

Urban Habitats

Urban habitats are very diverse. They may include fragments of ancient woodland, grassland and wetlands within urban areas along with industrial land, urban commons, gardens and buildings. These can offer unique habitats, which may support uncommon species and unique assemblages of plants and animals.

1 Definition

Suffolk is not generally thought of as an urban county. However, there are a many built up areas that contain a variety of valuable urban wildlife sites. These include SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites.

However, nature conservation in towns and cities is not only about providing for wildlife. Wildlife can also play an important part in people's life and therefore should not be restricted to nature reserves and the countryside. As 54% of people in Suffolk live in towns (with populations of over 10000) the need for a healthy environment in urban areas is particularly important. Parks, cemeteries, canals, allotments, 'derelict' land and gardens can support a huge range of animals and plants and play a crucial role in maintaining the wildlife resource of towns and cities. These places are accessible to all age groups and cultures and can provide ideal places to learn about biodiversity. The character of urban areas is continually altering, through landscape improvements, development and the changing demands on land. If we are to retain the wildlife in urban areas, it must be recognised, valued, protected and managed as a vital component of the townscape.



the county, which will substantially increase the size of some towns and villages.

Within towns and villages the wildlife character is diverse and reflects the surrounding landscape as well as the unique environment arising from dense development, historic land use, industry and the influence of people. 'Urban habitats' can include:

- i. **Relic natural systems:** for example - veteran trees, rivers, brooks and springs.
- ii. **Encapsulated countryside:** enclosed 'semi-natural' habitats such as unimproved grassland, heath, hedgerows and ancient woodland. In some cases these are associated with former historic parks that are now encapsulated within urban areas.
- iii. **Managed habitats:** Park grassland, road verges, gardens, allotments, churchyards, hospital grounds and street trees, that reflect intensive land-use.
- iv. **Man-made habitats:** which support 'urban' **plant and animal assemblages**, such as urban commons, industrial land, railway sidings, buildings and walls. Although these habitats do occur in Suffolk they form a relatively small percentage of the urban wildlife habitats and are principally found in Ipswich and Lowestoft.

There are number of species associated with urban habitats that are subject to national and

2 Current status

2.1 Local

Urban areas are generally defined as having a population of over 10,000. However, many actions in this plan refer to people and wildlife and therefore can include any settlement where there is potential for wildlife, education and access to wild places. The major urban area in Suffolk is in the south east of the county consisting of Ipswich and associated towns. The other major urban areas are Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Haverhill. Many of the larger market towns such as Stowmarket and Sudbury also have urban wildlife habitats. There is also pressure for additional housing allocations throughout

local biodiversity action plans. These include song thrush, stag beetle and pipistrelle bat. In addition there are a number of other species which, would not normally occur in Suffolk, which have taken advantage of urban sites. These include black redstart, which nest on old industrial buildings in Lowestoft and the colony of kittiwakes that nest on artificial ledges in Lowestoft harbour.

There is relatively good information on the extent, distribution and value of these urban habitats and the species. SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves and County Wildlife Sites identify the majority of the sites of high ecological interest within urban areas. However, the value of urban habitats for amphibians and reptiles has only recently been fully appreciated and further County Wildlife Sites have been designated during the last year. An Urban Wildlife Report was prepared for Ipswich Borough Council in 1992. Wildlife Audits of Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds were prepared by Suffolk Wildlife Trust for St Edmundsbury Borough Council in 1996. However there has not been any countywide audit of urban habitats. Suffolk Wildlife Trust ran an urban wildlife project in Lowestoft between 1986 and 1992 and the Trust started a three year Community Wildlife Project in Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds in 1996.

2.2 Natural areas

Urban habitats occur within all natural areas.

