

Nature and the National Trust



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Introduction

'Many places belonging to the Trust, and not regarded principally as nature reserves, make the naturalist's mouth water.' So wrote Sir William Beech Thomas in his chapter on Nature Reserves in *The National Trust – A record of fifty year's achievement* published in 1945. How right he was and how right he still is.

The Trust manages few formal nature reserves but the scale of our responsibility for the natural history of England, Wales and Northern Ireland is unrivalled by any other organisation.

The conservation of nature, for the benefit of people, has been at the heart of the Trust's work, alongside the care of the historic environment, since it was founded over 100 years ago. One of its earliest acquisitions was part of a nationally important nature reserve at Wicken Fen. Many prestigious wildlife sites followed, including Cheddar Gorge (1910), Blakeney Point (1912) and the Farne Islands (1925). Acquisitions of major importance for nature conservation continue to this day with The Mournes (1991), Orford Ness (1993) and a large part of Snowdon (1999) being notable examples.

This booklet highlights the importance of the Trust's role as a nature conservation body and sets out our Nature Conservation Policy and a Nature Conservation Strategy. Together they identify priorities for action and a framework for the development of local nature conservation strategies in the context of Region/Country Business Plans and Property Management Plans.

1

The National Trust's responsibility for wildlife

- 1.1 The Trust's conservation responsibilities are very broad, spanning both the natural and historic environment. The protection of the 'natural aspect, features and animal and plant life' of our properties was embedded in the Trust's purpose from the original Articles of Association in 1895 and was subsequently enshrined in the 1907 National Trust Act.
- 1.2 Nature conservation is at the heart of what the Trust was set up to do. It is central to our purpose and is the source of inspiration and loyalty of many of our staff, volunteers and supporters. The acquisition of countless pieces of our most valued landscape over more than a century has brought with it a great wealth and diversity of wildlife.
- 1.3 **Chalk or limestone grasslands**, typically featuring rare orchids, up to 45 species of butterfly and often with 35 plant species per square metre, are a glory of the Trust's holdings in the southern counties of England and in the Pennines. Overall the Trust owns 12% of the UK's remaining chalk and limestone grassland.
- 1.4 On acid sands, the Trust's **lowland heaths**, ablaze with purple and gold in late summer, are home to all Britain's species of lizards and snakes, and a special assemblage of bees, wasps and dragonflies. Our holdings amount to 7% of the national total, with superb examples in Dorset, Pembrokeshire and the Weald.
- 1.5 The **heather moors** of Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Snowdonia, the Peak District and the Mountains of Mourne are perhaps the most extensive of prime habitats with nearly 19,000 ha in Trust ownership. A special feature of Britain and Ireland, they have a particular suite of breeding birds. Habitats on peat, including **blanket bogs, raised bogs** and a range of **swamps, fens and marshes**, are particularly special and fragile.

- 1.6 Important **freshwater habitats** include more than 40 lakes that are designated at the national level as Areas or Sites of Special Scientific Interest or at the international level as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. These include many of the Lake District's lakes and tarns, and many ponds, streams and rivers. Recent research shows that 40% of the land surface of England and Wales drains through a National Trust property. We often own the springs and headwaters of catchment areas – the most sensitive and vulnerable parts of river systems. Sections of slow-flowing rivers, down to their estuaries are also notable, from the Derwent in Cumbria, Conwy in Wales, Ouse in North Yorkshire, to the chalk rivers of the Test and Mole in the south, and the drowned valleys of the Fowey, Fal and Helford in Cornwall.
- 1.7 The extensive **coastline** owned by the Trust is an obvious wildlife haven, with more than 1,100 km in our care. The huge variety of exposed geological features – from the granite cliffs of Cornwall to the soft clays and shales of Yorkshire or the layered basalt and chalk of North Antrim to the flats and marshes of East Anglia – supports a multitude of specialist habitats and species. Maritime grasslands and heaths, sand dunes and salt marshes are abundantly represented and virtually all provide wildlife sites of international repute. The Trust owns properties along a quarter of the estuaries in England and Wales and has a quarter of the sites of **marine importance**, which include key habitats such as chalk reefs, exposed rock platforms, sand plains and kelp forests. The waters around Lundy Island are England's only Marine Nature Reserve.
- 1.8 The Trust cares for about a quarter of the nation's **historic parks**, so readily associated with great houses and cultural heritage. These parks are of immense importance for the fungi, lichens and insects associated with old trees and are increasingly recognised as ancient relict habitats of international importance.
- 1.9 Britain and Ireland hold some 80% of the **ancient trees** in northern Europe and the Trust has more on its properties than any other individual owner. It also has 30% of the top national sites for beetles associated with ancient trees and wood-pastures.

