Home to the finest variety of wildlife in England

Facts, figures and trends

- The Yorkshire Dales National Park – with the North Pennines National Landscape – contains the most coherent and connected ecological network left in England[1].
- The National Park contains 23 nationally important habitats and almost 400 nationally-important species of wildlife.
- There are over 85,000 hectares of national priority habitats in the National Park. The dominant habitats are blanket bog (48,000 hectares); grass moorland (21,000 ha) and upland heath (20,000 ha)[2].
- The National Park contains:
  - 69% of England's upland calcareous grassland;
  - 72% of its limestone pavement;
  - 38% of its upland hay meadows; and
  - 20% of its blanket bog (deep peat).
- Over 57,000 hectares (26%) of the National Park is designated as nationally or internationally important for wildlife[2]. 96% of these Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in 'favourable' or 'recovering' condition. However, only 29% have actually reached 'favourable' condition (no change since 2003).
- There are 1,604 ha of ancient semi-natural woodland (0.73% of the National Park)[3].
- Around 4% is covered by woodland, of which around a quarter is commercial conifer plantation[4]. Almost 3,000 ha of native broadleaved woodland has been planted since1995[5]. Most of the woodland areas are small, and fragmented.
- 61% of the woodland is being actively managed, down from 65% in 2019[6].
- Of the 61 Priority Species for which trend data is available, 46 (75%) were either stable or increasing, a fall from 81% in 2016[7].
- Around 95% of the land in the National Park is in private ownership. Most of the internationally-important habitat (blanket bog and upland heath) is managed as grouse moor, and the other habitats are largely dependent on upland farming practices.
- Helping nature to recover by creating, restoring and connecting important habitats is the number one priority for the public.[8]
- In 2023 there were 15 hen harrier nesting attempts across the area – the highest number in recent years. However, there were also six confirmed persecution incidents recorded in the Yorkshire Dales National Park[9]. 2023 saw the first breeding pair of ospreys in Yorkshire for hundreds of years.

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1 Spatial analysis of Green Infrastructure in Europe, European Environment Agency (2014)
2 Extent of priority habitat and other habitats within Protected Landscapes, Natural England (2024)
3 Natural England (2017) – excludes plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS), 660 ha.
4 Forestry Commission (2022)
5 YDNPA (2022).
6 Forestry Commission (2023)
7 2020 Trends and Status Review, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2022)
8 Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan 2025-2030 - Consultation on Priorities: Summary of consultation results (2024)
9 Yorkshire Dales National Park and Nidderdale Birds of Prey Evidence Report 2022/23 (2024)

- 51% of rivers (up from 47% in 2016) are rated as in 'high or good' ecological status under the Water Framework Directive. The national average is 14%[10]. Reducing pollution in rivers is the third most important priority for the public[8].
- 17% of waterbodies (1 out of 6) are rated as in 'high or good' ecological status – unchanged from 2017[10].
- Ash Dieback was found in the National Park in 2014. It is estimated the 75% of all Ash will be lost across the UK with only 5% having some sort of tolerance to the disease.

Issues and opportunities

Climate change

- Uncertainty over the impacts of climate change, include:
    - changes in distribution and balance of species (both flora and fauna) due to rising year-round temperatures: species emigration (uphill or north) or extinction at certain sites (e.g. arctic juniper, red grouse); species immigration from south (e.g. comma butterfly);
    - increasing threat from non-native species, pests and diseases, notably ash die-back and phytophthora:
    - in drier summers increased biological respiration and lower dissolved oxygen content in streams will affect river species (e.g. white-clawed crayfish, aquatic mosses, stoneflies).

Species

- The National Park is bucking the national trend of decline in relation to some key species (red squirrel, curlew, dormouse) – but overall nature is still in decline.
- Tackling the general decline in pollinating insects – to protect their role in pollinating wild flowers in hay meadows and calcareous grasslands.
- How can the importance of conserving breeding waders such as curlew be sensibly balanced with multiple other ecological priorities, like the need to plant more trees?
- Numbers of nesting Hen Harriers have increased since the introduction of brood management but illegal killing continues. What more needs to be done to end this blight?
- The National Park is one of the last refuges in England for Curlew and other breeding waders, partly because of the widespread loss of habitat elsewhere, and partly due to extensive predator control associated with grouse moor management. How can the importance of conserving these species here be sensibly balanced with multiple other ecological priorities, like the need to plant more trees?
- Maintaining populations of some key bird species (Black Grouse, Red Grouse, Curlew) is likely to remain dependent upon the actions of grouse moor managers. How can public bodies help support delivery of wider biodiversity benefits in a way that is financially sustainable?

