

Plans

HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR URBAN AND POST-INDUSTRIAL HABITATS

AUTHOR: Deborah Lloyd

LEAD AGENCY: Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
The Old Ragged School
Brook Street
Nottingham
NG1 1EA

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CURRENT STATUS

Wildlife is not confined to the countryside. Most urban areas (towns and cities with a population over 10,000) contain a network of inter-linked green corridors and spaces, which the UK Biodiversity Action Plan divides into four main types:

1. Remnants of semi-natural habitats such as ancient woodland and river corridors.
2. Pre-industrial rural landscapes with arable land, meadows and villages.
3. Managed green space, such as parks, gardens, roadside verges and churchyards.
4. Naturally seeded urban areas such as demolition sites.

Types 1 and 2 are covered by other habitat action plans. An important characteristic of urban areas is their variety of interlinked habitats, both across each town or city as a whole and within individual sites. It is this which gives bats, kestrels, great crested newts and rare species such as ground nesting bees the mixture of breeding, foraging and sheltering areas they need. Even the most visually unattractive site may support species characterised by their resilience and adaptability to human disturbance, and as rural habitats continue to be lost and fragmented, urban areas are becoming increasingly important for biodiversity. Most urban areas in fact support a higher diversity of wild species per unit area than intensively farmed countryside. Urban nature reserves and other wild green spaces provide the only local contact with nature for the 80% of the population living in urban areas, and offer a wealth of educational, economic and social benefits.

Post-industrial land, found in both rural and urban areas, may include disused railway lines, spoil heaps or demolition sites which have been naturally colonised by wild plants, as well as derelict buildings, which provide important habitats for birds and bats. They are often considered worthless for biodiversity, but in fact some of our rarest species depend upon them in the absence of their natural habitats. They are free from intensive management, and often have variations in topography, soil type and drainage which lead to the development of a unique and diverse range of plant communities.

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Areas such as those being reclaimed from disused colliery sites in the County also present a considerable opportunity for habitat creation.

Due to the fragmented and diverse nature of urban and post-industrial habitats, it is very difficult to know exactly how much important habitat remains. What is certain, however, is that although public attitudes towards these habitats are changing, urban and post-industrial wildlife sites continue to be lost and damaged, often because their value for biodiversity is underestimated.

THREATS

The main factors currently affecting the County's urban and post-industrial habitats are:

- The loss of 'brownfield' sites and green corridors to development, leading to the fragmentation and isolation of sites and species.
- Unsympathetic urban regeneration and reclamation projects, particularly the use of non-native species in landscaping and planting schemes. Also the conversion of wildlife-rich habitats to amenity grassland or tree planting.
- Changes in industrial processes such as mining, which have reduced the creation of temporary habitats such as ash tips, which often support rare and threatened plants.
- The lack of appropriate management of green space, including the over-emphasis on 'tidiness' in parks, gardens and churchyards which often reduces their wildlife value.
- The decontamination of land of ecological importance.
- Damage to sites caused by unmanaged or inappropriate recreational use and other human impacts such as fly-tipping, noise and vandalism.
- Pollution of air, water and soil.
- Built development in flood plains, resulting in higher run-off rates to watercourses and a higher risk of flooding, which in turn leads to pressure for artificial flood defences. Changing flow rates and loss of habitats to development and flood defences are a key threat to wetland biodiversity.
- The accidental or deliberate introduction of aggressive non-native plant species, which may dominate areas at the expense of native plants.

CURRENT INITIATIVES - EXAMPLES

- Many private landowners manage urban or post-industrial sites of actual or potential biodiversity value, and have a vital part to play in their conservation. This includes gardeners and allotment holders as well as large land owners.

