

Date: 30 March 2021

Report: SUPPORTING NATURE RECOVERY IN THE DALES

### **Purpose of the report**

1. To brief Members on the state of priority habitats and status of populations of key species in the National Park; and, seek Member support for the preparation of a new 'Nature Recovery Plan'.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

2. It is recommended that the Authority:
  - a. notes the initial summary of progress in relation to nature recovery in the National Park;
  - b. and, in partnership with the Biodiversity Forum and Farming and Land Management Forum, prepares a new 'Nature Recovery Plan' for the Yorkshire Dales by 31 March 2022.

### **Strategic Planning Framework**

3. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework, and in particular:

***National Park Management Plan 2019-2024***

"By 2040 the Yorkshire Dales National Park will be home to the finest variety of wildlife in England".

### **Background**

4. The Yorkshire Dales National Park contains the finest limestone scenery in the UK supporting a multitude of rare and special wildflowers, mosses and lichens. The 'typical' dales pattern of heather-clad hillsides, marshy in-by land and farmed valleys with hay meadows, drystone walls and barns is not only a cultural landscape of the highest importance, it is also rich in biodiversity. The fells and moorland fringes support internationally important upland bird populations & provide a vital carbon sink. In total, the National Park contains 17 nationally-important habitats, covering 83,000 hectares – the most of any English National

Park. 57,000 ha (over 25% of the National Park) is designated as nationally or internationally important for wildlife – again, the most of any English National Park.

5. The Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum co-ordinates nature conservation activities within the National Park, and it provides expert advice to the National Park Authority. The current membership of the Forum is given in **Annex A**. In 2011, the Forum published the second Biodiversity Action Plan for the Yorkshire Dales National Park, entitled '*Nature in the Dales: 2020 Vision*'. It set two hugely ambitious objectives:
  - To get 95% of the area of priority habitats in the Yorkshire Dales National Park into “good” condition by 2020;
  - To get 95% of the populations of priority species in the Yorkshire Dales National Park into a stable or increasing condition by 2020.
6. From the outset, it was agreed that the Forum would review progress every 3-4 years. After previous reviews in 2013 and 2016, the final such ‘Trends and Status’ report is due this year.
7. There is now a growing national recognition of the value of nature and the fact that we are facing a global biodiversity crisis. The Government’s [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commits the UK to achieving “*a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife*”. More specifically, it advocates the development of a national ‘Nature Recovery Network’ (NRN) “*to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside*”. The NRN will come about through linking the best existing wildlife sites, creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network, focusing on priority habitats “*as part of a wider set of land management changes providing extensive benefits*”.
8. In relation to wildlife in National Parks, the Landscapes Review (Glover) concluded that whilst “we have retained places of great natural beauty, sometimes alive with wild species – which the policies and staff of our national landscapes have been instrumental in – what can be agreed is that what we currently have is not good enough.” The review proposed that “National landscapes should have a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature”; and that National landscapes “should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries.”

### **Trends and Status Review 2020**

9. The intention is that a full detailed draft will go to the Biodiversity Forum next month, and the final Report published in July. Work is well advanced and some interim results can be reported now. **Annex B** provides a summary of the state of the Priority Habitats that occur within the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
10. Some 96% of the area of Priority Habitat in Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) is in ‘good condition’. However, it should be noted that only 29% has yet reached Natural England’s definition of ‘favourable’ condition. The rest is categorised as ‘recovering’ (i.e. in active conservation management that should lead

to its restoration). A very substantial area of blanket bog is in this 'unfavourable – recovering' category and this is a major factor skewing the overall figures.