[10] Environment Agency (2024)

- Given that eradication of most invasive species (grey squirrel, Himalayan balsam, mink etc) may prove practically impossible, where should resources best be targeted?
- Is a changing climate creating opportunities to welcome new species and habitats that would add to the diversity of wildlife?

Land Management

- Developing new national and local systems of support for upland farming that can deliver improvements to both the environment and economic viability.
- How can local farmers and land managers be helped to access green finance opportunities?
- Landscape-scale nature recovery projects have recently started in several locations – Ingleborough; the Orton Fells; Wensleydale; and Upper Wharefedale. How much of the National Park should be managed with wildlife as the priority?

Habitat improvements

- The area of woodland that is being well-managed is falling. Most of the woodlands that are not in good condition have been damaged by grazing livestock, rabbits, deer or a combination of these.
- There is increasing emphasis on creating larger and more species-diverse habitat networks to build resilience to climate change. How can this best be achieved as part of creating more resilient farming systems?
- How to stop damage to the ecologically-valuable road verges in the National Park from being cut too often and at the wrong time of year, without compromising road safety?
- How could a long-term programme to incorporate more urgently-needed native woodland be funded and delivered across a sensitive, and often open, landscape?
- Is there anything meaningful that can be done locally to mitigate the impact of ash dieback?
- How to enhance more semi-improved grasslands so that they begin to approach the high quality meadows in their value for wildlife?
- What would be a realistic target for getting SSSIs into favourable condition, especially the blanket bog habitats that are crucial to both wildlife and climate mitigation objectives?
- Better information is needed on the condition of habitats, and the scope for achieving ‘good condition’ in the light of a changing climate.
- The Government has made clear that Protected Landscapes will be critical to achieving national targets for wildlife and climate. This will need to be reflected in Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the targeting of the national agri-environment schemes.
- Recent increases in the rates of support for environmental improvements through the Sustainable Farming Incentive & Countryside Stewardship Scheme, together with an increase in the number of actions available will offer farmers many more opportunities in the Environmental Land management offer, including moorland management, scrub creation and species rich grassland restoration and creation.

- The value of wood pasture – for farming, wildlife and carbon sequestration - has been overlooked. How can the creation of wood pasture be encouraged?
- What more needs to be done to tackle the largest sources of river pollution: soil erosion, nitrates and phosphates from farming; historical lead mine workings; and, local sewage works?

Policy Context

Some of the key international, national, regional and local strategies that provide important context for updating the Management Plan include:

- **European Water Framework Directive** – provides a legislative framework for improving the ecological value of the water environment, including fresh surface water and groundwater. Particularly aims to deal with diffuse pollution issues.
- **A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, Defra (2018),** set out the Government's 10 goals for improving the environment, within a generation. It details a series of policies to achieve those goals, and how government will work with communities and businesses to do this.
- **Environmental Improvement Plan 2023**, Defra - revises and updates the 25 Year Environment Plan. Includes a detailed delivery plan with policy actions allocated to different government departments, local government, and the private and third sector.
- **Delivering 30 by 30 on land in England, Defra (2023)** - sets out the Government's approach to protecting 30% of the UK's land by 2030.
- **Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain 2023 – 2028, Defra et al** – sets out a vision for the next 5 years of plant biosecurity in Great Britain, and a range of actions to protect Great Britain's plants .
- **Yorkshire Dales National Park Nature Recovery Plan**, Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum (2023) – sets out aspirations and objectives for action between now and 2040, aiming to conserve and enhance the biodiversity within the National Park.
- **Yorkshire Dales Local Plan (YDNPA 2016)** - sets out policies for development that will continue to safeguard the 'special qualities', including important wildlife, that make the National Park distinctive.
- **Catchment Management Plans** – set out collaborative responses to the water management issues that face the environment and people across each river catchment (see e.g. **Revitalising Eden: The Eden Catchment Plan).**
- **Delivery Plan for National Parks for wildlife and nature recovery**, National Parks England – sets out how National Park Authorities will deliver 20% of the government's nature recovery target on 10% of the land - 330,000 tonnes of CO2 per year.
- **National Parks for sustainable farming and land management**, National Parks England – in our parks, sustainable farming and land management systems deliver a wide range of public goods, and farmers receive a sustainable and realistic income.