

OAK WOODLAND

DEFINITION

Oak woodland is defined as broadleaf woodland, which is dominated by either English Oak, Sessile Oak or hybrids between the two. Most broadleaf or deciduous woodland in Devon is made up of a mixture of tree species and the degree to which oak dominates varies. However, oak woodland is predominantly found in North Devon on high ground or on steep valley slopes.

Oak woodlands are often long established and have been a source of timber for fuel and building for many years. They represent the climax vegetation in the south-west before large scale clearances by man would have dominated the vegetation types in Britain. Those that remain were managed until about a hundred years ago and are frequently referred to as ancient semi natural woodlands. (Woodland that was in existence about 1600 AD).

DISTRIBUTION

According to the 1994 Devon Wildlife Trust survey there was approximately 1177 ha of Ancient semi Natural Woodland, in North Devon excluding the Exmoor National Park of which the largest element is oak woodland. It is found predominantly on the steep valley sides along Bradiford water, the rivers Yeo, Mole, Taw, Bray and Little Dart where they have escaped the fate of clear felling in the past. The notable concentrations can be found on the fringes of Exmoor National Park, along the Bray and Bradiford Valleys north of Barnstaple, along the coastal combes of the high North Devon Coast, along the river valleys of the Taw near Kingsnympton and along the Little Dart from Chulmleigh to East Worlington.

KEY LOCATIONS

Bradiford Valley and Tutshill Woods near Barnstaple
Knapp Woods near Atherington
Bridge Woods near Burrington
Twitchen Woods near Arlington

Other Important Locations: Watersmeet near Lynmouth
West Exmoor Coasts including Woody Bay and Heddon Valley

CHARACTERISTIC WILDLIFE

Oak woodlands in North Devon are comprised mainly of sessile oak, though pedunculate or english oak is often be present as are hybrids. Associated tree species include rowan, hazel and holly. Oak woodland represents the most diverse of all of our habitats in Britain a three-dimensional home to a wide range of plants, birds, animals, insects and plants.

Plants: sessile oak, pedunculate oak, rowan, hazel, holly, bluebell, primrose, wood anemone, bilberry, heather, ferns including broad buckler fern.
Insects: 423 insect and mite species, more than any other woodland type, including blue ground beetle.
Mammals: dormouse, pipistrelle bat, greater horseshoe bat
Birds: woodpeckers, pied flycatcher, wood warbler, sparrow hawk, redstart

THREATS

Since the earliest times the area of woodland cover in Britain has declined as the forests were cleared by man. By Norman times (11th Century) it is estimated that there was about 15% woodland cover in England, which was predominantly oak and by 1900 this figure was about 10%. This was sustainably managed through coppicing until the beginning of the 1900's when many woodlands fell into disuse as man found other substitute materials. Further clearances and substitution by non native conifer plantations in the last century has led to a coverage of only 2.2% of semi natural ancient woodland in Devon. Whilst these woodlands are often protected from clearance many are no longer managed and are neglected.

Existing threats to woodland include invasion by non native tree and shrub species; the cessation of traditional management by coppicing; the grazing of woodland by livestock preventing regeneration; and a loss of woodland cover through landslips, particularly on the North Devon coast.

SITE STATUS

Some of the notable oak woodlands are Sites of Special Scientific Interest:

West Exmoor Coast & Woods near Lynmouth	710 ha
Watersmeet near Lynmouth	348 ha
Bradiford Valley (Tutshill Woods) near Barnstaple	23 ha

Many other oak woodlands are designated as County Wildlife Sites. According to the 1994 Wildlife Survey, Devon Wildlife Trust recorded 68 confirmed County Wildlife Sites of Ancient semi Natural Woodland, covering 835 ha, within North Devon.

Many of the coastal woodlands between Combe Martin and Countisbury lie within Exmoor National Park, whilst other small pockets of oak woodland around the Ilfracombe area lie within the North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Some of the river valley woodlands along the rivers Taw, Mole, and Bray fall within the County Council designated Areas of Great Landscape Value.

Some small woodlands are protected under the District Council’s planning legislation through Tree Preservation Orders which may protect trees of amenity or conservation value.

CURRENT ACTION

Since the publication of the North Devon Biodiversity Action Plan in 2001 Forestry Commission baseline data suggests that the creation of broadleaf woodland has been running at about 96 hectares per year, the majority of which will ultimately be dominated by Oak.

Much of the coastal woodland on Exmoor, as well the woodlands around Arlington Court, are in the ownership of the National Trust and frequently under active management.

