Action AW19);
- a review of management within SSSIs (AW20);
- defining site-by-site objectives for control of non-native species (AW9);
- identifying priority sites and restoring native woodland on PAWS (AW3, AW8 and AW21 - 23), and
- ensuring continued management of sites in the ownership of conservation organisations (AW27).

Within this habitat opportunities exist for areas of non-intervention. Actions to stimulate this approach (AW8) are crucial to the development of true wilderness within the Peak District, albeit on a small scale.

ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	LEAD AGENCY & Partners
DATA COLLATION AND SURVEY		
Data Collation		
AW1 Collate existing information and identify gaps in the knowledge for upland ashwoods outside of SSSIs. (All Objectives)	2001	EN/PDNPA WTs/LAs/LRCs Voluntary Sector
AW2 Compile a register of ash woodland sites from existing knowledge, including classification into types, level of importance (including 'Wildlife Site' status), important species, NVC category, condition and conservation status, and initiate a programme for regular updating. (Objective 1 and 2)	2001	PDNPA WBAPG/WT LAs/LRCs Voluntary Sector
AW3 Compile a register of PAWS sites which are likely to be capable of supporting ash woodland. (Objective 3)	2001	WBAPG
AW4 Compile a register of currently un-wooded sites with potential for expansion of ash woodland and assess their overall suitability for expansion, in collaboration with the Limestone Dales Action Plan and other limiting factors (e.g. archaeology). (Objective 4)	2005	PDNPA/WBAPG

	Survey		
AW5	Complete detailed habitat survey of woodlands on the AWI. (Objective 1)	2005	WBAPG

EVALUATING THE IMPORTANCE AND CONDITION OF SITES

Evaluating Importance and Identifying Key Sites

AW6	Agree methodology for the evaluation of upland ashwoods and identification of 'Wildlife Sites'. (Objectives 1,2 and 3)	2002	EN/PDNPA/NT WTs
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Defining Favourable Condition

AW7	Agree definitions of favourable condition for the complete range of sites found in the Peak District, to include the requirements of important species and a pragmatic approach to sycamore and beech control. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	EN/WBAPG
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AW8	Agree guidelines for the range of appropriate management needed to achieve favourable condition including: *The identification of priority sites/areas for conservation, restoration and creation, aiming to restore the typical zonation of woodland types in the dales from wet alderwoods in dale bottoms to mixed ashwoods on dalesides and oak/birchwoods on dale brows (in collaboration with the relevant Wet Woodland, Oak/birch Woodland and Limestone Dales Action Plans) *Options for non-intervention/wilderness areas *Appropriate methodologies for restoration and re-creation *Suitable species mixes and structures *The re-establishment of native limes on sites where they are known to have occurred in the past *Consideration of the importance of wych elm (All Objectives)	2001	WBAPG
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INVASIVE SPECIES

AW9	Instigate a pragmatic 3 tier approach to control of non-native species (especially sycamore and beech), along the following lines: *Usually eradicate from woods with less than 10 % *Gradually remove from woods where frequent *Accept as a naturalised component in woods where abundant (unless threatening an important adjacent native woodland site) (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	EN/WBAPG
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RESEARCH

AW10	Compile existing information and research on: *The functional importance of wych elm within ashwoods *The differing re-generation capabilities of sycamore and ash *The time-scales required for effective restoration (regarding possible dominance of sycamore or beech, if disturbance regimes are high) *The past distribution of limes and the influence of planting on genetic integrity *The extent of ashwood expansion in the dales Ensure that this information becomes widely available. (All Objectives)	2002	PDNPA/WBAPG
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AW11	In collaboration with other woodland action plans, evaluate the impact of numbers of deer on Peak District woodlands and implement any necessary mitigation action. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	WBAPG
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MONITORING

AW12	Agree methodology for, and implement, effective monitoring of ash woodlands. Ensure that the results of the process are collated and used to update the ash woodlands register. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	WBAPG
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AWARENESS RAISING

AW13	Share information on the wildlife importance and management needs of key conservation, restoration and re-creation sites with the landowners/managers, including feedback from surveys. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs FWAG/FC
AW14	Promote, through appropriate means, the use of long term management plans by woodland owners. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2001 onwards	FC
AW15	Promote appropriate new native woodland grant schemes. (Objective 4)	2003	FC/EN/PDNPA

