

Detailed guide: Report suspected illegal tree felling

Before anyone can cut down trees, they may need to get a felling licence from the Forestry Commission. In some circumstances, exceptions or other permissions may apply. Illegal tree felling is described as 'unlicensed'.

If you suspect an illegal felling incident that you'd like to report to the Forestry Commission, you can contact your [local Area office](#).

You can choose to make your report of an alleged illegal felling anonymously if you prefer.

Before you report

Before you let us know about the tree felling, note that some tree felling does not require a felling licence from the Forestry Commission. For example:

- felling trees in gardens, churchyards or a public open space where the public have a legal right of access for recreation
- felling trees to prevent the spread of a quarantine pest or disease
- felling trees with a diameter less than the width of baked bean can (8cm) at a height of 1.3m on the main stem

Up to 5 cubic metres of timber (approximately 5 metric tonnes) may be felled per calendar quarter without a felling licence.

For more information on exemptions, see the guide on [when to apply for a tree felling licence](#).

What could happen if a tree is cut down without a licence

If no felling licence or other valid permission is in place, or if the wrong trees are cut down:

- all parties involved can be prosecuted
- the Forestry Commission can serve a Restocking Notice to re-stock the land concerned, or any other land as may be agreed, regardless of whether or not a prosecution takes place
- the owner or tenant must maintain the replacement trees to acceptable standards for up to 10 years

If someone fells trees without a licence, and they get an annual agri-environment scheme payment on their land, they might be penalised financially. Any failure to comply with the licensing controls is a breach under the Cross Compliance rules (GAEC 7a).

If anyone tries to sell illegally felled timber, they might be committing an offence under the Timber and Timber Products (Placing on the Market) Regulations 2013. A breach of these regulations means that the illegally felled timber can be seized by an authorised inspector. Anyone convicted of an offence under these regulations could get an unlimited fine and/or term of imprisonment.

If the restocking requirements of either a felling licence or a restocking notice are not complied with, the Forestry Commission may issue an Enforcement Notice requiring action be taken to meet the conditions previously set. It's an offence not to comply with an Enforcement Notice and a fine may be imposed.

[Detailed guide: Manage and protect woodland wildlife](#)

You must comply with regulations protecting wildlife species and habitats when you're managing woodland and planning forestry operations. These include the European protected species (EPS) listed in the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#) and the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#).

It's an offence to:

- deliberately capture, injure, kill or cause significant disturbance to a protected species
- deliberately destroy the eggs of a protected species
- damage or destroy protected species' breeding sites or resting places (such as a bat roost in a tree or a dormouse nest on the woodland floor)

You must carry out planned operations carefully, making the necessary checks, and you may need a wildlife license in certain circumstances. If you follow good practice you should be able to carry out most activities without the need for a licence – but to do so you may just have to modify or reschedule some of your management proposals or practices.

Penalties

You can get an unlimited fine and up to 6 months in prison if you don't have a wildlife management licence when carrying out an activity that have an impact on protected species.

Who to contact

Although Natural England are the statutory body for wildlife licensing, the [Forestry Commission local area teams](#) offer support to woodland managers and owners who may need to [apply for a wildlife licence from the Natural England licensing unit](#). The Forestry Commission will carry out an initial assessment to help with processing of wildlife licence applications and give applicants a single point of contact. Natural England will make the final decision on wildlife licences and will issue them through the Forestry Commission.

Read more about

[how to comply with habitats regulations](#)

(PDF, 1.18MB, 19 pages)

– including decision-making and woodland planning processes that help to effectively manage protected species in woodlands.

Protected species checklists

Use this

[European protected species and woodland operations checklist](#)

(PDF, 135KB, 1 page)

when you begin to plan what work you want to do and how it might affect protected species. The completed checklist will help provide some evidence that you have considered protected wildlife if your operations are later challenged, but you must also research what species records are available, survey your woodland for evidence of species presence and manage your woodland according.