The English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS), run by the Forestry Commission, is available to landowners to provide financial incentives to create and manage woodlands. Grant support for the management of small woodlands may also be obtained through the recently introduced Entry and Higher Level Stewardship scheme.

Additional help and advice can be obtained through Countryside Management Services, such as the South West Forest Project, Exmoor National Park and the Northern Devon Coast & Countryside Service.

LINKS TO OTHER BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

	UK BAP	SW BAP	Devon BAP	Exmoor BAP	English Nature Natural Areas
Habitat Action Plans	Upland oakwood	Upland oakwood	Oak woodland	Upland oakwood	Western oakwoods, Lands End to Minehead
Species Action Plans	Dormice Greater horseshoe bat Lesser horseshoe bat Pipistrelle bat Blue ground beetle Pearl bordered fritillary	Pipistrelle bat	Greater horseshoe bat Pearl bordered fritillary Primrose Golden hair lichen Devon sorbi		

OAK WOODLAND

OBJECTIVES

- 1 To ensure that the existing area of oak woodland is not lost to other land uses
- 2 To ensure the existing stock of oak woodland is managed so that it has capacity to regenerate, retains an oak-dominated natural character and has an enhanced Wildlife value.
- 3 To expand the area in Devon of well-managed oak woodland with a diverse and characteristic community of animals and plants, without consequent loss to other semi natural habitats.
- 4 To foster greater public understanding, involvement and enjoyment of oak woodland, wildlife and its management.

ACTION		TARGET	LEAD DELIVERER	PARTNERS	Obj. No.
A	Policy and Legislation				
1	Ensure planning policies protect oak woodland sites from inappropriate development requiring planning permission, by linking to Ancient Woodland Inventory, CWS data and other sources of information.	No absolute loss of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland. No net loss of more recent sites.	NDDC Planning Authority	FC, DCC	1
2	Ensure the requirements for felling licences is maintained and enforced.	Prevent Illegal Felling	FC		1
3	Maximise use of Section 106 Agreements to create new oak woodland through planning gain.	As opportunity arises	NDDC Planning Authority	DCC	3
4	Favour appropriate, sensitively sited new woodland planting and natural regeneration, with priority to linking, buffering and building upon existing oak woodland sites.	Create 1000 ha of new predominantly Oak woodland (NVCs W8, W10, W11, W16, W17) by 2020.	FC/ SWF	DWT, EN, NDCCS	3
5	Encourage establishment of further Community Woodlands.	5 new sites by 2010 preferably within 500m of a settlement. Target sub regional, area and local centres (ND local Plan)	SWF	FC, Silvanus Trust, ITF, NDCCS	3,4

B Site Safeguard and Management					
1	Continue or instigate management to diversify woodland canopies and age structures. Continue or instigate management programmes to control invasive species which inhibit native oak regeneration or which are detrimental to oak woodland wildlife.	Aspire to increase and halt the decline in woodland management. FC data (2004) suggests only 27% of ALL woodland types in NDDC is in management 3700 ha.	FC, SWF, landowners and managers.	NDDC, ENPA, DWT, EN, NT	2
2	Use planting mixes, predominantly of local provenance oak, where woods are too small or otherwise unable to regenerate naturally.	Provide independent advisory service to landowners	SWF		2
3	Where control of pests is required, encourage use of ecologically benign methods.	As 2	FC	EN, NT, ENPA, NDDC, DWT, FTA, ICF	2
4	Identify and seek to acquire or establish new accessible woodland nature reserves in areas currently without them	Double the number of native woodland sites with free public access	DWT	NDDC, SWF	3
5	All SSSI woodlands in a favourable condition by 2010	EN to assess and provide list of SSSI Woodlands within NDDC	EN		2
C Advisory					
1	Offer advisory services to woodland owners on management techniques which promote regeneration and which benefit characteristic oak woodland wildlife.	Provide independent advisory service to landowners	FC, SWF, ENPA, NDDC	FWAG, Sylvanus, Tilhill, BLS (Barbara Benefield), F.T.A, DWT, RDS, NDCCS	2
D Research and Monitoring					
1	Identify all oak woodland sites through survey and evaluate to identify County Wildlife sites.	Subject to funding by 2010	DBRC	DWT, DCC, SWF, Woodland Trust, NDDC, ENPA, EN	1
2	Champion to host annual meeting with lead deliverers and partners	One per annum	SWF		4
E Communication and Publicity					
1	Encourage effective local co-operatives and rural industries making and utilising oak woodland produce, e.g. charcoal, firewood, furniture and timber.	Host Annual Regional Woodfair (SWF) and Biennial Woodland Show (FTA).	Forestry and Timber Association, SWF, ENPA	FC, SWF	1