

Date: 13 December 2022

Report: YORKSHIRE DALES PRIORITY SPECIES

Purpose of the report

1. To update Members on progress in preparing a Priority Species list for inclusion in the forthcoming Yorkshire Dales Nature Recovery Plan.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Authority:
 - endorses the approach being taken to identifying Priority Species; and
 - works in partnership with the Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum and others to develop a final Priority Species list for inclusion in the Yorkshire Dales Nature Recovery Plan (NRP) to be published in June 2023.

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 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' "*to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside*".
5. The 2019 State of Nature Report produced by 70 of the UK's largest conservation NGOs, concluded that, following analysis of millions of species records relating to 6,654 species: "*Our statistics demonstrate that the abundance and distribution of the UK's species has, on average, declined since 1970 and many metrics*

suggest this decline has continued in the most recent decade. The report cited evidence of a 13% decline in average species' abundance since 1970.

6. The Yorkshire Dales National Park (YDNP) contains some of the finest upland wildlife habitats in the UK, supporting many rare and special plants and animals. The Yorkshire Dales Biodiversity Forum is primarily responsible for coordinating nature conservation activities within the National Park. It does this on behalf of a partnership of organisations and provides expert advice to YDNPA.
7. The most recent Trends and Status report (finalised with the Biodiversity Forum in January 2022) concluded that meaningful data to assess population trends existed for only 61 (50%) of the 122 Priority Species. In relation to those species where population trends could be assessed, 76% had populations that were stable or had increased since 2011. Whilst somewhat encouraging compared to the national picture (as set out in paragraph 5), this figure falls short of the 90% National Park Management Plan (NPMP) target and indicates that the NPMP target will not be met by 2024.
8. In March 2021, the Authority resolved to work with the Biodiversity Forum, the Farming & Land Management Forum, and the Woodland Forum to prepare a new 'Nature Recovery Plan' for the Yorkshire Dales. It was intended that this would replace the previous YDNP Biodiversity Action Plan ('Nature in the Dales') which covered the period 2010-20. Following extensive work, a draft Plan was considered by the Authority in June. Members approved working in partnership with the three Forums to refine and publish the final Nature Recovery Plan by June 2023. A key part of the final Plan will be a list of 'Priority Species' for the National Park.

Creating a new Priority Species list for YDNP

9. A priority list is needed to be able to target limited resources at the species most in need of conservation action. As many of our rare and threatened species are dependent on one or more key habitats, there is also a need to determine which of the species are protected by habitat/site management, and which require additional bespoke conservation measures (see para 12 below). It will also provide a list of species that can be monitored so as to provide a meaningful measure of progress towards delivery of the ambition in the NPMP.
10. The previous Biodiversity Action Plan included all the UK Priority Species that were known to occur in the National Park. This resulted in the inclusion of a substantial number of species that, whilst they have been recorded in YDNP, do not occur here in nationally or even regionally significant numbers. This included some species, for example, that have their main strongholds in lowland areas of southern England and others that are migrants or very rare visitors. For a lot of these species, there was little that could be done locally to make a substantial difference to the species' status. Conversely, there were a number of species not included in the Priority Species list even though there are nationally or regionally important populations present here. The Biodiversity Forum wishes to address these issues when preparing a new Priority Species list.