- 1.10 Of the Trust's 24,600 ha of woods more than 6,000 ha are **ancient semi-natural woodland**. Of this nearly half is Atlantic oakwood, noted for its rich lichen and bryophyte assemblages. In addition, the Trust has more than 3,000 ha of 'plantations on ancient woodland sites', many of which still retain some of the flora and fauna associated with the ancient semi-natural woodlands which they replaced.
- 1.11 The combination of the ancient trees and built structures in the Trust's care, together with the vast range of feeding sites on its land, makes the Trust the single most important landowner for the conservation of **bats**, another group of mammals declining across Europe. All seventeen British and Irish species, several of which are very rare, are found on Trust land. Bats are recognised as key indicators of a healthy environment and are subject to international conservation agreements.
- 1.12 Of all the rare or scarce species listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, many of which are in decline, nearly half occur on Trust land. These include ten endemic species (confined in the world to the UK), and sixteen which are globally threatened. The Trust has sites for most of the rare birds and nearly half of the rare plants. The Trust owns many of the **richest butterfly sites** in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including most of the remaining sites for five of the rarest. We are lead partner for key BAP species, such as Lundy Cabbage and Thatch Moss, and joint lead partner for the Wart-biter Bush Cricket. Many species oriented conservation projects are based on Trust sites.
- 1.13 Not only are many Trust properties of superb quality for nature conservation in their own right, but some have the added advantage of being very extensive and can include **entire river basins and catchments**. There are examples in the Lake District, North Wales, the Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District. Management for nature on this large, landscape scale is particularly important as many declines in UK wildlife in the last century can be attributed to the reduction and fragmentation of key habitats.
- 1.14 In addition to these wonderful specialist habitats, the Trust is one of the largest owners of **farmland** in the UK, with around 80% of our land farmed in some way. This includes long-term grasslands, arable fields, hedgerows, hedgerow trees, stone walls, ditches, ponds and other features of the '**wider countryside**'. Land used for agriculture has suffered some of the greatest losses of wildlife in the post-1950 period and declines continue despite encouraging changes in European and domestic government policy. Of all habitat types farmland has the greatest potential for improvement for wildlife.

- 1.15 Much of the Trust's land has been acquired for the quality of its landscape, the distinctive character of which is determined by the underlying **geology**. This is the foundation of our natural heritage and the vast array of landscape types within the Trust's ownership is an unparalleled holding of geological interest. Our properties include a range of spectacular **landforms**, ranging from limestone gorges to shingle spits and from wild rivers to glaciated lakes. Nearly half of the Trust's SSSIs and ASSIs are designated for earth science interest and more than 50 sites are important for fossils.
- 1.16 The Trust is at the forefront of developing understanding of the importance of **soils** as a vital resource. Soils have not yet been fully assessed for their nature conservation value, but they are undoubtedly a fundamental biological and physical component of most terrestrial ecosystems. It is certain that many of our sites with long-term habitat continuity or rarer rock types will include rare or valuable soils.

2

A Nature Conservation Policy for the National Trust

2.1 The National Trust's vision for nature conservation

Our natural heritage is fundamental to our life support system and a source of inspiration for many people. The Trust's vision is for a healthy environment supporting a rich diversity of wildlife to be valued and enjoyed by present and future generations.

2.2 Abundance and diversity of wildlife

2.2.1 The range and diversity of natural history in our care is huge.

2.2.2 We are the largest voluntary conservation organisation in Europe, both in terms of the historic environment and the amount of land held in trust for nature conservation. Almost 40% of the 250,000 ha we own is of national or international importance for nature including 10% of all the Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and nearly 18% of the National Nature Reserves in England. The Trust also has a significant stake in sites designated as being of European importance. Nearly a third of both the UK's Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas include Trust land.

2.2.3 The Trust's ecological interests range from the mountain tops of Snowdon, the Mourne and Scafell Pike to 1,130 km of coast and foreshore. They encompass many of the Priority Habitats and Species identified as being most at threat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

2.2.4 The Trust is the most important landowner for major species groups including bats, butterflies and fish. Recent surveys have shown that Trust land is often of national importance for fungi. Given our huge resource of wild plants, including many rare species, we are likely to make a significant contribution to a new and global project identifying Important Plant Areas.

Management principles:

- The Trust will strive for an abundance and diversity of species appropriate to local climate, geology and soils.
- The Trust will allow nature to take its course wherever possible and desirable and manage positively for this.
- Where a habitat is of intrinsic significant cultural and/or ecological importance the Trust will promote active management to maintain it as far as this is sustainable.

2.3 Natural heritage and cultural heritage

- 2.3.1 The natural history of the UK is very much a product of its cultural history. Our distinctive landscapes and the wildlife they support have been formed through thousands of years of interaction between people and the land; from farming to land reclamation or industry to field sports. Natural and cultural history are indivisible and this is demonstrated nowhere better than across the unique range of properties owned by the Trust.
- 2.3.2 Our historic parks, moors, downs, heaths, hedgerows and walls are cherished landscape features as well as key wildlife habitats. Through the emphasis on lifelong learning we are uniquely placed to manage natural and cultural heritage holistically and promote understanding of their interrelationship.
- 2.3.3 Nature conservation and archaeological interests are often closely related in that work for the benefit of one, such as the mechanical removal of scrub, can impact on the other. Similarly, management within designed landscapes will require an integrated approach in order to take proper account of the relative significance of natural and cultural heritage so as to identify optimum solutions for conservation overall.
- 2.3.4 The breadth of the Trust's conservation work enables us to understand the intimate relationship between nature and culture; to relate wildlife and history to distinctive landscapes and to recognise and explain 'vernacular' ecological interest as well as vernacular architecture. Just as cultural development has shaped the natural environment, so the natural environment has shaped our culture. Animals, plants, landscapes and wild places have had a profound influence on our art, literature, architecture, customs and traditions as reflected in the collections and archives in the Trust's care.