CONSERVATION ACTION AND INCENTIVES

Designation

AW16	Review coverage of ash woodland SSSIs and notify further sites as appropriate. (Objective 1)	2005	EN
AW17	Implement obligations under European (Natura 2000) legislation with respect to the review of the Peak District Dales cSAC. (Objective 1)	2001	EN
AW18	Review desirability and opportunities for establishment of further key sites as NNR and LNR, and establish if appropriate. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2005	EN/LAs/WTs NT/PDNPA

Grant Schemes

AW19	Consider recommending reviews of woodland, agri-environment and conservation schemes to ensure that: *Management prescriptions and payments encourage stock exclusion from existing semi-natural woodland, removal of non-native species where appropriate, restoration of PAWS and new native woodland creation in appropriate locations *Encouragement is given to the production of long term management plans *Incentives are sufficient to encourage appropriate management (All Objectives)	2002 - 2010	FC/MAFF/EN PDNPA/WEG WBAPG
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Negotiation and Review of Agreements

AW20	Review management of all sites within SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners and managers to ensure maintenance or restoration of favourable condition. (Objective 1)	2001 - 2005	EN
AW21	Negotiate appropriate agreements with landowners/managers of sites outside SSSIs and existing agreements, targeting: *Priority conservation sites *PAWS for woodland restoration *Sites for new woodland creation (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	FC/PDNPA MAFF/NT/WTs FWAG

AW22	Review management of ashwoods in existing conservation agreements, outside of SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers to ensure that favourable condition is being maintained or restored. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	MAFF/NT/WTs PDNPA/FWAG FC
AW23	Review whole holding agreements which include unprotected ashwoods or sites for restoration/expansion. Consider the opportunities for amending the agreement to incorporate favourable management. (All Objectives)	2002 - 2010	MAFF/NT/WTs PDNPA/FWAG FC
AW24	Ensure action plan targets are incorporated into the production of Forest Plans. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	FC/EN/PDNPA
Alternative Incomes			
AW25	Where access is available, investigate whether woodland products marketing or other woodland uses would encourage appropriate management, and if so encourage development in collaboration with other woodland action plans. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	FC/TGA/CLA
Land Acquisition			
AW26	Consider negotiating purchase/lease of priority sites where this would be the most effective way of achieving conservation objectives and when a negotiated conservation solution has not succeeded. (Objectives 1 and 4)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs NT/WdT
Direct Action			
AW27	On land owned by public or conservation bodies, ensure that: *Management maintains and where possible enhances the value of ash woodland *Options for the restoration of PAWS are reviewed *Opportunities for new native woodland creation are taken *Opportunities for involvement of local communities in site management are taken where possible (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/FC NT/ WTs/WdT
AW28	Identify appropriate sources of local provenance Peak District ashwood trees and shrubs and encourage their supply. (Objectives 3 and 4)	2001 - 2003	FC/PDNPA/NT DWT

REGULATION

Planning

AW29	Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on ash woodland; that loss or damage to ash woodland is avoided; and that opportunities for the enhancement are considered in relevant planning decisions. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs WTs
AW30	Consider the opportunities for the creation of ash woodland in relevant planning decisions, including quarry restoration schemes. (Objective 3)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs WTs
Other Regulatory Mechanisms			
AW31	Consider the need for a review of both groundwater and surface water abstraction consents in catchments with sensitive ash woodland sites. (Objectives 2 and 3)	2001 onwards	EA/WBAPG (joint leads)

RESOURCES

It is envisaged that the majority of actions proposed will be carried out by the relevant organisations using current resources. These include:

- the considerable investment made by landowners and managers in managing their land sympathetically for wildlife;
- EN's programme of reviewing SSSI management and its grant and management agreement schemes;
- the FC's Woodland Grant Scheme;
- MAFF's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme;
- MAFF's Countryside Stewardship Scheme;
- continuing management of woodlands in the ownership of conservation organisations and public bodies (EN, NT, WTs, LAs, PDNPA).

Additional resources are likely to be required:

- to provide adequate financial incentives for the conservation, enhancement and restoration of existing priority woodlands (2001 onwards);
- to enhance management of sites in the ownership of conservation organisations (2001 onwards).