11. In January the Biodiversity Forum considered and agreed a paper outlining a systematic approach to updating the Priority Species list. Firstly, a baseline list would be drawn up of all the species of 'conservation importance' for which there are recent records in the National Park. This was done by asking each of the three Local Record Centres that hold biological records for YDNP (Cumbria; Lancashire, and North & East Yorkshire) to provide information on:
- UK Priority Species (now termed 'Section 41 Species');
 - Any species listed in a Red Data Book;
 - Any species covered by a recognised regional or national action plan; and
 - Any species on Annex I or II of the Birds Directive.
12. This resulted in a baseline list of 392 species that are present in the YDNP and of conservation importance. A sub-group of the Biodiversity Forum was set up to divide this list into three sections in order to determine management priorities, allocating each species to one section:
- **'YDNP Priority Species'** – Species that require bespoke conservation action(s) that are above and beyond generic habitat management of a specific habitat. All species in this category must be capable of being monitored within the National Park;
 - **'Key Species'** – Species that are known can be protected through adequate management of habitats, and, therefore, do not require additional bespoke action;
 - **'Species of Importance'** – Species where there is insufficient information available to determine if it should be categorised as a 'Priority Species' or 'Key Species'.
13. The current draft list comprises 41 Priority Species (see **Appendix**), with 190 Key Species, and 161 Species of Importance. A further 43 species have been identified that were included in Biodiversity Action Plans which historically covered at least part of the National Park but the species do not fit in any of the three categories outlined above. At one stage in the recent past each of these species must have been considered to be of some conservation concern but they would not qualify as Priority Species using the criteria developed by the Biodiversity Forum. Finally, 16 species in addition have been identified that are thought to be only rare visitors to YDNP. It should be stressed that all of these species are important; the categories are purely to determine the type of conservation management required.
14. It is intended to finalise the Priority Species list early in 2023. The whole Biodiversity Forum has been consulted on the composition of the lists and there is a consultation underway with key local naturalist societies that are not represented directly on the Forum at present (e.g. Yorkshire Naturalists' Union). It is recognised that the naturalists and Forum members are a valuable repository of expert knowledge and may be able to suggest species for inclusion in the lists for which there are no records at the Local Record Centres. Consultees have been asked also to comment on whether any species needs to be re-categorised,

for example, if an expert considers there is sufficient information to move a 'Species of Importance' into the 'YDNP Priority Species' list.

Conclusion

15. The Yorkshire Dales National Park supports nationally-important populations of many important species. Coordinated action will be necessary to help reverse the declines in wildlife locally and nationally. The proposed approach is very likely to mean there will be a much shorter list of YDNP Priority Species compared with the current position. This will help to focus additional action on those species where a real difference can be made, and ensure that progress can be readily monitored, so as to paint a more accurate picture of both the actual status of key populations, and the work being done to conserve them.

Tony Serjeant
Senior Wildlife Conservation Officer
28 November 2022

DRAFT list of proposed Priority Species for Yorkshire Dales National Park

BIRDS (12 Species)			
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>

MAMMALS (10 Species)			
Water Vole	<i>Arvicola terrestris</i>	Hazel Dormouse	<i>Muscardinus avellanarius</i>
Brandt's Bat	<i>Myotis brandtii</i>	Daubenton's Bat	<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>
Whiskered Bat	<i>Myotis mystacinus</i>	Natterer's bat	<i>Myotis nattereri</i>
Common Pipstrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>
Brown Long-eared Bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>	Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>

BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS (8 Species)			
Northern Brown Argus	<i>Aricia artaxerxes</i>	The Forester	<i>Adscita statices</i>
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>	Yellow-ringed Carpet	<i>Entephria flavacinctata</i>
Heath Rivulet	<i>Perizoma minorata</i>	Least minor	<i>Photodes captiuncula</i>
Chestnut-coloured Carpet	<i>Thera cognata</i>	Barred-tooth Stripe	<i>Trichopteryx polycommata</i>

OTHER ANIMALS (1 Species)			
White-clawed Crayfish	<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>		

VASCULAR PLANTS (10 Species)			
Alpine Rock-cress	<i>Arabis alpina</i>	Hairy Rock-cress	<i>Arabis hirsuta</i>
Lady's Slipper	<i>Cypripedium calceolus</i>	Mountain Avens	<i>Dryas octopetala</i>
Field Gentian	<i>Gentianella campestris</i>	Common Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>
Burnt-tip Orchid	<i>Neotinea ustulata</i>	Dwarf Milkwort	<i>Polygala amarella</i>
Creeping Willow	<i>Salix repens</i>	Marsh Saxifrage	<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>