



# Traditional Orchards

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan

### Ecology

**What is a Traditional Orchard?** Traditional orchards are defined as orchards that are managed in a low intensity manner as opposed to those intensively managed for fruit production. Traditional orchards are areas of grassland with open grown trees similar to wood-pasture and parkland. However the traditional orchards are distinguished from other habitat types by certain characteristics. Tree species composition is usually primarily from the Rosaceae family with a dense arrangement of the trees. Traditional orchards are often only planted on a small scale and can include plantings of nuts (particularly hazelnuts but also walnuts). The herbaceous vegetation growing around orchard trees is managed through grazing or cutting whilst grafting and pruning to increase the yield of fruit or nuts from the trees.



### Why are Traditional Orchards important?

Traditional orchards can occur on a wide range of soil types and on slopes ranging from steep to level with any aspect. These areas often have ponds and other wetland features present due to the need to water livestock. There are also often hedgerows surrounding traditional orchards, which can provide food, shelter and corridors to other habitats for a wide range of species.

The trees within traditional orchards often decay quickly and so provide crevice and hollow nesting sites for birds such as spotted flycatchers and can also provide roosts for bats. The bark itself supports many fungi, moss and lichen species. A detailed description of the importance of orchards for wildlife can be found within Biodiversity Reporting and Information Groups report on the Species and Habitat Review (2007) which can be downloaded from [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)

### Current status

Traditional or old orchards are composed of standard fruit trees, planted at a low density. They make a significant contribution to the local landscape and are of considerable value to wildlife. A



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recent study by the Central Science Laboratory found that more than twice as many bird species are associated with traditional orchards compared to modern, intensively farmed orchards.

Cheshire is not, in a national context, regarded as an area renowned for fruit growing. It does not spring to mind as readily as Kent or Herefordshire, but for all that, Cheshire has a rich history of fruit growing from nursery production to market sales.

Orchards were once an important part of the Cheshire landscape. The county supported many orchards and produced a wide range of fruit, with each area having its own speciality or distinctive fruit variety. Most older farms, smallholdings and cottages still have remains of orchard trees either in the garden hedgerow or in grassy paddocks set close to the house. Evidence of orchards is also to be found on Ordnance Survey maps and in field names across the county.

In recent times the number and variety of orchards in Cheshire has declined. However, the loss is far greater than fruit growing alone, along with trees have gone traditional crafts, wildlife havens and landscape features.

## Threats

- \* Intensification of agriculture - traditional orchards were planted at about 150 trees per hectare with pasture beneath. Modern orchards are often planted on dwarf rootstocks at 2,200 trees per hectare, they are grubbed up every 12-15 years, they are sprayed with pesticides (up to once a week during the summer), they are heavily pruned, and a strip of bare earth is maintained beneath the trees.
- \* Increased imports of foreign fruit
- \* Commercialisation of British fruit farming
- \* Removal of traditional orchards for development
- \* Neglect

## How are we helping to conserve traditional orchards in the Cheshire region?

- \* Cheshire Orchard Project set up in 1994, which currently has 12 member organisations.
- \* The Cheshire Orchard Audit undertaken in 1996 - 150 separate traditional orchards identified and recorded.
- \* CLT provide free apple trees to schools and community groups to establish school and community orchards.
- \* VRBC provide free fruit trees to local residents.



- \* Awareness raising of orchards and fruit growing through Apple Days, Blossom Days and Quince Days.
- \* Cheshire Orchard Project featured on Common Ground's website.
- \* Articles on orchards and fruit featured in The Acorn (CLT newsletter).
- \* CLT and TLG Orchards run 2 annual orchard workshops - 'Starting Out With Orchards'.
- \* Funding for orchard management and restoration provided through Countryside Stewardship Scheme.
- \* Regular school visits and guided walks around Norton Priory's orchards as part of their ongoing education programme.
- \* All Cheshire Orchard Project members use orchards as a LA21, Sustainable Development, Sense of Place and Local Distinctiveness tool.
- \* Norton Priory holds the NCCPG national collection of tree quince.
- \* Jodrell Bank Science Centre holds the NCCPG national collection of ornamental Malus (crab apple).
- \* Research being undertaken in to the history of orchards in the landscape, with a particular emphasis on south Cheshire.
- \* Of the 6000 known varieties of apple in Britain, 32 are Cheshire varieties. The Cheshire Orchard Project is continuing to build up this number of known Cheshire varieties.
- \* Cheshire Orchard Project attends regular National Orchard Association meetings.

Agri-Environment Schemes- Environmental Stewardship options are available to land managers and farmers to restore, maintain and create traditional orchards in Cheshire.

## Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve traditional orchards in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

## How to find out more about traditional orchards

The Cheshire Orchards Project leaflet produced by CLT  
PTES Traditional Orchards Project  
[UK BAP Definition](#)



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### How can you get involved?

Cheshire Landscape Trust and TLG Orchards have run workshops, entitled 'Starting Out With Orchards' and 'Pruning for Beginners', to help people learn about fruit trees and orchards. It is hoped these will be repeated annually. To enquire about further workshops, or to ask general advice, please contact Cheshire Landscape Trust on 01244 674193.

### Contact details

LBAP Chair Katie Lowe,  
Cheshire Landscape Trust  
Tel: 01244 674193

### References and Glossary

The Cheshire Orchard Audit (May 1996) Data assimilated by Emma Coombs, CWT  
Orchards of Cheshire (1995) Edited by CFWI