11. The condition of Priority Habitat outside of SSSIs gives some cause for concern. Again, the overall figures are skewed by the predominance of blanket bog habitat (of which only 13% is in good condition) but the area of Priority Habitat other than blanket bog assessed as being in good condition was 29% at the end of 2020.
12. With respect to rivers, however, there is a much more positive story. The Environment Agency recently reported that the proportion of rivers that are in good ecological status has increased significantly – from 47% in 2017 to 62% in 2020. To put this figure into context, the average figure for England in 2020 was just 14%.
13. Final data on individual species is still being collated. In 2016 80% of the 59 'monitorable' species were present in populations that were either stable or increasing. It is likely that the final 2020 figure will be very similar.
14. Over the last 10 years, there have been hugely positive stories for some species, for example curlew, red squirrel and dormouse. However, some other iconic or scarce species (such as yellow wagtail, juniper and yellow marsh saxifrage) are faring less well. While the Yorkshire Dales has seen declines in the abundance and range of some key species, these reductions have generally been less pronounced than in the rest of the UK. In some instances, YDNP has bucked the national trends by maintaining stable distributions and even increasing numbers. A case in point are the wading bird species that have suffered catastrophic declines elsewhere in the country but which maintain strongholds in the Dales - such as curlew, lapwing, redshank and snipe.

## **A NEW NATURE RECOVERY VISION FOR THE DALES?**

15. As the Authority's initial submission to the Glover Review said, there is an opportunity to deliver a step change in what the nation can expect of its Designated Areas in terms of wildlife. More than any other places in the country, National Parks should be bigger and better places for nature. The quality of biodiversity and wildlife should be exemplary.
16. The vast majority of land in this National Park is owned and managed by individuals, with <5% owned by public agencies and charities. The Authority owns and manages less than 0.001% of the land. NPAs have few powers to manage, or resources to influence, decision-making and activity on the ground. However, there are signs that this is changing.
17. Collectively, the national parks in England have produced a 'Delivery Plan for Wildlife in National Parks (**Annex C**)', setting out how – with the right investment – National Parks could help deliver the Government's targets for nature recovery. Work is nearing completion on a more detailed 'prospectus' for each National Park. For the Yorkshire Dales, this will show how the strong partnerships that already exist could restore and create almost 30,000 ha of priority habitats over the next 10 years with

the right funding, helping to create connections within and beyond the Park's boundary.

18. There is already a range of exciting local partnership initiatives underway or planned:

- a. [‘Tees-Swale: naturally-connected’](#) – the largest farming/nature recovery project in England was formally launched this month. With funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and local partners, it will restore/create over 4,000 ha of habitats across Swaledale and Upper Teesdale.
- b. **‘Dale-by-Dale’** - with funding from Natural England, the Authority has been working with farmers and landowners in 4 dales (Garsdale, Kingsdale, Littondale, and Raydale) to look at opportunities for nature recovery.
- c. [The Great North Bog](#) – an ambitious, grand-scale peatland restoration initiative being developed by the North Pennines AONB Partnership, the Yorkshire Peat Partnership and the Moors for the Future Partnership. It is a landscape approach to restoration across nearly 7,000 square kilometres of upland peat in the Protected Landscapes of northern England
- d. **Dales Woodland Restoration** – the members of the Dales Woodland Forum recently committed to creating 6,000 ha of native woodland over next 10 years. We are in advanced discussions with the Woodland Trust, White Rose Forest and other funders about starting to turn that ambition into reality.
- e. [Re-cover](#) – in December the Authority launched this new interactive habitat map, which is designed to help farmers and landowners identify opportunities to protect, expand and connect habitats such as flower-rich hay meadows, wetlands and ancient woodlands.

19. The Environment Bill currently making its way through Parliament contains proposed legislation to make it a legal duty upon County and Unitary authorities to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). There are five Defra LNRS Pilots in England that have been underway since October 2020, including one covering Cumbria, in which the Authority is involved. The pilot is led by Cumbria County Council with support from Natural England, and involves representatives from each of the five National Landscapes in Cumbria. By the end of this month there will be mapping showing existing habitats and opportunities to enlarge these, improve their condition and strengthen links between habitats. It is intended that these strategies will identify local priorities for Biodiversity Net Gain and the new ELM agri-environment scheme.

