



WOOD-PASTURE, OLD PARKLAND & VETERAN TREES

1. INTRODUCTION

Wood-pasture and old parkland are the products of historic land management systems derived from medieval royal hunting forests, wooded commons, deer parks, pastures with trees and 16th to 18th century landscape schemes (e.g. of Capability Brown). This plan also includes areas currently under agriculture, forestry or other land-uses which were formerly wood-pasture or parkland, but which still contain veteran trees of nature conservation interest. It also includes individual veteran trees that might have originated in deer parks or parklands long gone, or have developed in hedgerows or church-yards. This is in response to the growing concern for Britain's important holding of old trees.



Charlecote Park © Steve Falk

The habitat essentially consists of large or veteran trees of both native (e.g. English oak and common ash) and alien origin (e.g. sweet chestnut and Turkey oak) at various densities within semi-natural and amenity grassland, heathland or woodland. In some instances sites are still grazed by domestic stock and/or deer (e.g. Charlecote Park), though this has ceased at many sites to be replaced by amenity activity (e.g. golfing), tourism or arable agriculture. There are no reliable figures for the extent of the resource in Britain although a figure of between 10 000-20 000ha is currently being used as the 'best estimate' of the habitat in a 'working condition' where management is at a level that sustains the habitat's natural features (source: UK BAP). A much greater amount is thought to exist in an unmanaged condition or as trees within arable or improved pasture, or as managed trees within formal, ungrazed landscapes such as golf courses, historic properties and recreational parks. Some former deer parks are no longer distinguishable as such e.g. Wedgenock Park west of Warwick, which was reputedly one of the first ever established.

Veteran trees are defined as the oldest examples of a given species in an area. For oak, sweet chestnut, beech and horse chestnut, the species most relevant to this plan, this is generally interpreted locally as 300 years (typically with trunk girths exceeding 250 inches). For shorter-lived trees such as birch and poplar, this might be 200 years, but the definition is a rather subjective one that can vary between a county with many such trees and one with relatively few. Britain's holding of old trees has international significance, as the frequency of them here is far greater than in most other parts of western Europe.

In Britain, the veteran trees of wood-pasture and parkland in particular provide important micro-habitats for many internationally rare species, including certain fungi, lichens, bryophytes and a variety of 'saproxyllic' (rotting wood-associated) invertebrates – particularly flies and beetles. These micro-habitats include attached and detached decaying wood, sap runs, heart-rot, water-filled rot holes, rotting stumps and invisible old roots. The fungi associated with veteran trees and the dead wood in turn provide a further microhabitat for many insects. Parklands also provide a refuge for indigenous or otherwise valuable tree genotypes (e.g. English oak and black poplar).

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2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS	Target
A. Determine the extent, location, quality and management needs of all remaining and former wood-pasture and parkland sites and veteran trees in the county.	2010
B. Maintain the current resource (extent, distribution, condition & number) of wood-pasture, parkland and veteran trees, opposing losses	2005-2015
C. Restore 50ha of sites in unfavourable condition to favourable ecological condition (having defined this)	by 2010
D. Reduce fragmentation between sites and the generation gap between veteran trees by initiating the expansion of 50ha of wood-pasture or parkland and promoting new generations of open-grown trees on all sites	by 2010
E. Advise and inform owners on issues such as management methods, funding sources, restoration of former sites.	2005-2015
F. Increase awareness of the value of veteran trees to land-owners and tree surgeons and promote alternative solutions to felling.	2005-2015
G. Promote the biological, historical and landscape interest of wood-pasture and parklands to those using or managing public areas for recreation purposes.	2005-2015
H. Promote farming methods which protect veteran trees	2006-2015

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Woodlands
- Lowland Heathland
- Lowland Acid Grassland
- Lowland Neutral Grassland
- Traditional Orchards

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Song Thrush
- Black Poplar
- Bats

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

- *Maintain the current extent and distribution of the total resource of wood-pasture and parkland.*
- *Maintain the current extent, distribution and condition of the total resource of wood-pasture and parkland that is in favourable ecological condition.*
- *Initiate in areas where examples of derelict wood-pasture and parkland occur, a programme to restore 2 500 ha to favourable ecological condition by 2010.*
- *By 2002, initiate the expansion of 500 ha of wood-pasture or parkland in appropriate areas to help reverse the fragmentation and reduce the generation gap between veteran trees.*

4. CURRENT STATUS

The West Midlands region holds approximately 9% of England's wood pasture and parkland resource according to the regional biodiversity audit. In Warwickshire, eighty-one parklands have been identified via desk research of current OS maps and the resource is currently estimated to be at least 1500-2 000ha (Harrison, G.R., 2002 - pers. com.) but how much is of nature conservation interest is uncertain and most such sites now lack veteran trees. Only a few fragments of wood-pasture remain in Warwickshire (Tasker, 1990). Historically, parkland is associated with large country estates and wood-pasture is associated with common grazing land. Veteran trees can also be found within plantation woodland or in coppiced woodland, as well as in hedgerows, churchyards, village centres or fields.

