Home to the finest variety of wildlife in England

Facts, figures and trends

- The National Park contains 17 nationally-important habitats and well over 100 nationally-important species of wildlife[1].
- There are 83,000 hectares of national Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats in the National Park. The dominant habitats are blanket bog (47,000 hectares; 17% of the England total); and upland heath (20,000 hectares)[2].
- Although they cover a smaller area, the National Park has very significant amounts of other nationally-important habitats: 31% of England's limestone pavement; 26% of England's upland hay meadows; and, 58% of upland calcareous grassland in England.
- Over 57,000 hectares (26%) of the National Park is designated as nationally or internationally important for wildlife[2]. Over 98% of these sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) are in 'favourable' or 'recovering' condition, compared to just 76% in 2006. However, only 30% have actually reached 'favourable' condition (no change since 2003).
- Of the 59 nationally-important species for which trend data is available, 48 (81%) have populations that are stable or increasing[3].
- Around 95% of 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 dependent on upland farming practices.
- There has been only one successful breeding pair of Hen Harriers in the National Park since 2007. Populations of other important raptor species (e.g. Peregrine and Goshawk) remain much lower than might be expected.
- 47% of sampled rivers and 17% of waterbodies are rated as in 'high or good' ecological status under the Water Framework Directive (up from 42% and 0% respectively in 2010).[4]
- The amount of ancient semi-natural woodland is 1,604ha or 0.73% of the National Park[5].

Policy Context

***A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*, Defra (2018),** sets out what the Government intends to do to improve the environment, within a generation.

***Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services*, Defra (2011)** – sets out the Government's strategic direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade on land and at sea. The latest Biodiversity Indicators connected to this Strategy were released in December 2015.

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1 As identified in the *UK Biodiversity Action Plan*
2 Natural England (2018)
3 *2016 Trends and Status Review,* Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2017)
4 Environment Agency (2016). Figures relate only to the former National Park area
5 Natural England (2017) – excludes plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS), 660 ha.

***Nature in the Dales: 2020 Vision*, Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum (2011)** – the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for the National Park.

***8-Point Plan for England's National Parks*, Defra (2016)** sets out the Government's ambitions to create thriving natural environments in National Parks.

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.

***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.

***National Pollinator Strategy*: for bees and other pollinators in England, Defra (2015)** – The Government strategy "to protect pollinating insects which support our food production and the diversity of our environment" 2014 – 2024.

Protecting Plant Health: A Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain, Defra (2014) – Overview of the activity that Defra and the devolved administrations are undertaking to improve plant biosecurity.

***Technical Paper*: *The metric for the biodiversity off-setting pilot in England*, Natural England (2012)** - Biodiversity offsets are conservation activities that are designed to give biodiversity benefits to compensate for losses - ensuring that when a development damages nature (and this damage cannot be avoided or mitigated) new nature sites will be created. Where appropriate, biodiversity offsetting is an option available to developers to fulfil their obligations under the planning system's mitigation hierarchy.

***Conservation 21: Natural England's conservation strategy for the 21st Century*, Natural England (2016)** - How Natural England will work to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and the ecosystem services they provide.

Issues

- The National Park is bucking the national trend of decline in relation to several key species (red squirrel, curlew, dormouse). How can these notable successes be extended to a wider range of important species?
- Over 100 species were added to the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) in 2012, and it is impractical to attempt to measure trends for every one. Government policy has moved away from BAPs with multiple 'Species Action Plans' towards landscape-scale initiatives focusing on improving ecological networks and ecosystem functioning. A review is needed of the Priority Species included in the Dales BAP.
- There have been no successful breeding attempts by Hen Harriers in the National Park since 2007, and incidents of persecution of birds of prey continue. Setting aside any action at a national level (e.g. licensing system for grouse shooting), what could be done locally to make a tangible improvement in the number and variety of birds of prey?
- Uncertainty over the impacts of climate change, including:

- 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).

- Many of the Park's most important habitats are the result of generations of management of the land through farming. With Brexit looming, what opportunities are there to develop new systems of support for upland farming that can deliver improvements to both the environment and economic viability?

- What role can other local businesses play in helping to conserve and enhance the special wildlife of the National Park, and how can the value of this wildlife be better used to support local businesses?
- The 'Parish Wildlife' Project has engaged 42 groups of local people and volunteers directly in wildlife conservation activity. What realistic scope is there to expand this approach any further – given that 95% of the land is privately-owned?
- Game management has an important role to play in preserving upland biodiversity, as well as delivering other environmental benefits. With the majority of the Park's moorland privately owned, maintaining upland heathland and blanket bog and populations of key bird species (Black Grouse, Red Grouse, upland waders etc) is likely to remain dependent upon the ability and motivation of landowners. How can grouse moor managers and public bodies work together to deliver wider biodiversity benefits in a way that is financially sustainable?
- The vast majority of the woodlands that are not in good condition have been damaged by grazing livestock, rabbits, deer or a combination of these. A programme of stock-proofing of woodlands combined with rabbit and deer control would bring the majority of woodlands in the National Park into good condition. How could this be achieved?
- There is increasing emphasis on habitat networks to build resilience. Opportunities to strengthen the networks in the Dales have already been mapped. How can these opportunities be turned into action on the ground, and how can their impact be meaningfully measured?
- River water quality is amongst the best in England but still relatively poor. What more could be done to tackle the largest sources of pollution: soil erosion; nitrates/phosphates from agriculture; and, historical lead mine workings?
- The National Park holds some of the most comprehensive and detailed wildlife data in the country. Is that data being used effectively? Beyond collecting similar data for the new area of the National Park, what further information would be valuable?
- Ecologically-valuable road verges in the National Park are regularly damaged by being cut at the wrong time of year.

- There is scope to incorporate significantly more native woodland into the generally open landscape character of the Park, but how could it be funded and delivered? Is there anything meaningful that can be done locally to mitigate the impact of ash dieback?
- What is the scope for enhancing more semi-improved grasslands so that they begin to approach the high quality meadows in their value for wildlife? What methods of enhancement work most effectively and how can these be disseminated more widely?
- There has been no overall improvement in the condition of SSSIs in the National Park since 2003, even though almost all sites are in a positive management agreement. In part, this reflects the preponderance of blanket bog habitats, which will take many years to restore. What would be a realistic target now for getting SSSIs into favourable condition?
- The number of pollinating insects are in general decline. While there is little demand for insects to pollinate commercially grown crops in the National Park, it would unwise to overlook the wider value of pollinating insects. For example, their role in pollinating wild flowers in the hay meadows or calcareous grasslands throughout the National Park.