20. From a purely national park perspective, the development of County level strategies presents some challenges because there will be 3 LNRSs covering different parts of the National Park. Nonetheless, it will be important to be engaged in the development of the LNRSs over the next 2-3 years because of the influence they will have on the ELM scheme – the single most important mechanism for driving nature recovery (and the viability of upland farming).

21. In order to maintain momentum, it is recommended that a new ‘Nature Recovery Plan’ for the Yorkshire Dales should be prepared by March 2022. This would:

- a. Provide the means to influence the eventual LNRSs;

- b. Set out local partners' shared long term ambitions for nature recovery; and,
- c. Provide the framework for coordinating local action to put the Yorkshire Dales National Park at the heart of the national Nature Recovery Network

22. For all the reasons outlined in this report, it is essential that this Plan be developed with local partners, and with farmers and landowners. It is proposed, therefore that:

- a. through the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership, a single, coherent, 'high-level' set of priorities and objectives for nature recovery be developed to cover Nidderdale, North Pennines, Forest of Bowland AONBs and the Yorkshire Dales and Northumberland National Parks; and,
- b. this be supported by a more detailed nature recovery plan specifically for the National Park, which should be prepared by the Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum with the involvement of the Yorkshire Dales Farming and Land Management Forum.

## **Conclusion**

23. The Yorkshire Dales remains important for many species of animals and plants that have suffered significant declines elsewhere, notably for the populations of upland birds that inhabit the high moors and in-by land on the moorland fringes. However, it is widely recognised that this is no longer enough. The local partners have committed to making the Yorkshire Dales home to the finest variety of wildlife in England. Clearly, this will be dependent on significant new investment but the opportunities represented by the Glover Review, the 25 Year Environment Plan, the ELM scheme, and the launch of the national Nature Recovery Network, mean there is reason to be optimistic.

Tony Serjeant  
Senior Wildlife Conservation Officer

14 March 2021.

## ANNEX A: Members of Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum as at March 2021

<b><i>Representative</i></b>	<b><i>Organisation</i></b>
Catherine Mercer	Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust
Chris Alder	Upper Wharfedale Field Society
Chris Jones	RSPB
Deborah Millward	Yoredale Natural History Society
Fran Graham	National Trust
Gordon Haycock	Wharfedale Naturalists
Graham Jackson-Pitt	Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Graham Standring	Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
Ian McPherson	YDNPA Member Champion Natural Environment
Jack Hirst	Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust
Prof. Jonathan Grey	Wild Trout Trust
John Lamb	Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Kathryn Lillistone	Environment Agency
Matthew Snelling	Yorkshire Peat Partnership
Peter Welsh (Chair)	Independent
Pippa Merricks	Natural England

The Area (ha) and Condition of Priority Habitats in the Yorkshire Dales National Park 2020 – INTERIM RESULTS AS AT 11/03/21

Habitat	Within SSSIs			Outside SSSIs			Total		Change since 2016
	Area	In good condition		Area	In good condition		Area	% in good condition	
		Area	%		Area	%			
Blanket Bog (Upland Bog)	21,458	20,459	95%	8,324	1,043	13%	29,782	72%	↓
Calaminarian Grassland	49	49	100%	48	45	94%	97	97%	↑
Calcareous Grassland (Lowland)	43	43	100%	87	54	62%	130	75%	↓
Calcareous Grassland (Upland)	6,001	5,854	98%	1,021	439	43%	7,022	90%	↑
Upland Hay Meadow	741	730	99%	443	128	29%	1,184	73%	↑
Inland Rock, Scree & Limestone Pavement	4,263	3,835	90%	388	128	33%	4,651	93%	↑
Lowland Flushes, Fens & Swamps	863	798	93%	22	16	73%	885	92%	↓
Lowland Meadows	1	1	100%	300	116	39%	301	39%	↓
Native woodland	1,375	1,301	95%	488	72	15%	1,863	74%	↓
Lowland Raised Bog	72	72	100%	0	-	-	72	100%	No change
Rivers <sup>1</sup>	0	0	n/a	1,128	697	62%	1,128	62%	↑
Upland Flushes, Fens & Swamps	414	386	93%	1,210	60	5%	1,624	28%	↓
Upland heathland	15,759	15,272	97%	856	344	40%	16,615	94%	No change