Management principles:

- The Trust will respect and promote the intimate relationship between natural and cultural heritage.
- In seeking optimum solutions for nature conservation we will take full account of the significance of associated cultural heritage.

2.4 A landscape approach

- 2.4.1 Nature is not confined to reserves or designated areas. Wildlife is an integral part of the world around us and it pervades all our activities, from farming, forestry and recreation to our gardens, buildings and monuments. It matters in both town and country.
- 2.4.2 The conservation importance of the 'wider countryside' is recognised in the Trust's Agriculture Policy of 2000 in which we made a commitment to improve environmental standards, including biodiversity, on our farmed land through our programme of whole farm planning.
- 2.4.3 In order to overcome the threats of fragmentation and isolation of wildlife habitats and the impacts of pollution and hydrological change, it is essential that the Trust thinks and operates on a landscape scale. The effective conservation of water resources, soils and a host of wetland habitats can only be achieved by working on a catchment or river basin level.
- 2.4.4 The extent of the Trust's land holdings means that it can often think and manage property on a landscape scale. Whether our ownership is large or small, however, we will always need to consider our Property Management Plans in the context of overall water catchments and the wider landscape. We will use our experience of large-scale land management to inform and develop our partnership working.

Management principle:

- We will plan and manage on a landscape scale to create a network of large high quality habitats, working in partnership with others as required.

2.5 Sustainable land management

- 2.5.1 Sustainability involves meeting current needs without destroying the very resources upon which we, and future generations, depend. It also requires us to consider properly the social, economic and environmental consequences of our actions and not to favour unduly any one of these interests at the expense of the others.
- 2.5.2 Resources can be seen as those that are fundamental to life itself – such as clean air, clean water and healthy soils – and those that are fundamental to the quality of life – such as the evidence of our past, the aesthetic and spiritual quality of landscapes or the opportunity to use open space for exercise and recreation. Biodiversity uniquely falls into both categories. It is a barometer of the health of the natural systems upon which we depend and it is a source of inspiration, discovery and wellbeing in its own right.
- 2.5.3 An understanding of all these resources, including their significance and vulnerability, is an essential requirement of sustainable land management.
- 2.5.4 The vast range of property types in the Trust's care, from rare and threatened habitats to urban green spaces and large tracts of working countryside, enables us to build wildlife thinking into a wide spectrum of land uses and circumstances. Our broad remit and long-term view, caring for places forever, allows us to put wildlife in the context of truly sustainable multi-functional land management and to demonstrate what this means in practice.

Management Principle

- The Trust will manage for wildlife in the context of sustainable land use, not as an isolated activity. We will seek optimum outcomes for nature as an integral part of all land uses.

2.6 The management of change

- 2.6.1 The Trust's long experience of managing for conservation in the real world has taught us to recognise the need to work with change.
- 2.6.2 We see conservation as the careful management of change – revealing and sharing the significance of places and ensuring that their special qualities are protected, enhanced and understood for the enjoyment of present and future generations.
- 2.6.3 The status and distribution of species has never been static. Human influences change as technology, economics or even attitudes evolve. Nature conservation is not therefore about maintaining a status quo but about managing the factors that cause change, as far as this can be done.
- 2.6.3 Nature conservation does help to identify what is special, what we value most and what realistically can be protected. It can also identify potential for the creation of new habitats and future opportunities for wildlife in the context of ongoing change.
- 2.6.5 Biological communities are the product of a range of processes and influences. Some systems, such as the maintenance of a flower-rich meadow, are highly dependent on human intervention, or cultural influence. Others, such as natural regeneration of woodland, can be non-interventionist and dominated by natural processes.
- 2.6.6 The Trust's objectives for the management of any particular site within a landscape will be determined by the relative significance of the cultural and natural processes and the value attached to the product of those processes.
- 2.6.7 We now know that there is a pattern over most of the UK of hotter drier summers, milder wetter winters, more storms with heavy rainfall, and higher sea levels and increased wave heights. These trends, which are projected to continue, will be punctuated by more extreme weather events affecting water tables and accentuate soil erosion. Sea level rise is progressively causing coastal squeeze, erosion of soft cliffs and inundation of salt marshes presenting new opportunities for habitat creation, particularly in association with changes in agriculture.
- 2.6.8 Climate change is already having an impact on the UK's wildlife. New species are colonising from the south, such as the little egret and the small red-eyed damselfly. Northern and montane species, such as wood cranesbill and mountain hare, are predicted to decline in the southern parts of their range.

- 2.6.9 Species will need to move geographically in response to climate change. Some will move easily, others will not. The breeding ranges and migration patterns of animals and birds and the flowering times of plants will alter.
- 2.6.10 The adoption of a landscape approach will enable habitats and systems to be managed at a scale that will be more robust, more flexible and better able to allow species and their habitats room to move and change.

Management Principle:

- The Trust will manage for the long term, in the context of predicted climate change and other environmental influences. We accept that some habitats and species will be lost, changed or replaced over time.

