

TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

DEFINITION

Orchards have long been an important part of north Devon's agriculture, landscape and culture. In the past, virtually every farm in northern Devon had its orchard(s). Traditional orchards tend to be of good wildlife value and of great beauty. They are very much a man-made habitat and are much valued by the public.

Traditional orchards are defined as orchards managed in a low intensity way, containing a variety of species and varieties including any or all of apples, pears and cherries. The trees are grown on a standard rootstock and the management of both trees and grassland does not depend upon the use of chemicals.

Mazzard orchards are a traditional cherry variety grown in the Landkey area on land called Mazzard Greens and they are one of the orchard types of particular interest in north Devon.

DISTRIBUTION

Historic maps show a good record of the extent of orchards in the past. Orchards that have been in existence for many years are frequently the most interesting sites. But it is thought that 90% of Devon's traditional orchards were lost during the last century, though in the recent past there has been an increasing interest in managing existing orchards, harvesting and using crops and replanting traditional varieties of orchard trees.

A survey of all orchards across the country is currently being carried out by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species. Forty one counties, including Devon, have been completed so far. 416 traditional orchards were recorded in the Survey which were within the Biosphere Reserve but of these only 249 were classified as definitely or probably Traditional Orchard priority habitat. These two classifications add up to 126 Ha of Traditional Orchard in the Biosphere Reserve with an average size of 0.5 Ha.

LOCATIONS

Main locations: Landkey to Chittlehampton
Witheridge area

Traditional Orchards



Main Community/Demonstration Orchards: Landkey Millennium Green (Mazzards)
Rosemoor Garden
Hele Orchard, near Ilfracombe
Yarde Community Orchard
Hatherleigh Community Orchard (Holme Farm, Hatherleigh)
Venn

CHARACTERISTIC WILDLIFE

Traditional orchards are particularly attractive to a wide variety of wildlife including rare, endangered and BAP species. Old orchards frequently have a good percentage of standing and fallen dead and decaying wood. This is valuable for hole nesting and insectivorous birds, roosting bats and deadwood invertebrates.

Fruit blossom form an important nectar source for bumble bees butterflies and other insects. Fallen fruit is a very important food source for birds, mammals and insects. The bark of older trees can provide a very good substrate for lichen species.

Plants: primrose, yellow rattle, devils bit scabious
Mammals: bats including greater and lesser horseshoe
Birds: mistle thrush, redwing, fieldfare, great and lesser spotted woodpecker, bullfinch

THREATS

There are many threats to this habitat. In the past many orchards were grubbed up when they became uneconomic for the farm business and the surrounding hedges were removed to include the land within adjacent fields. Some orchards rather than being grubbed up were merely neglected and the trees were allowed to fall down and not be replaced. The wood pasture concept of raising a timber crop on land retained in livestock production is no longer popular and many previously managed sites are threatened by neglect. Changes in agricultural practices have led to a cessation of traditional grazing practices and intensification of management, including high fertiliser use, ploughing and reseeding and in some cases a conversion to arable land.

Some traditional orchards have been converted to modern bush varieties of trees. This type of orchard is short lived and is of limited wildlife value compared with a traditional orchard.

Loss of traditional grafting techniques has meant that some varieties of apples have not been propagated locally and have therefore been lost.

SITE STATUS

Dunsland Park SSSI contains a Traditional Orchard. There are 17 traditional orchards included within County Wildlife Sites in the Biosphere Reserve.

CURRENT ACTION

Traditional Orchards can receive payments through the Higher Level Scheme Agri-Environment Scheme (HLS), funded by Natural England, but the scheme is competitive and resources focussed on where NE perceive the benefits will be greatest so not all traditional orchard owners will be offered agreements. Applications are currently received by invitation only from NE. . There is no size threshold for orchards within HLS.

Orchards Live are a north Devon based group aiming to save traditional orchards and apple varieties through encouraging replanting standard orchards, running training courses, promoting the use of local fruit and gathering information on orchards and apples and associated activities. They have been both active and successful at getting across their messages and have a quarterly newsletter for members.

The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species has carried out a survey of traditional orchards across the country. The survey used volunteers and aimed to locate and map traditional orchards in order to maintain and preserve this unique and special habitat, whilst encouraging the more traditional methods of orchard management and raising the profile of locally grown fruits.

On, or near, October 21st every year, Apple Day events are held as an annual celebration of apple, orchards and local distinctiveness. Initiated by Common Ground in 1990, it has since been celebrated each year by people organising hundreds of local events.



of

LINKS TO OTHER BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

	UK BAP	SW BAP	Devon BAP	Exmoor BAP
Habitat Action Plans	Traditional Orchards Lowland Wood Pasture and Veteran Trees Ancient and/or Species Rich Hedges Lowland Meadows	Wood Pasture & Parkland Ancient and/or Species Rich Hedges	Lowland Wood Pasture & Parkland Ancient and/or Species Rich Hedgerows	Parkland, wood pastures & veteran trees Neutral Grassland Un-improved Grassland
Species Action Plans	Bullfinch		Primrose Brown Hare	

OBJECTIVES

- 1 To maintain the current extent, distribution and quality of traditional orchards in the Biosphere Reserve.
- 2 To target resources for restoration at traditional orchards most under threat and at historic orchard sites.
- 3 To increase the extent of traditional orchards through new planting.
- 4 To raise awareness of the value of traditional orchards for wildlife
- 5 To increase awareness, understanding and value of traditional orchards, their products and their cultural history.

	ACTION	TARGET	LEAD DELIVERER	PARTNERS	Obj. No.
A	Policy and Legislation				
1	Ensure that planning policies protect orchard sites from development	No net loss to development	NDC,TDC		1
2	Ensure that planning authorities have full list of current orchards	Current distribution details circulated	PTES	NDC,TDC	1
B	Site Safeguard and Management				
1	Develop a traditional orchard grant scheme including maintenance and restoration for sites that do not fit into HLS	Grant Scheme set up and run	NDABS	Orchards Live, FWAG	1,2,3
2	Seek funding to purchase an apple harvester or loan to north Devon orchard owners	Harvester purchased	Orchards Live		1,3
3	Encourage marketing of locally produced apples through orchard co-operatives and other mechanisms to assist marketing produce.	Co-ordinated scheme run	Orchards Live	NDABS, NE	1,5
3 4	Compare the criteria for County Wildlife Site designation with other counties to see if they are similar	CWS Criteria evaluated	DBRC		4
C	Advisory				
1	Encourage uptake of relevant ES options	5 Orchards in ES	NE	FWAG, NDABS	1,2,3
2	Set up demonstration orchard with a variety of tree guards	Demonstration site set up	Orchards Live	NDABS	1,3

D Research and Monitoring					
1	Identify orchards most at risk	GIS layer produced	PTES	Orchards Live, FWAG	3
2	Establish a database of people who are seeking extra apples	Database produced	Orchards Live	NDABS, FWAG	5
3	Investigate techniques for the re-introduction of mistletoe to Biosphere Reserve orchards	Trials carried out	NDABS	Orchards Live, NE	4,5
E Communication and Publicity					
1	Organise awareness raising events in areas of high concentrations of orchards	2 events organised	NDABS	Orchards Live, FWAG	3,4,5
2	Publish photos of Devon apple varieties on the internet	Photos on the web	Orchards Live		5
3	Establish a list of orchards with public access	List established	NDABS	Orchards Live, FWAG	5