<sup>1</sup> Length measured in km. Taken from the Environment Agency's Water Framework Directive Classification Status Cycle 2 data (updated 29 September 2020).

## Delivery Plan for Wildlife in National Parks

This document is one of a suite of 4 inter-connected plans devised by the ten English National Park Authorities to drive action in nature recovery in response to the 25 year Environment Plan.



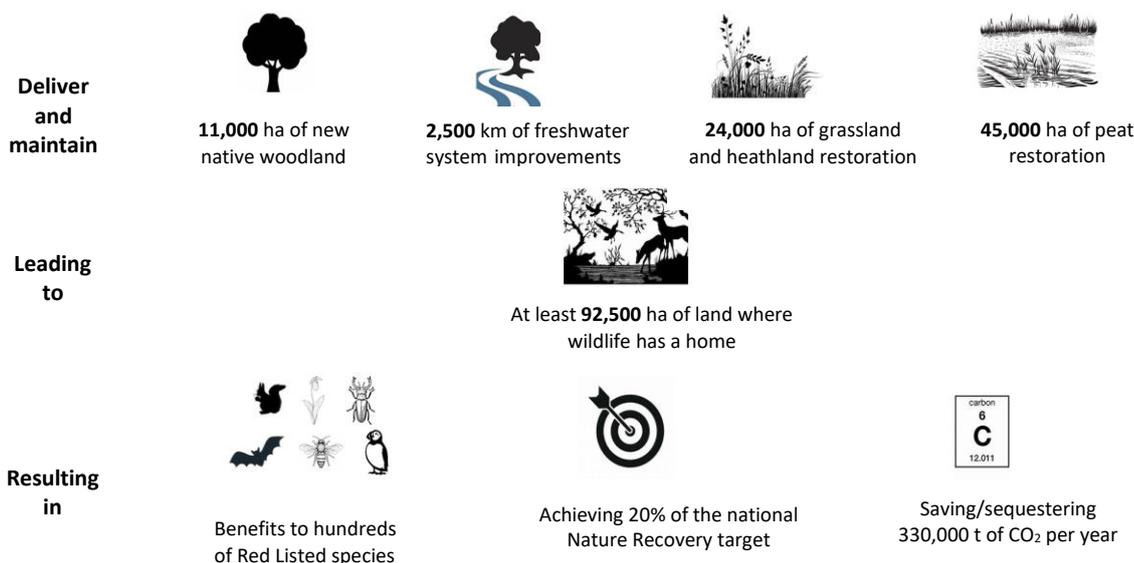
**Nature Recovery vision** - *National Parks sit at the heart of the nation's nature recovery network; we are places where wildlife flourishes, habitats are maintained, restored, and expanded, and where everyone can experience nature and wildlife at their best. Strong local partnerships in each National Park will deliver 20% of the government's nature recovery target on 10% of the land, saving/sequestering 330,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.*

**We will work together, and at scale, to transform nature's recovery in National Parks. We commit to developing a nature recovery programme for National Parks that:**

- Identifies zones to deliver concentrated habitat enhancement and improved functionality
- Prioritises species to be safeguarded and re-introduced
- Increases tree cover and restores peatlands, grasslands, heathlands and other habitats, with the principle of right habitat, right place, right reason
- Provides nature based solutions to climate change resilience.
- Restores soil structure and health to improve function (carbon storage and water management)
- Implements long-term invasive non-native species control programmes
- Establishes buffer zones and green and blue infrastructure corridors linking National Landscapes, National and Community Forests, and urban areas to create a genuine national network where everyone can access and experience nature and wildlife at their best.