The best former wood-pasture site in the county is arguably Stoneleigh Deer Park, as it has a large number of oaks over 300 years old (with some probably exceeding 500 years). Other important collections of old trees exist at Farnborough Hall, Coombe Countryside Park and Packington Park. Information on other veteran trees is still being collected by Warwickshire Museum, which suggests that away from these sites there may be just a few dozen trees with girths exceeding 900cm (c250 inches) and these are usually isolated individuals (e.g. the Baginton Oak and Whitnash Oak) or small groups (e.g. the Crowley Oaks of Ullenhall and some of the oaks in and around Temple Balsall). It is also thought that some riverside willow pollards and churchyard lime pollards are considerably older than their girths suggest because pollarding reduces trunk growth. Photographic evidence from the County Record Office supports the view that the pollarded limes of churches such as Holy Trinity, Stratford, are at least 250 years old and several other churches have similar trees.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

Wood-pasture and parkland is a national and a European priority for conservation.

There are no wood-pasture and parkland sites designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the county, but some are afforded non-statutory designations. This includes Ecosite designation within the WBRC on ecological grounds. It also includes designation of some sites as Historic Parks by English Heritage based on landscape reasons e.g. Coombe Abbey, Warwick Castle Park, Charlecote Park etc (see the MAGIC web site. Others may be listed on the county Sites and Monuments Record. No wood pasture, parkland or veteran tree sites have yet been subject to SINC designation, though SINC criteria include sections on parkland (which would also cover wood-pasture) and on veteran trees.

Trees are specifically protected if covered by a local authority Tree Preservation Order or housing species protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (e.g. all bats and some nesting birds). Section 91 of Planning Policy Statement 9 (ODPM, 2005) states that veteran and other substantial trees can be important for biodiversity conservation and local planning authorities should consider their nature conservation value and the use of TPOs to protect them, in land use change decisions.

Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides the potential to include trees or parklands within formal Conservation Areas where they form an integral part of the historic built environment, though it is not fully known to what extent this occurs in Warwickshire.

The Ancient Tree Hunt initiative recently launched by the Woodland Trust, Ancient Tree Forum and The Tree Register of the British Isles is attempting to strengthen the protection of veteran trees in Britain and may influence planning guidelines in future.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

- **Conversion to other land uses** such as arable, improved pasture forestry, built development recreational purposes. This may or may not affect the ecological value of sites, but in some cases has resulted in damaging car parking beside trees, building too close to trees, loss of the habitat mosaics associated with old trees, compaction of the soil around roots, increased vandalism to trees and a variety of other activities that damage or threaten trees. Some factors are given further coverage below.
- **Agricultural improvement** including deep ploughing (which can damage roots), use of fertilisers and herbicides (which can damage mycorrhizal fungi associated with tree roots plus any associated unimproved grassland) also pesticides (which can damage insect and bat assemblages).
- **Reduction of veteran tree numbers** through felling, neglect, loss of traditional management techniques (particularly pollarding), disease and vandalism.

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- **Changes in groundwater levels** due to abstraction, causing physiological stress to veteran trees.
- **Inappropriate or unsympathetic grazing** leading to nitrogen enrichment beneath the tree canopy, overgrazing of associated grasslands, tree damage, compaction of soil, loss of nectar plants, or scrub invasion through under-grazing.
- **Safety considerations and insurance.** Landowners and managers are increasingly managing their estates in a liability-conscious manner, which may have resulted in the felling of trees and may threaten some mature specimens in the future.
- **Unsympathetic tree management and removal of detached wood** – attached dead limbs, fallen limbs and wind-blown trees can support many rare species of insect, but are often removed unnecessarily.
- **Age gaps in tree stocks** which affects the continuity of microhabitats associated with older trees and therefore threatens key species with extinction where their requirements become scarce or absent (even temporarily).
- **Air pollution** at the sites closer to areas of urbanisation has led to a reduction in the lichen flora and a predominance of mosses tolerant of acid rain pollution.
- **The Ancient Tree Hunt and Tree Forum** has considerably raised the profile of veteran and ancient trees nationally and has provided support and information locally

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- Coombe Countryside Park has a restoration plan for opening up areas of woodland to create a woodland pasture habitat and for restoring 120 acre's of deer-park to parkland pasture. The project is funded by the Countryside Agency as one of three pilot projects nationally, looking at best practice in country park restoration.
- Stoneleigh Deer Park has a detailed ecological management plan for the Business Centre area of the site.
- The National Trust has identified wood-pasture & parkland as the priority habitat for nature conservation action in its West Midlands Region (which holds nearly 20% of the NT's parkland resource). This is reflected in its current Regional Business Plan, which includes several actions to promote favourable condition of parklands & veteran trees and to raise awareness of their value. The parklands at Charlecote and Farnborough Hall are managed unintensively under Countryside Stewardship agreements. Surveys of open grown trees have been undertaken recently at Charlecote, Baddesley Clinton, Packwood House and Earlswood Moat House.