3 Current factors affecting the habitat in Suffolk

- Lack of up to date information on the whole spectrum of urban wildlife resources.
 - Poor perception of site value - especially open and disturbed ground. This is exacerbated by the perception that the development potential for sites is more important than the wildlife potential.
 - Conflicting pressures for land use and the consequent loss of habitat. Many urban sites are subject to existing outline planning permission for development.
 - Changes to planning policy that encourage development of brownfield sites may increase the pressure on the remaining urban wildlife sites.
- Inappropriate management of valuable habitats to create 'tidy' landscapes.
 - Lack of management of wildlife sites, often due to numerous small and dispersed sites increasing costs.
 - Disturbance, trampling and heavy use on sensitive sites.
 - Lack of buffer zones to protect existing urban wildlife sites.

4 Current action

- Local authorities play a major role in urban nature conservation across Suffolk. Site protection, wildlife management and maintaining a diversity of linked natural networks to enhance biodiversity have been clearly defined in PPG9, and local authorities help meet these responsibilities in urban areas through:
 - i. Protection of sites and wildlife features. There a number of Local Plan policies acknowledging and protecting wildlife in urban areas at the District level
 - ii. Strategic land use allocation.
 - iii. Maintaining up-to-date scientific information on urban natural resources.
 - iv. Minimising the impacts of development on biodiversity.
 - v. Management of wildlife sites and green open space.
 - vi. Declaration of statutory Local Nature Reserves in urban areas - there are currently 8 Local Nature Reserves in Suffolk that are within urban areas.
 - vii. Habitat protection and creation in relation to development proposals.
 - viii. Setting up an Environmental Appraisal process (to include biodiversity) to look at sites and policies when updating Local Plans.
- Several districts and boroughs have Countryside Ranger Services that deal with policy issues, management of specific sites and are involved in community participation and education in urban areas which can lead to increased awareness and 'ownership' of wildlife sites by local communities. Suffolk County Council also manages Country Parks in some urban areas, which provide a base for information and education about biodiversity.

- There are a number of conservation volunteer teams based in urban areas of Suffolk. Greenways Project and Gipping Valley Project volunteers work along the valleys and the urban fringes of Ipswich. Suffolk Wildlife Trust volunteer teams from Ipswich and Lowestoft also work on urban sites but concentrate their work on trust reserves.
- Ipswich Wildlife Group manage many urban wildlife sites within the town and promote a wide range of urban wildlife initiatives including allotment forestry, brimstone and buckthorn project, reedbed rehabilitation and river corridor restoration.
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust's "Wildlife on Your Doorstep" project is a three year project (started in August 1999) funded by the National Lottery Charities Board which uses environmental arts and a community development approach to stimulate and support community environmental projects in the urban areas of Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Mildenhall, Brandon, Sudbury and Great Cornard. A parallel two year project will start in Lowestoft in August 2000.

5 Action plan objectives and targets

1. To ensure biodiversity issues contribute significantly to the development of sustainable green towns and cities.
2. To develop up-to-date and accessible information on urban ecological resources. To maintain and enhance the value and integrity of key wildlife sites, wildlife features and strategic natural networks across urban areas
3. To increase awareness and understanding of the value and management of the range of 'urban' habitats, especially those supporting key populations of important species.
4. To provide accessible natural open space for environmental education and the informal enjoyment of nature within 300m of every home.
5. To stimulate local action to benefit wildlife, through LA21 and other community initiatives.

6 Proposed local action with lead agencies

ACTION	KEY LOCAL PARTNERS	TIMETABLE				
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
A. Policy and Legislation						
All reviewed Local Plans or Supplementary Planning Guidance (e.g. Nature Conservation Strategy) to include the following:	LAs, GOER, DETR, EN, EA, all Local Plan consultees	*	*	*	*	*
i. The identification and protection of statutory wildlife sites, RIGGS, natural networks and wildlife features within urban areas.						
ii. Retention, management and enhancement of habitats related to new developments, through planning agreements.						
iii. Mitigation / replacement of lost habitats to maintain net ecological resource (identifying truly re-creatable habitats versus irreplaceable habitats).						
iv. Positive management of land within LA ownership.						
v. Provision of Local Nature Reserves and accessible natural open space to recommended levels (English Nature 1996: A Space for Nature).						
vi. Statement of intent to support SBAP targets.						
Develop and implement a long term strategy for land use and land management in all major urban areas - to maintain and improve natural networks of wildlife sites and green space. Target: As supplementary planning guidance for next Local Plan Review or by 2004.	LAs, SWT, CMPs	*	*	*	*	*
Lobby Town and Country Planning Institute to include biodiversity issues / ecological design / wildlife law into planners' syllabus.	LAs	*	*	*	*	*
B. Site safeguard and management						
Suffolk Biological Centre to annually update planning departments on 'County Wildlife Sites' which hold key habitats and species (priority BAP species and habitats, protected species etc.) in urban areas.	SBRC, LAs	*	*	*	*	*
Continue to survey and identify new County Wildlife Sites where appropriate.	SWT, SCC	*	*	*	*	*