**How will we do this:** we commit to working through our strong local partnerships, to co-create the plans with farmers, landowners and communities. So we achieve sustainable change that supports the community in their role as custodians and identifies investment in nature recovery to help support viable farm businesses. These nature recovery programmes will form the backbone of our future National Park Management Plans.

**This will deliver in the first 10 years, as a minimum:**



## **Our programme to achieve the vision**

Working at a landscape scale is a strength of National Park Authorities. We don't own much of the land, only around 10%, so we regularly work with farmers, landowners, the community and many other bodies across the entirety of National Parks. With a breadth of collective expertise - ecologists, planners, environmental scientists and rangers - we know our landscapes in depth, and we know the impacts that climate change and biodiversity loss are having on them. This gives our local partnerships many of the answers to nature recovery. We will work together and with Natural England and the National Association for AONBs to place these targets and our work across protected landscapes at the heart of the nature recovery network – making us more than the sum of our parts. We also need the policies, funding and collaboration to support delivery, both locally and nationally. We will monitor progress against this Plan and undertake a light-touch review each year.

### **How can you help?**

#### ***Champion nature recovery in national landscapes with us:***

- Ministers to champion National Parks at the heart of the national nature recovery network
- Defra to strengthen the role of National Park Management Plans, so they are the local nature recovery strategies for National Parks, and back their implementation with stronger legal status.
- Partners to collaborate with us to agree a joint and supportive approach to get more wildlife in National Landscapes.

#### ***Policies and powers to support nature recovery:***

- National Parks to be identified as priority areas for funding within ELMS - with priorities within each National Park identified and agreed at a local level, within a national framework, informed by National Park Management Plans which will play a formal role in determining how those national and local priorities can be delivered. NPAs have a key role as 'environmental brokers' – linking buyers (public and private sector) of environmental goods with potential providers (landowners, managers and farmers).
- The National Peat Strategy and English Tree Strategy to fully recognise the need for positive action in National Parks and to adopt the Forestry Commission definition of *the Right Tree in the Right Place* for this work and the environmental principles proposed by the National Park Authorities for their development.
- A strengthened 'section 62' duty to be included in the Environment Bill to place on all public bodies a clear duty to help *deliver* the nature recovery network as set out in the NPMP, and further legislation to create powers to promote and protect nature in National Landscapes on a par with built heritage or road transport
- Defra to support devolution bids that give powers to expedite local delivery of the Nature Recovery Network

#### ***Provide underpinning evidence and insights for nature recovery:***

- Defra, National Parks and AONBs to develop a common template for assessing the state of nature and natural capital in our National Landscapes which is regularly and robustly assessed, with resources to help this work.
- Natural England to carry out a review into the losses and gains in wildlife across the country, and work with us to establish opportunity maps with clear goals for the reinstatement of past losses of habitats and species, taking account of the impacts of climate change.
- Natural England to develop with the local Management Plan partnerships a set of Nature Recovery indicators, representing the key nature conservation attributes in each National Landscape.

#### ***Funding for nature recovery in our national landscapes:***

- External funding grants to support collaborative work that delivers nature recovery targets.
- Delivery of the ambitious targets outlined for National Parks above are a priority for the Nature for Climate Fund and Green Challenge Fund so support from these funds catalyse the delivery of these objectives.
- All future Government grants for nature recovery in National Parks to include a check that the work is consistent with the nature recovery aspirations in the local partnerships adopted Management Plan.

#### ***Nature recovery at landscape scale:***

- National Park Authorities have been involved in some of the biggest landscape management schemes in the country over the past 10 years. We will work across our national landscapes on large scale collaborative 'Net Zero With Nature' projects on an even bigger scale – starting with the 'Great North Bog' and the SW Peatland Partnership.