2.7 Nature and people

- 2.7.1 The Trust's purpose is about providing benefit to the nation as much as it is about the protection of nature itself. Nature is important to people. It provides a sense of place and a vital counterbalance to the pressures of modern living.
- 2.7.2 Many eminent naturalists and academics have observed that the concept of nature is deeply embedded within us. In the words of Jules Pretty, Professor of Environment and Society at the University of Essex: *'For all of our time we have shaped nature and it has shaped us and we are an emergent property of this relationship. An intimate connection to nature is both a basic right and a basic need.'*
- 2.7.3 In 1995 the Trust estimated that, each year, 50 million visits were made to its countryside properties and there are now thought to be many more. Access to the great outdoors as part of a healthy lifestyle is actively promoted by numerous organisations. Open spaces in the Trust's care are an important part of people's lives as well as being favourite holiday resorts or places of retreat. The attachment that people have for these places is often very strong and deeply felt, as highlighted by MORI polls. Some people want to connect more with wild places but aren't able to do so. This can be resolved as much by providing inspiring information and interpretation as it can by physical access itself.

- 2.7.4 Over the last 35 years the Trust has provided many opportunities for active involvement in environmental conservation, particularly through, working holidays and local school/NT partnerships called Guardianship schemes, as well as through having quality habitats that are accessible to naturalists. There is a healthy and growing interest in volunteering in wildlife and countryside work and the Trust needs to engage more with the naturalists, both amateur and professional, who use and value its properties.
- 2.7.5 This crucial relationship between people and nature is fundamental to our approach to nature conservation. Providing public benefit from the natural heritage is central to its purpose and the foundation for developing our future support base.

Management Principle:

- The Trust will seek opportunities for its wildlife to be a source of inspiration, enjoyment and learning for members, visitors, volunteers, enthusiasts and scholars. It will encourage people to become involved in its work.

2.8 Working with others

- 2.8.1 Achievement of our vision will depend upon robust ecosystems which are sufficiently resilient to adjust to natural processes and desirable land use change. We will work with our tenants and partners to create mosaics of habitats connected by wildlife-friendly countryside at the landscape scale.
- 2.8.2 The Trust can only achieve so much working within its own boundaries and will never fulfil its conservation purpose by working in isolation. There are many organisations, bodies, groups and individual landowners managing natural heritage and there is much to be gained by working together.
- 2.8.3 Cooperation with others will be essential in order to think, plan and act on a landscape or catchment scale. We can and must learn from our successes and failures, and from the experiences of others. This is the best way to improve both our understanding of the issues we face and the effectiveness of our nature conservation and land management work.

2.8.4 The Trust has a great deal of knowledge it can share with others. Its practical experience of land management provides an invaluable evidence base upon which to draw in order to influence public policy.

Management Principles:

- The Trust will seek to improve its contribution to nature conservation by constantly learning from what it does, and sharing knowledge and experience with others.
 - The Trust will use its experience to influence policy, including through working with partner organisations and public campaigns.
-

3

A Nature Conservation Strategy for the National Trust

3.1 Determining priorities

- 3.1.1 The scale of the Trust's responsibility for nature conservation is enormous and the demands on our resources potentially vast. These resources, however, are limited and spread across our buildings and collections as well as countryside and open spaces.
- 3.1.2 It is therefore essential that the Trust prioritises to ensure that resources are allocated effectively and that we concentrate our efforts on the issues and opportunities that will make the most difference.

3.2 The state of our wildlife

- 3.2.1 The 1992 Convention on Biodiversity and the UK Government's Biodiversity Action Plan in 1994 acknowledged that much of the wildlife of the UK (and the world) was in a perilous state.
- 3.2.2 Catastrophic declines in the quality and extent of many of our habitats and species have been well publicised. Habitat loss has been accompanied by (and in many cases has caused) a deterioration in the quality of natural resources such as soil, water and air.
- 3.2.3 Initiatives taken under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan have managed to halt some losses, but a number of Priority Habitats and Species continue to decline.
- 3.2.4 In 2003 English Nature published data on the condition of all SSSIs in England. Even though these represent some of the best protected wildlife sites in the country, nearly half have been found to be in unfavourable condition. At this time more than a quarter of the National Trust's SSSIs, covering about 8,000 ha and 130 separate units, were currently judged to be in unfavourable condition. By the end of 2007 17% were in unfavourable condition. This was – and remains – often due to factors beyond the Trust's immediate control, such as atmospheric pollution or the inappropriate grazing of commons. However, many other Trust SSSIs and ASSIs could easily slip into unfavourable condition if appropriate management is not maintained. English Nature and now Natural England has pledged to meet DEFRA's target to restore favourable condition for 95% of SSSIs by 2010. The Trust has a responsibility and a key role to play in helping to achieve this ambitious target.

- 3.2.5 The National Trust has not been immune from these losses. An understanding of the habitats and species on Trust land and its geology has been built up through the work of the Biological Survey Team over the last 29 years. This provides a unique record of the natural history of most Trust land, although many reports are now very old. Where repeat surveys have been possible they reveal changes over time which are not always favourable.
- 3.2.6 Loss of wildlife on farmland has generally been as acute on Trust land as on any other. A survey of 26 of the Trust's parklands in 1999 showed that the majority were in poor condition with over-enriched grasslands, polluted lakes, dying trees and excessive stock grazing or inappropriate agricultural management, including ploughing.
- 3.2.7 The Trust's success in protecting and recreating or restoring some key habitats shows that it is possible to reverse these trends. Major schemes for the recreation of chalk downland at Stonehenge and heathland in Purbeck are probably the largest of their kind in Europe and are prominent examples of many such initiatives on our land. The reduction of stocking of important upland areas, such as Snowdon and the High Peak, has demonstrated that improvements for wildlife can be made on a large scale.

