



Wood-Pasture and Parkland

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Ecology

What are wood-pasture and parkland habitats?

Wood-pastures are described as areas that have been managed by a long-established tradition of grazing allowing, where the site is in good condition, the survival of multiple generations of trees, characteristically with at least some veteran trees or shrubs. The tree and shrub component may have been exploited in the past and can occur as scattered individuals, small groups, or as more or less complete canopy cover. Depending upon the degree of canopy cover other semi-natural habitats, including grassland, heath, scrub etc. may occur in mosaic with woodland communities. While oak, beech, alder, birch, ash, hawthorn, hazel or pine are often dominant, a wide range of other tree and shrub species may occur as part of wood-pasture systems.



Wood-pasture and parkland are the products of historic land management systems, and represent a vegetation structure rather than being a particular plant community. Typically this structure consists of large, open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) at various densities, in a matrix of grazed or cultivated grassland, heathland and/or woodland floras.

In terms of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) of plant communities lowland wood-pastures and parkland are most commonly associated with W10 *Quercus robur* - *Pteridium aquilinum* - *Rubus fruticosus* woodland, W14 *Fagus sylvatica* - *Rubus fruticosus* woodland, W15 *Fagus sylvatica* - *Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland and W16 *Quercus* spp. - *Betula* spp. - *Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland, although others may occur. Upland examples may show more resemblance to W11 and W17 woodland types. In addition the more open wood-pastures and parkland may include various scrub, heathland, improved and unimproved grassland NVC communities.



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Tree management, usually by pollarding, has often helped to produce the characteristic veteran trees, while grazing by domestic livestock, deer or rabbits maintains the vegetation matrix (Reid 1997). Chatters and Sanderson (1994) identified 3 general types of grazed lowland woods: grazed high forest, parkland and grazed coppice.

Why are wood-pasture and parklands important for wildlife?

Wood-pasture and parkland are particularly important for the fungi, lichens, bryophytes and invertebrates associated with veteran trees and decaying timber. Indeed, according to the UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report (1995) UK lowland wood pasture and parkland provides the habitat for 38 species of conservation concern. The fauna of dead wood (saproxylic species) is threatened throughout Europe and Britain is important for this fauna in a European context. Parklands and wood pasture may also preserve indigenous tree genotypes. Veteran trees may be present in hedgerows.

Current status

Much relict parkland remains in the Cheshire region although this has largely been changed to agriculture over time.

Threats

- Neglect or inappropriate management of individual trees.
 - * Loss of trees through disease or physiological stress either as a result of natural processes or human activity (drought/soil compaction/root damage).
 - * Removal of standing and fallen dead wood because they are perceived to be a safety risk.
 - * Lack of replacement trees, therefore, lack of continuity in deadwood habitat; leading to further slow decline in the quality of the habitat
 - * Conversion of wood-pasture and parkland to other uses such as arable land, amenity land (golf courses etc.) or even housing/industrial developments.
 - * Inappropriate management of existing wood-pasture and parkland habitats through conversion of surrounding pasture into intensive grassland, or through intensified grazing regimes.
 - * Air pollution leading to epiphyte and soil damage.
 - * 'Over-tidying' of parkland sites, such as through the removal of fallen limbs / dead fallen timber, and by carrying out conventional tree surgery, thus removing dead wood habitat from the tree canopy.



How are we helping to conserve wood-pasture and parkland in the Cheshire region?

- * Application of statutory powers to protect species and sites.
- * Encouraging the appropriate management of wood-pasture and parkland habitats and working with land owners to ensure best practice is achieved where possible to do so.
- * Emphasising the availability of grants that can benefit wood-pasture and parkland sites.
- * Provision of literature and advice to landowners through a variety of organisations.
- * Liaison with the Veteran Trees Initiative.
- * Development of a draft site register for lowland wood-pasture and parkland.

Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve lowland wood, pastures and parkland 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 lowland wood, pasture and parkland

Woodland Trust 5 year Ancient Tree Hunt - www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk
[UK BAP Definition](#)

Contact details

LBAP Chair James Hall, Cholmondeley Castle and Gardens Estate Office
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References and Glossary

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