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- The Countryside Commission's document 'Linking Town and Country'(1999) advocates the production of 'Greenscape Strategies' for every urban area setting out clear policies and programmes for the protection of the urban green network.
- A number of urban and post-industrial sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) or Local Nature Reserves (LNR).
- The Nottinghamshire Structure Plan and many Local Plans recognise the importance of protecting, promoting and enhancing urban wildlife. Nottingham City Council and Mansfield District Council have published Nature Conservation Strategies which aim to protect and promote biodiversity within urban areas.
- The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's Urban Wildlife Scheme promotes nature conservation in all urban areas by involving the public, managing nature reserves, promoting surveys and supporting local projects, as well as campaigning to raise the profile of urban wildlife.
- The Greenwood Community Forest aims to regenerate the landscape on the urban fringe, improving wildlife habitats and public access by advising and supporting Local Authorities, land managers and community groups.
- The Corridors to the Countryside Project is a partnership based initiative to enhance areas along the main green corridors in Nottingham for wildlife and people.
- The Greenwood Community Forest, in association with BTCV and Local Authorities, run a voluntary tree warden scheme and a network of community tree nurseries producing locally sourced stock.
- The Groundwork Trusts and BTCV work with local communities throughout urban areas on a wide range of nature conservation and environmental improvement projects.
- Many local communities have formed groups such as 'Friends of Brierley Forest Park' and 'Friends of Berry Hill', and work closely with Local Authorities and Conservation Groups to manage their local site. BTCV provides a support scheme for such groups.
- Nottinghamshire County Council and the Forestry Commission, funded by British Coal, are restoring 1000 ha of former colliery spoil tip to woodland and other habitats.
- The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust are working with East Midlands Electricity in 'greening' their sub-stations across the County.
- The Environment Agency is addressing the issue of increased run-off to water courses from development by promoting the use of balancing ponds, lagoons etc, collectively known as Best Management Practice.

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TARGETS

- Identify and confirm the status of all urban and post-industrial sites of significant conservation value by 2005.
- Establish mechanisms to protect and maintain viable networks of wildlife sites and corridors in all urban areas by 2010, ensuring that all urban inhabitants have access to areas rich in wildlife within 1/4 mile of where they live.
- Secure sympathetic management on 75% of urban SINCs by 2005, increasing this to as near to 100% as practicable by 2010.

PROPOSED ACTION

Policy and legislation

1. Ensure the incorporation of relevant (inter-)national law, policies and guidance into all plans and policies relating to the protection, enhancement and management of urban and post-industrial habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

2. Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of urban and post-industrial habitat and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

3. Ensure agri-environment, forestry and other funding schemes include appropriate management options and design measures to suit local nature conservation needs.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

Site safeguard and management

4. Review the extent of SSSI coverage of urban and post-industrial habitats and consider notifying further sites as necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies.

5. Designate SINCs and declare Local Nature Reserves on appropriate areas of urban and post-industrial habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

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6. Promote the uptake of positive management with owners of SSSIs, LNRs, SINCs and any other areas of urban and post-industrial habitat.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

7. Carry out appropriate habitat management on sites controlled by BAP partners.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

8. Ensure sites containing urban and post-industrial habitat have appropriate management plans that are working towards improving site management and condition

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

9. Acquire land to ensure good habitat management or to create habitat.

ACTION: NGO's.

Advisory

10. Provide formal or informal training in management techniques for urban and post-industrial habitat to land managers, site wardens, volunteers, etc.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

11. Establish demonstration sites or projects to demonstrate/publicise good habitat management techniques.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Future research and monitoring

12. Establish and maintain a monitoring programme (a site register) to determine progress towards county HAP targets.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

13. Ensure that areas of urban and post-industrial habitat are periodically resurveyed to establish extent and condition. Update resulting habitat inventory every 5 years and revise targets and HAPs if necessary.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

Communications and publicity

14. Improve public awareness and appreciation of urban and post-industrial habitat by providing appropriate interpretation, education and access (where appropriate).

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

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15. Improve awareness of the value of, and appropriate management techniques for urban and post-industrial habitat among site owners and occupiers.

ACTION: Government Agencies, Local Authorities, NGO's.

What You Can Do

- Become a voluntary tree warden - contact BTCV or Nottingham City Council.
- Encourage wildlife into your garden by not using chemical pesticides and planting native British plants wherever possible. Leave a patch of long grass or nettles for butterflies, create a pond and put up bird or bat boxes.
- Start a wildlife project in your school, work place or community. Why not create a community pond or nature reserve? Advice is available from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and BTCV.

Species List

The following are examples of species of conservation concern (Appendix A) which are likely to benefit from this action plan:

- Bats
- Water vole
- Kestrel
- Barn owl
- Blackbird
- Dunnock
- Black redstart
- Northern rustic moth
- Bay willow moth
- Fly orchid
- Fragrant orchid
- Field woundwort
- Common broomrape