ACTION	KEY LOCAL PARTNERS	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Identify and declare urban Local Nature Reserves (biological and geological) to above recommended minimum levels of 1ha per 1000 population.	LAs, EN	*	*	*	*	*
Increase levels of accessible natural greenspace and educational sites in areas of identified deficiency, to recommended minimum standards (EN 1996).	LAs, CMPS	*	*	*	*	*
Identify and implement at least one habitat creation and restoration project per year across the county to improve degraded habitats along natural networks of wildlife sites and green space. For example wetland/river restoration.	<u>L</u> As, EA, SWT,	*	*	*	*	*
Develop management plans for all local authority owned urban wildlife sites (with County wildlife Sites as priority) by 2004.	LAs, SWT,IWG	*	*	*	*	*
Target owners of all urban wildlife sites (with County Wildlife Sites as priority) for advice on land management for biodiversity.	LAs, CMPs, FWAG	*	*	*	*	*
Support/establish volunteer teams and support local communities in carrying out conservation work in urban areas.	SWT, LAs, IWG	*	*	*	*	*
Promote the management of school grounds for wildlife and learning about biodiversity.	SCC, LAs, SWT	*	*	*	*	*
C. Advisory						
Hold a county / regional conference for urban land managers and conservation organisations about biodiversity and best practice on site management and public participation.	SWT, SCC, LAs		*			
Produce guidance on best practice ecological design for planners and developers, including species protection, habitat / species requirements, biodiversity, surface water treatment, lighting etc.	LAs, EN, SWT, EA, SCC		*			
D. Future research and monitoring						
Survey urban areas to identify green space and green corridors in addition to SSSI and CWS designations.	LAs, SWT		*	*	*	*

ACTION	KEY LOCAL PARTNERS	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Undertake public surveys of 'urban' species (particularly Biodiversity Action Plan species associated with urban areas) and habitats involving schools, community groups and the general public.	LAs, SWT, CMPs	*	*	*	*	*
Assess levels of natural and accessible open space, identify deficiency areas (as defined using EN criteria) and monitor changes in levels	LAs			*	*	*
E. Communications and publicity						
Set up demonstration projects in accessible areas, showing and interpreting land management (coppice, hedge laying, heathland / grassland restoration and hay making etc.). For example in town centre formal parks and LNRs.	LAs, CMPs, IWG	*	*	*	*	*
Seek opportunities for increased promotion and participation in urban wildlife, through interpretation of sites (especially LNRs and County Wildlife Sites), events, publicity, guided walks etc.	LAs, CMPS	*	*	*	*	*
Develop local groups (or strategies for engaging the local community) for all LNRs and LA owned CWSs to promote better communication between users and managers, especially regarding land management.	LAs					
Develop a network of voluntary wildlife wardens, within urban areas, to increase communication between the public and site managers. Provide 'training' and liaison with appropriate local authority conservation staff.	LAs, SWT		*	*	*	*
Promote biodiversity issues within all existing LA21 groups, to offer opportunities for local people to develop urban wildlife projects and integrate biodiversity into other community initiated plans.	LAs,	*	*	*	*	*
Local authorities to establish wildlife forums (urban or district wide) to develop local wildlife priorities and feedback on action for biodiversity.	LAs	*	*	*	*	8