3.3 Key factors in the decline of wildlife and environmental quality

- 3.3.1 Most of the losses and declines summarised above can be attributed to a number of key factors set out below. In order to protect the value of the Trust's nature conservation resource, and to compensate for, or reverse, some of the losses, these factors will have to be addressed and will shape our priorities for action.

a) Habitat Loss and Fragmentation

Many habitats that were far more extensive in the past have now been reduced to small isolated remnants through progressive habitat destruction and deterioration. This has largely been caused by development of buildings and infrastructure together with rapid changes in agriculture and forestry throughout the 20th century.

Habitats that have become fragmented not only tend to contain less interest in their own right but are far more vulnerable to damage and external impacts. It is becoming clear that many species need to function in clusters of populations at a landscape scale. Some native species, however, including some of the rarest and most threatened, have poor powers of dispersal and cannot cross 'hostile' land between isolated sites to colonise new areas. They depend on suitable corridors or stepping stones to be able to move between blocks of habitat.

b) Inappropriate Grazing

The maintenance of many desirable habitats depends upon grazing. The lack of grazing by suitable animals at appropriate levels is the cause of much habitat and species decline and the unfavourable condition of many SSSIs and ASSIs. Typically overgrazing in the uplands and the lack of suitable grazing regimes in lowland habitats have been problems. Grasslands, heathlands, fens, stable dunes, wood pastures and parklands all require appropriate grazing regimes to maintain their ecological interests.

c) Invasive species

Many valued species and habitats are threatened by the rapid spread of invasive plants and animals. These are often introduced species such as rhododendron, mink or signal crayfish, but can also include natives such as indigenous scrub which threatens more desirable heathland or downland habitats. Not all introduced species are invasive. Many are well established, such as sycamore and the rabbit, and some, such as grey squirrel, are beyond effective control. Climate change will undoubtedly alter the composition of some communities and non-natives may comprise an increasing proportion of their constituent species. It will be important to work in partnership with others to understand and minimise the impact of those non-native species which are invasive, especially those that profoundly alter the make-up of ecological communities and threaten ecosystem functioning.

d) Pollution

Air pollution has damaged large tracts of upland habitats, such as the Peak District moorlands. Whilst sulphur dioxide levels have declined since the Industrial Revolution, nitrogen-based pollution is now the main cause of acidification. There is increasing evidence that nitrogen deposition from the atmosphere is also damaging low-fertility habitats because of the increased nutrient input. The pollution of freshwater bodies, ground waters and estuaries is an even more widespread problem and is now largely attributable to enrichment from sewage, agricultural fertilisers and manures, pesticides and soil erosion.

3.4 Geology and earth science

- 3.4.1 Geological sites are generally in much better condition than habitats. The main threats are:
- changes to soft coasts (erosion and deposition) due to sea defences and marine dredging;
 - irresponsible collecting and extraction of fossils;
 - damage to cave features by farming activities;
 - modification and stabilisation of 'process' sites, such as rivers and landslips;
 - inappropriate educational / recreational activities, and
 - vegetation encroachment obscuring important features.

There is also a major need for information on earth science

- 3.4.2 Soils on the other hand are generally in poor condition due to the agricultural changes, pollution and changes in hydrology listed above.

3.5 The need to act – risks and opportunities

- 3.5.1 Ongoing declines in wildlife on Trust land highlight the dangers of complacency and put the Trust's credibility as an environmental organisation at risk. The Trust cares for a very significant proportion of the nation's natural heritage and it is important for us to highlight the key threats to this resource and, wherever possible, to be seen to be tackling them.
- 3.5.2 Over a long period, the Trust has invested heavily in nature conservation staff and skills and in the collection and interpretation of information on our natural heritage. Despite this, however, we have failed to capitalise on the key role we play in nature conservation in terms of developing our reputation, and support and shaping public policy.
- 3.5.3 Twenty-nine years of biological survey of Trust land has been invaluable, but in some aspects we still do not have the information required to proclaim our achievements and our concerns with confidence. Progress is being made in computerising biological records but many are based on surveys carried out ten to twenty years ago. We have hardly begun to survey our freshwater habitats (a crucial indicator of the health of an environment) although our Water Resources Risk Assessment highlights the vulnerability of each individual site. The Coastal Erosion and Flood Risk Assessment work draws attention to valuable habitats and built structures at risk, but with only a few exceptions we have not assessed the marine habitats in our care.