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- Warwickshire Museum has been spearheading the collation of records of surviving old trees in the area and produced an exhibition 'Warwickshire's Ancient Trees' (summer 2004) in conjunction with the Ancient Tree Forum (as part of the National Ancient Tree Hunt).
- Some entomological survey-work has been undertaken at Coombe and Stoneleigh by staff of Warwickshire and Coventry Museums. However, more entomological survey work is required at all sites. Surveys by the National Trust at Earlswood Moat House and Coughton Court in 2005 revealed the presence of a rich beetle fauna associated with wood-decay in veteran oaks.
- The LBAP Partnership is receiving notes on revised targets for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan no.5 on Wood-pasture and Parkland and will attempt to incorporate these into reviews of this local HAP.
- Parklands Consortium, based locally at Stoneleigh, is involved in the conservation and restoration of historic parklands of national and county ecological interest. Warwickshire commissions have included at Stoneleigh Abbey, Stoneleigh Deer Park and Coombe Abbey.
- Restoration of historic parklands and protection of veteran trees are identified as key priorities under the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme in the Arden Joint Character Area (JCA), which includes much of north and west Warwickshire.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended - Core Steering Group - Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant habitat policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9)	LBAPSG	LAs	2005-2015	B
PL2. Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria is considered for designation as an SSSI.	NE	WWT WM EH	2008	B
PL3. Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria is considered for designations as a SINC and/or an LNR, or (if appropriate) Scheduled Ancient Monuments.	WSP	WWT NE LAs	2005	B

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PL4. Encourage the use of existing funding schemes for wood-pasture and parkland restoration/extension and management.	FWAG	NE CLA	2005- 2015	D, E
PL5. Review and renotify all relevant sites as ecosites and SINCS and enter onto Recorder and HBA database.	HBA		2008	B
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Ensure development proposals do not affect the integrity or conservation of existing and proposed wood-pasture and parkland sites (taking special care with placement of buildings & car parks and encouraging use of fencing where necessary).	LBAPSG	LAs	2005- 2015	B,C,D
SM2. Confine tree surgery and tree felling to the minimum required for public safety in order to maximise the life of the trees. Ensure that felling licenses are applied for where tree removal is proposed.	LBAPSG	LAs LOs FC NT	2005- 2015	G,H
SM3. Investigate the relocation and re-establishment of key species dependent on veteran trees.	LBAPSG	LAs Univers- ities	2005- 2015	C, E
SM4. Produce management plans for all key existing wood-pasture and parkland within the county.	LBAPSG	NE WM FWAG LOs	2015	C, F, G
SM5. Promote farming methods which protect veteran trees especially via Environmental Stewardship (Entry Level & Higher Level schemes)	FWAG	WM NE	2005- 2015	H
SM6. Actively recommend measures to increase the extent of connectivity and maintain options to expand area of habitat.	LBAPSG	WCC LAs WWT NE	2008- 2015	D
Advisory				
A1. Inform all landowners of the value of their parkland and/or wood-pasture and offer advice on management and environmental stewardship options.	FWAG	FC CLA NE WWT	2005- 2015	F,G,H
A2. Provide Best Practice Guidelines to appropriate landowners.	WWT	NE CLA FWAG	2005- 2015	F,G,H

Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Establish appropriate survey and research work to define size and distribution of the resource, priority sites and identify potential opportunities for habitat recreation.	WM	WWT LAs LOs	2005	A, B, C, E,
RM2. Establish an accurate and up to date GIS database on the county's parklands, wood-pasture sites and veteran trees.	HBA		2006	A, B, D
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Increase public awareness of the importance of, and threats to parklands and wood-pasture and the need for conservation action. Provide appropriate interpretation / information at sites with public access.	NT	CPs FC LAs LOs WWT	2005- 2015	H
CP2. Investigate training needs of landowners/tenants/volunteers regarding management and conservation of parkland and wood-pasture habitats and species and provide as appropriate.	WM	WWT BTCV FWAG	2006	G

Abbreviations: BTCV – British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, CLA – Country, Land & Business Association, CP – Country Park, EH – English Heritage, NE – Natural England, FC – Forestry Commission, FWAG – Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, HBA – Habitat Biodiversity Audit, LA – Local Authority, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, LOs – Landowners, NT – National Trust, TOs - Tree Officers, WM - Warwickshire Museum, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (see also LBAP Bibliography web page)

Tasker. A. (Ed). (1990). *The Nature of Warwickshire*. Barracuda Books Ltd.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

UK Biodiversity Action Plan no.5

Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Guides: no.1- Trees & Farming from
Dysart Road, Grantham, Lincs. NG31 6SW

Ancient Tree Forum

The Ancient Tree Hunt

MAGIC web site

Natural England

Parklands Consortium, East Lodge, Stoneleigh Park, Warks. CV8 2LH

9. CONTACT

anton.irving@english-nature.org.uk

stevenfalk@warwickshire.gov.uk