Operational site assessments

You can also complete an operational site assessment (OSA), using the [site feature checklist](#)

(PDF, 23.5KB, 1 page)

This is a simple checklist to use when planning forest operations – eg harvesting or civil engineering work. Use the OSA to consider any aspect of the work that could cause a problem, including to:

- wildlife on or close to the site
- people directly involved in the operation
- third parties such as members of the public, neighbours etc
- the landowner who is legally responsible for operations that occur on the site

Read Forestry Commission

[guidance on OSA and protected species](#)

(PDF, 64.2KB, 2 pages)

You can download species-specific advice from the Forestry Commission on how

to check your woodland for protected species and how you should operate in their presence:

- [all 17 species of bats](#)
(PDF, 311KB, 12 pages)
- [dormouse](#)
(PDF, 79.5KB, 9 pages)
- [great crested newt](#)
(PDF, 171KB, 10 pages)
- [otter](#)
(PDF, 89.7KB, 10 pages)
- [sand lizard and smooth snake](#)
(PDF, 80.3KB, 9 pages)

Read the [Forestry Commission field guide on European protected species](#)
(PDF, 5.64MB, 96 pages)

Badgers

It's an offence to kill, injure or take badgers. It's also an offence to interfere with their setts. If you're in doubt over whether you might damage or disturb badgers or if damage or disturbance would be unavoidable, you should [apply for a wildlife licence](#)

Red squirrels

Red squirrels and their drays are protected by law. Find out more about the [legal protection of the red squirrel](#).

Plants

You should also consider plants in your woodland that might be protected by law. See the list of [plants protected by law and how they are protected](#).

Note: woodland managers should follow the good practice found in the [UK Forestry Standard](#).

Biodiversity

Find out more about [managing your woodland to benefit species and habitats biodiversity](#).

Apply for a wildlife licence

Find out when you need [to apply, the type of licence you need and how to complete the application](#). This guide provides a full list of licensing information for:

- badgers
- bats
- bumblebees – non-native species
- deer
- dormice
- freshwater fish
- great crested newts
- invertebrates
- mink, coypu, muskrat and grey squirrel
- natterjack toads
- otters
- plants
- reptiles
- water voles
- white-clawed crayfish
- wild birds

Wild plant licences

Find out how to apply for a [licence to cover activities affecting wild plants](#)

Tree felling

You should be able to undertake felling operations without a wildlife licence even in the presence of EPS, providing you follow the associated good practice rules and make proportionate decisions on how to deliver your work proposals

You may need a wildlife licence if felling operations could adversely affect any protected species on your site, for example, when you need to fell trees that host protected species because of a tree pest or disease. Find out more about tree-felling and applying for felling licences.

Contact the Forestry Commission

You can email england-protectedspecies@forestry.gsi.gov.uk or get in touch with a woodland officer in your local area office for advice on protected species and support to apply for licences.

Find your [Forestry Commission's Area Office and Administrative Hub contact details including, address, telephone number and email address.](#)

Detailed guide: Sites of special scientific interest on or near woodland

Sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) are protected by law to conserve their wildlife or geology. The Forestry Commission or [Natural England](#) can help identify woodland you own or occupy as an SSSI – this is called being designated.

Find out [what you can do on or near an SSSI](#) and when you need consent for an activity. The Forestry Commission in consultation with Natural England can help you manage your woodland.

You don't need formal consent for work next to an SSSI but Natural England may choose to advise on precautions you may need to consider so that your work doesn't harm the SSSI.

How the Forestry Commission can help

The Forestry Commission will obtain consent from Natural England on your behalf when we process your application for grant aid or a felling licence. This means that when we send the grant agreement or felling licence to you we'll also send Natural England's consent, which may list additional conditions. Prior to carrying out any work on an SSSI it remains your responsibility to check that you have the relevant consents from Natural England.

Find out about applying for a felling licence

Find out more about applying for grants and funding in the overview guidance on creating woodland.

What you need to do

Complete a supplementary notice of operations for work on an SSSI and send this with your grant or licence application. If you don't send this form to us, you'll have to get consent from Natural England independently.

Download the SSSI supplementary notice of operations to complete and return with your application to the Forestry Commission.

In this form you'll answer a series of questions related to woodland management operations and what the impacts will be in order to carry out tree felling on a SSSI.

You must give full and clear details about the specific nature of the proposed operations, how you propose to carry out and manage them and where and when within the SSSI they would take place. This information allows Natural England to check that you won't harm the SSSI's special wildlife so they can decide whether to give consent.

To process your application as quickly as possible, we may contact you to arrange a joint site visit with a Natural England advisor.

Contact the Forestry Commission

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

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

[Detailed guide: Manage threats to woodland: destructive animals, invasive species](#)

This guide summarises the threats to woodlands from issues such as:

- browsing by deer and wild boar
- damage from grey squirrels
- invasion by non-native species, including plants

Read guidance on how to [manage woodlands to benefit biodiversity](#).