- 3.5.4 The Trust is still widely seen as an organisation principally concerned with historic buildings and so needs to ensure that equal and appropriate recognition is given to all aspects of its conservation work. In the last fifteen years there have been several initiatives to increase awareness of our countryside work. However, surveys, such as The Opinion Formers' Audit and MORI poll carried out for the Trust in 2001, have revealed that both partners and the public still perceive us as more about 'big houses' than the environment.
- 3.5.5 The Trust has been very successful at generating support through interest in the historic environment and this will remain a vital part of our work. However there are signs that this market is hardening and that growth will be increasingly difficult to maintain. Generating support for the Trust through its work in the natural environment, however, is far less developed. In the future, as indicated by the results of a recent members' survey, the greatest potential for growth is likely to lie in the increasing number of environmental enthusiasts and everyday users of our open spaces.
- 3.5.6 In an Organisational Review carried out in 2002 we recognised the importance of wildlife through the appointment of Nature Conservation Advisers in each of nine Trust English Regions, Wales and Northern Ireland. Introduction of other staff including Policy Officers, and from 2007 Regional Environmental Practices Advisers, now equips the Trust better than ever before to promote the environmental side of our work. Country or Regional Nature Conservation Strategies are now in place or being developed to set out particular responsibilities in each area, implemented through costed actions on the ground.
- 3.5.7 The primary Government initiative for habitat and species conservation, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, has established a framework for action. The Trust is already regarded as a major contributor to the UK BAP for several habitats and species such as woodlands, lowland and upland heaths, grasslands, bats and butterflies, and, more recently, orchards. However, it has had less involvement as yet in others such as wetlands and foreshore which are of major importance to the Trust. There is an emerging UK Geodiversity Action Plan and in England and Wales there are many Local GAPs. Northern Ireland is developing an Earth Science Conservation Review. All these have much relevance to the Trust.
- 3.5.8 Policy changes such as CAP reform and the Water Framework Directive should finally deliver new approaches for which the Trust has been calling for years. In England the integrated agency, Natural England, is overseeing rural delivery with purposes that are a close fit to the Trust's, creating good opportunities for partnership and influence.

3.5.9 These reforms represent the most profound shake up of land use policy since the Second World War. The Trust has enormous potential at local level to demonstrate how they can be used to make a real difference and an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate sustainable land management.

3.6 Key habitats, species and earth science features for the Trust

3.6.1 Virtually all terrestrial habitat types and species groups are represented on Trust land but there are some where the Trust has a particular responsibility because of the scale of its ownership or its ability to make a difference.

3.6.2 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats and Species have been assessed at a national level to determine the relative importance of the Trust's contribution using the following criteria:

- the scale and significance of the Trust's holding
- the degree of risk or vulnerability
- the opportunity or scope for improvement
- the potential to influence

3.6.3 Habitats and species for which the Trust has a particularly important role to play are listed below and a summary of key actions associated with each is set out in Appendices 1 and 2. No similar exercise has been applied to earth science features as yet, but those believed to be of particular importance to the Trust and the key actions needed are set out in Appendix 3.

Habitats:

Woodlands

Parklands and ancient trees

Coastal and marine habitats

Lowland heath

Upland heath and bog

Calcareous grassland

Freshwater habitats

Farmland

Orchards

Gardens

Species groups:

Bats

Butterflies

Insects associated with veteran trees

Fish

Fungi

3.7 Strategic Aims and Objectives

- 3.7.1 To provide a framework for Region/Country Nature Conservation Strategies the following strategic aims and objectives have been identified. Generic actions required to achieve each objective are summarised in Appendices 4 – 6.
- 3.7.2 The relative importance of individual objectives, habitat types and actions will vary locally and priorities will be determined through our Regional and Country Nature Conservation Strategies and, through them, Property Management Plans and Region / Country Business Plans. They in turn will be informed by *Our Strategy to 2010 and Beyond* as well as the Organisational (Delivery) Plan. Progress will be tracked through the Trust's Conservation Performance Indicator.

AIM 1: TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE WILDLIFE AND NATURAL RESOURCES IN OUR CARE

Objectives:

- 1a) understand the biological and geological resource in our care and its relationship with the wider landscape and environment
- 1b) improve the quality of UK BAP Priority Habitats and Species through appropriate management
- 1c) increase the extent of UK BAP Priority Habitats and mosaics to improve their ecological viability
- 1d) re-connect core habitats to facilitate the movement of plants and animals at the landscape scale
- 1e) monitor our performance and learn from our experience

Priority actions to achieve these objectives are set out in Appendix 4.

AIM 2: TO PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT OF NATURE AND ACHIEVE RECOGNITION FOR OUR KEY ROLE AS A NATURE CONSERVATION ORGANISATION

Objectives:

- 2a) increase the opportunity for access to and enjoyment of nature, including geology
- 2b) promote understanding and discovery of nature through implementation of our vision for learning
- 2c) increase opportunities for people through volunteering and participation in decision making about the management of our land
- 2d) promote our work as a nature conservation organisation to raise awareness and generate new membership and support
- 2e) develop our skills, knowledge and understanding of the management of nature and earth science through training and raising awareness of our staff and volunteer

Priority actions to achieve these objectives are set out in Appendix 5.

AIM 3: TO USE OUR EXPERIENCE TO INFLUENCE WIDER LAND MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

Objectives:

- 3a) develop working partnerships with key environmental organisations, corporate bodies and landowners
- 3b) share information about our experience of managing for nature and earth sciences
- 3c) actively use our land management experience to influence policy and decision makers
- 3d) campaign on key issues of importance for nature conservation
- 3e) use our key projects and sites to demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable land management

Priority actions to achieve these objectives are set out in Appendix 6.

