

Ancient and/or Species-rich Hedgerows



Yellowhammer:
(Photograph by Wayne Richardson)

Links to Habitat and Species Action Plans and Guidance Notes.

Priority habitats and species associated with this HAP:

Bats, Tree Sparrow, Farmland, Barn Owl, Turtle Dove, Linnet, Grey Partridge, House Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Unimproved Grasslands, Lowland Wood Pasture and Veteran Trees

Action Plans have been prepared for those in bold.

Introduction

Hedges have long been considered an important part of the English landscape and some hedges at least may pre-date the Roman occupation. However, they were not always as extensive and the network was increased dramatically during the Enclosure Period (1720 to 1840). In fact, at this time, many people decried the planting of hedges as despoiling the beauty of the English landscape. How things change. This was not uniform across the country, as many areas had already been enclosed at an earlier period.

Our objectives for Ancient and/or Species-rich Hedgerows are:

- To encourage the conservation and good management of species-rich hedges;
- To encourage the retention and replanting of hedgerow trees;
- To encourage the planting of new hedgerows that re-establish or compliment the local field patterns and local hedge character;
- To ensure development takes full account of the importance of hedges and that adequate mitigation is provided so that there is a net gain in the local context.

Ancient Hedgerows are considered to be those that pre-date this Enclosure Period. Such hedges tend to be more diverse either because they have been derived from woodland clearance, have had a long time to allow new species to colonise or were planted more diversely in the first place.

Species rich hedges are defined as having 4 or more woody species in a 30m section. In contrast, many late enclosure hedges are mainly Hawthorn, possibly with Elder. Whatever their origin, old, species-rich hedges tend to support a greater variety of wildlife and can be of great nature conservation and landscape significance.

Their value lies partly in their similarity to woodland edge habitats and they can contain many woodland plants and insects such as Bluebell, Primrose, Dogs Mercury and Comma Butterfly, This is particularly the case if they are connected either through time or place directly with old woodland. They criss-cross the countryside in a far reaching network and provide the primary habitat for a considerable number of species of concern in the countryside, for instance many farmland birds.

Often associated with them are other significant features such as old ditches, banks and hedgerow trees, especially ancient ones. These in turn provide habitat for other species not otherwise found in hedges including bats, Barn Owls, Tree Sparrows and a wider variety of insects and plants.

Historically, hedges can also be of great interest, being associated with ancient field patterns, old boundaries such as parish, township or estate boundaries or old woodland sites.

With agricultural change and the mechanisation of farming following World War II, however, hedgerow losses began to increase as fields were expanded. It is estimated that 22% of hedges were removed between 1947 and 1985 and a further 21% between 1984 and 1990.

In 1993 it was estimated that there were approximately 329,000km left, of which 138,000km were considered to be species-rich or ancient in origin. Losses were thought to be continuing at about 5% a year.

Losses were not uniform but were greater in the eastern part of the country where arable intensification was greatest.

To offset this loss, the Hedgerow Regulations were introduced in 1997 requiring hedgerow removal to be notified and assessed by the local authority. This offered a measure of protection to old and species-rich hedges.

At the same time the Countryside (now Environmental) Stewardship Scheme had begun to make inroads into hedgerow loss through the offering of grants encouraging farmers to plant new hedges It also encouraged landowners to manage and improve their remaining hedges to offset one of the other major causes of hedgerow loss, that of neglect.

Many ancient hedges, although still present, are not in favourable nature conservation condition due to the way they are, or have been, managed.

Ancient and/or Species Rich are a UK BAP priority habitat.

The Resource

The extent of old hedges or their losses in Scarborough is little known, however, from what little information we do have, areas such as the North York Moors fringe and the northern edge of the Vale of Pickering are still likely to contain a significant proportion. For instance the old Enclosure award of 1771 for Scalby would suggest that there were already a significant number of hedges present and survey would indicate that many of these would be considered species-rich. Many of these still remain and survey would indicate that most of these would be considered species rich.

Similarly, limited surveys at Brompton also indicate a high proportion of very rich hedges on the Moors/Vale of Pickering fringe. As at Pickering, the hedgerow pattern here is very distinctive and historically significant.

In contrast, many hedges on the Wolds or within the Vale of Pickering are species poor. When one considers their history, this is logical with drainage of the Vale and enclosure of the sheepwalks occurring very late. There are though very important exceptions, particularly in the Vale of Pickering. Here some probably relict species from pre-drainage times have survived and been incorporated into what can otherwise be species-poor hedges. For instance Aspen is recorded in a hedge on Cayton Carr and Alder Buckthorn from North Lane, Flixton.