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), it's illegal to release most invasive species – including non-native deer and grey squirrel – into the wild, even when the plant or animal was originally taken from the wild.

Deer and wild boar

All species of deer are increasing in number and expanding their range in England and Wales. Wild boar are also expanding their range in England and in

the longer term may be expected to establish in areas of high woodland cover over larger areas of England. Although deer and wild boar have value – aesthetically, culturally, as a sporting quarry and for their meat – they can also have negative impacts.

Populations which become too great can lead to:

- damage to trees, hedges and fences, to woodland flora and non-woodland habitats
- increasing traffic accident numbers
- poor health within localised populations
- winter starvation

Advice on dealing with deer and wild boar

The [Deer Initiative \(DI\)](#) is a broad partnership comprising statutory agencies, nature conservation and animal welfare non-governmental organisations, Government, landowners and a range of other interests, who share a vision for a healthy and sustainable future for deer in England and Wales. They offer advice on deer and wild boar life cycles and their management, including help to source grant funding.

Read

[managing deer for woodland biodiversity](#)

(PDF, 171KB, 2 pages)

for further information on the impacts that deer have on plants and animals and the options you have in dealing with them.

Grey squirrels

The grey squirrel was introduced to the UK from North America in 1876 and its population has grown rapidly since then with detriment to our native red squirrel. Grey squirrels damage our forests and woodlands by stripping bark from trees' main trunks (at the base and up in the canopy) and branches. When they strip a complete ring of bark around the tree, it will kill the tree.

The Forestry Commission is committed to helping you manage the impacts of grey squirrels in your woodlands by:

- providing support through Countryside Stewardship (see below) for you to control grey squirrels where they're a threat to management plan objectives – including conservation of red squirrels
- supporting the UK Squirrel Accord partnership (see below), including its work to develop fertility control for the grey squirrel
- taking action on its land holding (public forest estate) – see the [grey squirrels policy and action plan](#) (PDF, 161KB, 5 pages)

for more information

- updating guidance on controlling grey squirrel damage to woodlands

Advice on dealing with the grey squirrel

Find more [information and advice from Squirrel Accord](#) – the partnership of 32 leading woodland, timber industry and conservation organisations was created following policy development discussions and formally launched by HRH Prince Charles in 2014. They aim to bring a concerted and coordinated approach to securing the future of red squirrels and woodlands, and to control the introduced grey squirrel.

You can also find out more about the [management of grey squirrels](#) from Forest Research.

Other invasive species

In 2015, the EU Alien Invasive Species regulations came into force including a list of 49 'Invasive Alien Species' of EU concern for which the UK must take action to eradicate if found here unless the population is already well established. See the [full list of Invasive Alien species](#).

In the UK the Invasive Non-native Species Strategy has been developed to give a strategic framework within which the actions of government departments, their related bodies and key stakeholders can be better co-ordinated. This should help you meet the challenge posed by invasive non-native species.

Invasive plant species of particular concern in woodland

Invasive non-native plants that may cause problems in the UK include:

- Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)
- Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)
- rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*)
- giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)

The first 3 are a threat to native flora and habitats, as they are aggressive and form dense stands that exclude other plants. Giant hogweed is less aggressive to other plants, but is poisonous and can cause severe skin reactions.

Find out how to [prevent the harmful spread of invasive plants](#). See detailed advice on preventing the spread of [Japanese knotweed](#) and [managing and controlling rhododendron](#) (PDF, 1.57MB, 44 pages)

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Invasive animal and insect species

Invasive non-native species include:

- grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – they outcompete red squirrels and damage young trees – see above
- American mink (*Mustela vison*) – they threaten birds and mammals

inhabiting river systems (which may be present in your woodland)

- Muntjac and Sika deer (*Muntiacus reevesi* and *Cervus nippon*) – becoming more abundant and widespread and cause damage to tree and shrub shoots – see above
- Citrus longhorn beetle, *Anoplophora chinensis*

Advice on dealing with non-native species

The [GB Non Natives Invasive Species \(GB NNISS\) secretariat](#) offer online tools and information including species risk assessments, species fact sheets and species management advice.

Countryside Stewardship: woodland improvement

For grants find out about the eligibility and requirements for the [woodland improvement option of Countryside Stewardship](#) which offers incentives to control deer, grey squirrels and non-native species including the [control of rhododendron](#).

Find out more about grants and funding to create and manage woodlands in the [create woodland: overview guide](#).

[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 water 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](#).