Appendix 1 Key habitats: the National Trust's responsibilities

Habitat	Key actions by habitat
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Woodland

- remove conifers from ancient woodland sites and other inappropriate locations
- control and/or remove undesirable invasive species
- establish and maintain a diverse age and species structure with open glades and rides
- retain veteran trees and dead wood
- create new areas of native woodland

Parkland and ancient trees

- protect and care for veteran trees to extend their lifespan
- stop cultivating and using fertilisers and sprays in historic parks
- ensure the grazing regimes avoid poaching, trampling and damage to ancient trees
- retain dead wood wherever possible (subject to the comparative significance of historic designed landscapes)
- establish and manage trees to succeed veterans

Coastal and marine habitats

- sustain valued coastal habitats as far as practicable, accepting that they will develop or adapt in response to coastal and climate change.
- use Coastal Erosion and Flood Risk Assessments to determine risks and opportunities for key habitats
- identify suitable sites inland to create new habitats to replace those lost to coastal change e.g. reedbeds and grazing marshes
- adopt flexible management solutions which can enable, or adapt to, the processes of coastal change
- survey and assess foreshore habitats adjacent to Trust coast and review impacts of land management which impact on them
- actively engage in Coastal Zone planning and other initiatives to ensure marine wildlife is conserved

Lowland Heath

- remove / control undesirable invasive species
- introduce/maintain grazing by suitable animals at appropriate levels wherever possible
- exploit opportunities for expansion / restoration of heathland
- maintain or restore appropriate hydrology for wet heath and mires

Upland heath and bog

- prevent or alleviate overgrazing of upland heaths
- protect peat lands from drainage, burning and overgrazing
- establish and maintain a diverse mosaic of moorland plant species where appropriate
- allow scrub and woodland to establish in appropriate locations
- remove conifer plantations from moorland areas and replace with native broadleaves or moorland restoration
- manage bracken stands to diversify the habitat

Calcareous grassland

- establish and maintain suitable grazing regimes
- control scrub and invasive species
- create new calcareous grassland from suitable land currently under cultivation or intensive grazing

Freshwater habitats

- prevent nutrient run off and pollution of water courses, lakes, ponds and groundwater
- prevent soil erosion and siltation
- maintain adequate flows in rivers and streams
- restore natural dynamics of rivers and wetlands, and natural bankside vegetation
- promote floodplain enhancement and catchment management
- survey and assess freshwaters

Farmland

- protect and enhance BAP priority farmland habitats and species
- prevent nutrient run off and pollution of water courses
- protect soils and improve soil management
- use farmland to extend areas of key habitats where appropriate
- create wildlife networks to link key habitat areas
- protect ancient trees and hedgerow trees on farmland

Orchards

- complete NT audit of orchards
- contribute to developing the HAP and promote and publicise it
- protect and enhance existing orchards, including protecting trees and unimproved grasslands
- restore and replant damaged sites and create new orchards
- realise the social and economic benefits of orchards

Gardens

- expand survey of wildlife in gardens
- analyse and disseminate information
- produce leaflets, guided walks etc to promote wildlife in gardens

Appendix 2

Key Species: the National Trust's Responsibilities

Species groups

Key actions by species group

Bats

- ensure suitable measures are in place to protect roosts in buildings
- identify and maintain tree roosts through retention of ancient trees, retention of standing deadwood and varied age structure of woodlands
- identify and enhance prime feeding areas
- maintain and create mature hedges and other features to link roosting and feeding sites

Butterflies

- manage important butterfly sites sympathetically
- increase the extent and quality of habitats important for butterflies
- create migratory routes to facilitate butterfly colonisation across landscapes
- use butterflies as a barometer of nature conservation success
- continue to promote the conservation of our rarest butterflies by habitat management and re-introduction

Insects associated with veteran trees

- continue a programme of specialist surveys and monitoring of known and potentially important sites
- promote importance and value of decaying and dead wood, standing and fallen, especially where it is lacking, notably certain designed landscapes, farmland and orchards
- explore ways of publicising the value of this fauna (which is seldom visible) with the public
- identify networks of veteran trees in the wider countryside which should be conserved and expanded

Fish

- Promote the importance of the Trust's rivers, estuaries and larger lakes for native fish communities
- Promote the particular needs of migratory fish 'from source to sea'
- Continue to implement the Trust's *Management of Freshwater Fisheries* and review all fishing leases accordingly
- restore overstocked coarse fisheries and carp ponds
- carry out fish surveys

Fungi

- promote importance of fungal conservation and of NT for fungi
- emphasise importance of fungi in soil health, fertility, recycling, carbon storage, etc.
- commission specialist survey especially of grasslands for fungi
- ensure habitat requirements are understood especially where they conflict with requirements for plants

Appendix 3

Key Earth Science features: the National Trust's Responsibilities

Habitat

Key actions

Fossils, rocks and minerals

- Work with local geologists and RIGGS groups to resolve key issues and conflicts
- Promote responsible collecting and recording in line with Trust policy and local codes of conduct

Coastal landforms and processes

- Allow natural erosion, deposition and flooding wherever possible in line with the Trust's Coastal Policy
- Engage with Shoreline Management Planning to promote the Trusts policies and address issues such as offshore dredging

Caves and karst

- Ensure farming activities (especially slurries and fertilisers) do not damage these features; include information in Whole Farm Plans and notify tenants

Landslips and mass movement sites

- Discourage stabilisation, seeking professional geological advice

Soils

- Continue to acquire and use detailed soil maps of properties where available and identify important sites for soils
- Use soil attributes as part of the land capability assessments especially when deciding on farming systems and cropping on farms
- Promote NT soils policy and include in educational materials

