

[Detailed guide: How to benefit species and habitats biodiversity in your woodland](#)

Updated: Removed confusing link. Post launch additional content required.

The conservation of biodiversity is an essential part of sustainable forest management. Forests cover nearly one-third of the world's total land area and are vital in ensuring environmental functions such as climate regulation and soil conservation in addition to biodiversity. They provide habitats for a large array of plants and animals, some of which are rare or threatened. Through these important ecosystem services, biologically diverse forests and woodlands contribute to the sustainability of the wider landscape.

[Read the UK Forestry Standard \(UKFS\), the reference standard for sustainable forest management across the UK.](#)

Support priority habitats and priority species

Many habitats that are important for biodiversity in the UK have been reduced in area and fragmented and, while they are generally protected, are in need of restoration and expansion. Priority habitats have the potential to provide the richest and most varied components of biological diversity within the UK. All types of native woodlands, as well as wood pasture and parkland, are woodland priority habitats.

Priority species are those that are declining, rare, at risk of extinction, and/or have special requirements. A high proportion of priority species are associated with semi-natural woodland.

Conserve ancient and native woodland

Woods that are both ancient and semi-natural in character have the greatest value for biodiversity. Known as ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) these are still widespread although fragmented. They serve as valuable refuges of woodland biodiversity, particularly for sedentary species that, once lost, do not readily recolonise. ASNWs also frequently retain characteristics of previous management such as coppice and other traces of cultural history.

Sites that were once ancient woodland but have been converted to planted forests are known as plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS). Many PAWS retain at least some characteristics or remnants of native woodland, which give them the potential to be restored to native woodland, contributing to policy objectives for native woodland restoration.

Good practice

Read the guide [Managing ancient and native woodland in England](#), which brings together all of the current good practice in one document. The guidance looks to the future, advising how to help woodlands adapt to climate change and the challenges it brings, and includes information on, for example, harvesting woodfuel from native woodland in ways that will enhance biodiversity and heritage.

The handbook [Managing Native Broadleaved Woodland](#), produced by Forest Research, gives more detail and underpinning evidence for the value of an ancient and native woodland. It complements the UK Forestry Standard. You can buy it at a cost of £30.

Find out if your woodland is good for wildlife

Assessing the ecological condition of native woodland will help you to get an overview of the condition of your woodland's habitats and identify any issues you may need to address to help support habitats and species. A simple straightforward assessment has been developed and tested by members of the England Woodland Biodiversity Group, including Forestry Commission, Natural England, and The Woodland Trust, which enables owners to assess woodland condition in a standardised way.

To complete an assessment, you need to do a walking survey through your woodland and use a form to record features along your route, then compare your results to a standard set of condition thresholds. You can use the completed assessment to support the development of your woodland management plan and improve the long-term resilience of your woodland.

To allow native flora and fauna to recover from damage caused by non-native species, you should manage your woodlands to counter threats from invasive plant and animal species like deer, grey squirrel and rhododendron.

[Find out more about how you can manage threats to your woodland.](#)

The rules about forest operations and land use change

You must consider wildlife species and habitats when you're creating woodland or managing woodland to comply with regulations. These include the European protected species (EPS) listed in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

For both priority species and priority habitats the timing and equipment to be used for certain forest operations can be damaging. Use the UK Forestry Standard, European protected species good practice guidance and knowledge from your woodland survey to help plan these operations proportionately, and for an appropriate time of year.

If you're proposing a land-use change you must take into account the relative merits of existing habitats, and the potential impact of change on priority

habitats and species, both on the site and on adjacent land. So you'll need to ask for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to determine if effects due to afforestation or deforestation are likely to be significant. [Find out more about EIAs.](#)

Where there's likely to be a significant impact you'll need to get EIA consent. If you plan to [convert woodland to open habitats](#) you must also have [felling permission](#) to permanently remove woodland.

Find out what you must do to [protect woodland wildlife and habitats](#) and how you must apply for wildlife licences so you can legally operate in woodlands and forests.

Read the [operations note on the principles you must apply if you're considering planting trees on or near priority habitats](#) and guidance for [afforestation proposed on or near nationally important upland breeding wader areas.](#)

(PDF, 266KB, 4 pages)

Creating new forests and woodlands

Increasing woodland creation in England is in line with our aspiration of 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by end of 2042. We want to increase the long-term supply of English-grown timber, given strong current and projected demand.

We will increase tree planting by creating new forests and native woodlands, and incentivising extra planting on private and the least productive agricultural land, where appropriate.

Trees and forests provide a unique blend of social, economic and environmental benefits. However it's important to make sure that the right trees – in terms of biosecurity, value for money, air quality impact and biodiversity among other criteria – are planted in the right places, in line with the UK Forestry Standard.

Contact the Forestry Commission, England

You can [contact the Forest Commission, England](#). The Forestry Commission area offices assist with:

- grants
- licences
- advice for woodland owners and managers
- pests and diseases

Forest Research

The research agency of the Forestry Commission offers a range of services that will [help with pest and disease control](#) and also offer resources such as

[publications, statistics and datasets.](#)