Areas of particular interest for hedges also occur around villages in the form of the old village closes; the small fields behind and often associated with, the old houses. These will often have pre-dated any enclosure award and can be significantly older and more diverse.

There are no SINC sites yet designated for hedgerows, although there are several that are known to fulfil the necessary criteria and will be considered. The SINC criteria are substantially more rigorous than both the UK Biodiversity Forum's definition and the Hedgerow Regulation's criteria. This is to ensure that only the very best hedges are designated in this way.

Threats

With regard to hedgerow removal, there are still losses occurring although this is much reduced. Loss to agriculture is controlled by the Hedgerow Regs 1997. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that the UK Biodiversity Forum's definition of a species rich hedge is slightly different (less rigorous) than for the Hedgerow Regulation's (1997). This means that some 'species-rich' hedges could still be lost.

Agricultural management can have a considerable impact on the quality of a hedge, even if losses from removal are much reduced. Unsympathetic cutting, herbicide and pesticide spraying into the hedge bottoms, grazing or ploughing up to or into a hedge bottom can all have a significant effect on the wildlife value of a hedge.

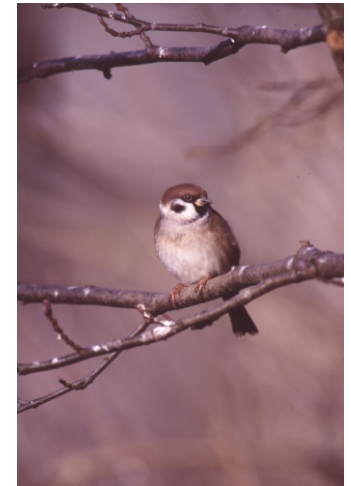
Although only a part of a hedge, hedgerow trees are a significant habitat within them and of conservation value in their own right. They are of particular value to species such as bats, Barn Owls, Tree Sparrows etc. They can be particularly important in very old hedges that have historical links with ancient woodland, potentially retaining species not otherwise found. These can be felled without felling consents and are difficult to protect. The scale of any changes in the numbers of hedgerow trees are not known and so their status is uncertain.

Losses from development can now be a major form of hedgerow loss and may disproportionately affect old species rich hedges. Development tends to be concentrated on the fringes of settlements or as infill and these sites are often as significant for their old hedges, as for old unimproved grassland. Once development has occurred, even if they are left in place they lose their protection from the Hedgerow Regulations and often suffer from inappropriate management.

Although not exactly a threat, inappropriate planting of species within existing hedges can be detrimental to their overall value. Where possible planting should be of native species and in character with other hedges in the locality.

Potential for Enhancement

Although losses have significantly decreased, there are considerable



The Tree Sparrow is a common user of species rich hedgerows: (Photograph by Whitfield Benson)

opportunities for enhancement both of the extent and quality of hedges. Environment Stewardship and management advice to farmers (see Guidance note on Farming) encourages planting and thickening of hedges.

Finding out the extent of species rich hedges and of hedgerow trees will enable a better understanding of the actions necessary to ensure the long term enhancement of this important habitat within the context of a farmed landscape.

Development almost invariably results in some hedgerow loss or, if not loss, then a reduction in value through unfavourable management. There may not be opportunities to compensate for this on site. Where this is the case Section 106 Agreements should be used to secure off-site mitigation to compensate for this loss. It may be possible to link these to landowners not in Environmental Stewardship and thereby enhance hedges that would otherwise not be improved. The targeting of these would be able to be derived from the proposed surveys.

The surveys would also indicate where the planting of new hedges was appropriate. This should be done using locally characteristic species rich mixes that are, if possible, native sourced.

Current Action

- A UKBAP action plan has been prepared that aims to halt the further loss of ancient, diverse hedges, maintain the present extent of hedgerow trees and ensure favourable management of 50% of all hedges by 2005.
- Implement the Hedgerow Regulations in such a way as to protect all qualifying hedges.
- Provision of advice to farmers through the Borough Council's Parks and Countryside section.
- Incorporation of appropriate hedge proposals within development consents.
- Encourage the uptake of Environmental Stewardship Schemes Agreements.



Hedgerows:
(Photograph by Graham Megson)