Natural Rivers

- Restore rivers and allow natural functioning of floodplains

Stratigraphical features, rock exposures

- Keep exposures open as far as practical
- Actively promote and provide opportunities for interpretation, recreation and education

Appendix 4 Strategic Framework for Action – Protect and enhance nature

AIM	OBJECTIVES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>To protect and enhance biodiversity and natural resources</p>	<p>understand the biological and geological resource in our care and its relationship with the wider landscape and environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish/update baseline information for key habitats and species and geological features on NT sites, and continue survey and assessment • Encourage and facilitate research on and around Trust land relating to issues of conservation importance • Map all key habitats, record on GIS and use this to make better use of the data we hold
	<p>improve the quality of priority habitats and earth science features through appropriate management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure key habitats in Trust care are in, or moving towards, favourable condition especially in designated areas • Ensure clear, landscape-scale nature conservation objectives are established for key properties and are embodied in region/country strategies, management plans and whole farm plans as appropriate • Address issues facing priority habitats and species groups (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3)
	<p>increase the extent of priority habitats and mosaics to improve their ecological viability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify priority habitats for enlargement • Identify opportunities for habitat creation or restoration through change of land use or reversion from agriculture • Consider acquisition of suitable sites to extend areas under sympathetic management
	<p>reconnect core habitats to facilitate the movement of plants and animals within landscapes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify landscapes that will benefit from greater connectivity • Work in partnership with others to plan strategic wildlife networks • Use Whole Farm Plans and management of open spaces to identify opportunities to use set-aside, field margins, hedgerows, watercourses, scrub, woodland and other features to facilitate the movement of wildlife
	<p>monitor our performance and learn from our experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up selected species recording systems at key sites • Carry out condition assessments of selected sites every five years • Use Conservation Performance Indicator to assess effectiveness of management for nature conservation • Learn from our mistakes • Improve planning and prioritisation of nature conservation work

Appendix 5 Strategic Framework for Action – Promote understanding and enjoyment

AIM	OBJECTIVES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>To promote understanding and enjoyment of nature and achieve recognition of our key role as a nature conservation organisation</p>	<p>increase the opportunity for access to and enjoyment of nature, including geology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to provide and promote access to key habitats and sites • Manage access positively and demonstrate how conflicts can be avoided or ameliorated • Develop maps and guides on where to go • Take advantage of opportunities presented by new open access land under CROW Act
	<p>promote understanding and discovery of nature through implementation of our vision for learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a series of leaflets and publications • Produce mobile exhibitions to deliver key nature conservation messages at events, meetings and talks • Continue to develop links with schools and formal education programmes and produce information and resource packs to support • Develop the new NT website to raise the prominence of our nature conservation work • Continue local walks and talks programmes • Hold a Wildlife Open Day in each region/country each year
	<p>increase opportunities for people through volunteering and participation in decision making about the management of our land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinvigorate countryside volunteering programme and Acorn Camps • Increase opportunity for voluntary biological recording • Build links with local groups and communities • Consult locally about significance and management proposals and decisions • Encourage local groups, schools or communities to adopt-a-site
	<p>develop our skills, knowledge and understanding of the management of nature and earth science through training and raising awareness of our staff and volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise profile of nature conservation work amongst staff and volunteers using intranet and existing internal media • Develop induction opportunities/material for new staff • Continue to provide nature conservation training opportunities for non-specialist staff • Develop the use and distribution of the Nature Conservation Newsletter
	<p>promote our work as a nature conservation organisation to raise awareness and generate new membership and support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and target new audiences with environmental interests for recruitment • Develop material to support recruitment of 'environmental members' • Identify new members with a nature conservation interest for 'after joining' care and information • Refine and develop nature conservation and environmental messages to support fundraising and appeals • Produce publications on major habitats, species and earth science features in our care

Appendix 6 Strategic Framework for Action – Influence wider land management policy and practice

AIM	OBJECTIVES	POTENTIAL ACTIONS
<p>To use our experience to influence wider land management policy and practice</p>	<p>develop working partnerships with key environmental organisations and landowners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Trust management plans in the context of whole catchments and identify 'upstream' and 'downstream' issues for partnership working • Work in partnership with others to plan strategic wildlife networks • Hold events to involve opinion-formers • Host working seminars • Establish key relationships with Natural England • Work with UK BAP and GAP groups and key partners - Wildlife & Countryside Link, Butterfly Conservation etc • Work more closely with Environment Agency on River Basin Plans, Abstraction Plans, Fishery Plans etc. • Contribute to DEFRA's Major Landowners Group for SSSI condition • Continue leading role in Grazing Animals Project
	<p>share information about our experience of managing for nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information and work with other organisations to determine the significance of the Trust's land in the context of the wider landscape • Annual review of biodiversity achievement • Provide web-based information about our work
	<p>use our key projects and sites to demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable land management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region/Country workshops • Develop and publish case studies • Produce publications on best practice • Promote research
	<p>campaign on key issues of importance for nature conservation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g. farming, food, flood and coastal defence, uplands, land use planning, education, access • Media days • Use butterflies and other key groups as a barometer of the health of our environment
	<p>actively use our land management experience to influence policy and decision makers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce re-building biodiversity roadmap • Respond to major consultations • Attend government stakeholder groups • 'Policy from Practice' briefings

