



A time of action

Time seems to have raced past since the Ravine WoodLIFE Project was officially launched back in May last year. Since then the Project Partnership has been busy implementing a wide range of work to secure the future of more than 7000 acres of some of the most important native woodland habitat in the UK. As work within the woodlands slows down during the bird nesting season following our first full year, now seems a good time to take stock. Welcome to our inaugural issue of Woodlife NEWS – we hope it will give you an idea of just some of the successes we have achieved so far and future work which is being planned.

Receiving part-funding from the European Commission's LIFE-Nature programme, the Ravine WoodLIFE Project is a partnership of eight organisations working together to conserve the native ash woodlands of the Peak District Dales and the Wye Valley. The White Peak area of the Peak District National Park contains the largest remaining area of this habitat type in Great Britain. The Lower Wye Valley, on the border of south Wales and England, is one of the most important areas for woodland conservation in the United Kingdom.



Both have been identified as some of the best examples of ravine, or ash, woodlands remaining throughout Europe, and are designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the European Habitats Directive. These fascinating woodland habitats and the diverse wildlife they support face a range of threats to their long-term survival; uncontrolled grazing, the presence of non-native species, the decline in traditional woodland management and in areas the woodlands becoming increasingly fragmented and isolated from one another.

The Ravine WoodLIFE Project Partnership is working with private landowners, local communities and businesses to address these threats at a landscape scale so that future generations can continue to enjoy these beautiful woodlands and the wildlife they support.

Within the Peak District Dales SAC, achievements to date include:

- *In co-operation with landowners and tenants, up to 100% funding is being provided for woodland conservation management work over 380 acres of privately owned SAC woodland*
- *Over 4000m of fencing has been erected to control livestock grazing*
- *Selective felling, thinning, coppicing and deadwood management commenced on 233 acres of woodland*
- *Ecological survey work and habitat mapping underway throughout 5162 acres of SAC*

Within the Wye Valley Woodlands SAC, achievements to date include:

- *Access for management operations improved at three woodlands*
- *32 acres of neglected coppice brought back into management*
- *Thinning and selective felling completed through 259 acres of woodland*
- *800m of deer fencing erected to protect native tree regeneration*
- *Co-ordinated deer management implemented over 1465 acres of woodland*
- *A programme of ecological surveying and monitoring underway*

The Ravine WoodLIFE Project has also been working to raise awareness of the ravine woodland habitats it is aiming to conserve. Over the past 14 months the Project has attended over 11 events in the two Project areas and received press coverage both locally and nationally on numerous occasions.

We hope that you find this newsletter interesting and informative. Further information about the Project can be found on the Project website at www.RavineWoodLIFE.org.uk, and please do contact us if you have any queries regarding the Project (contact details on the back page of this newsletter).

INSIDE

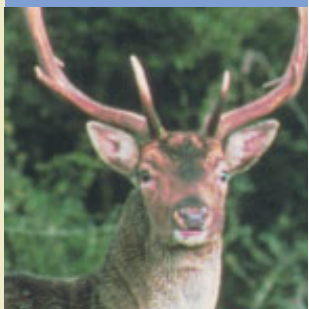
Peak District Dales

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SPECIES FACTFILE

COMMON DORMOUSE

The only native British dormouse species, *Muscardinus avellanarius* is an agile climber feeding on nuts, fruit and berries.

During the summer months common dormouse are active above ground level in the woodland canopy and in areas of scrub. Here they construct ball-shaped nests up to 15cm in diameter to raise their young, producing up to two litters a year, each of about four young.



In late summer, hazelnuts, acorns and chestnuts are important sources of food as the dormouse builds up fat reserves to hibernate over winter.

Hibernation usually lasts between October to April and occurs in nests at or below ground level.

As a result of changes to woodland management and habitat fragmentation the common dormouse population has declined. Sadly, from woodlands at the edge of its range in northern England & Wales it has totally disappeared.

Monsal Dale working with private landowners to benefit wildlife

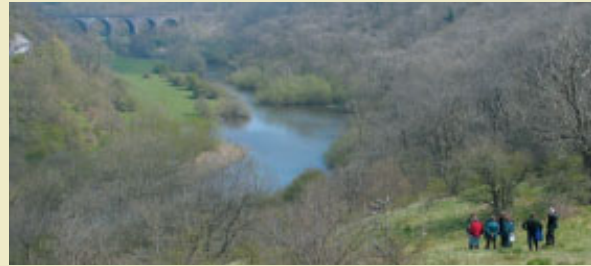
Monsal Dale is not just a spectacular landscape within the Peak District National Park, the woodlands and grasslands within the Dale are also of international importance for their conservation value. The steep dale sides enclose a world of crystal clear streams and mossy rocks, precipitous woodlands and grasslands, making the dale a haven for wildlife.

English Nature and the Peak District National Park Vision Project have been working closely with the landowner and tenant to agree the management required to protect and enhance the long-term conservation value of this beautiful dale.

It is planned to erect fencing and repair walls to allow grazing to be controlled over 350 acres of woodland and calcareous grassland. Restricting grazing in some areas will allow trees to regenerate within woodlands and also protect grazing sensitive grassland plants such as Jacob's ladder. Fence lines will be carefully located to ensure that they are not visible within the landscape. In some cases fences will have to cross footpaths and where this is unavoidable pedestrian gates will be provided to

ensure that walkers can continue to enjoy the area. Hawthorn scrub will be cleared in some areas to provide ideal conditions for plants and butterflies.

Within 124 acres of woodland, sycamore will be carefully felled to start a long-term sycamore control programme which will favour the regeneration of native tree species. Only small numbers of trees will be felled so that no obvious gaps in the woodland cover will be visible. Felled trees will be left on site to create fallen deadwood habitats and in addition some carefully selected trees will be ring barked to create standing deadwood. Large, old trees which provide food and shelter for many species will not be felled.



Jon Stewart, English Nature's Deputy Team Manager said; *'To conserve the internationally important wildlife habitats of the Peak District the co-operation and support of private landowners, stakeholders and communities is crucial, and we are delighted that working together with the National Park Authority, Chatsworth Estate as landowner and the farming tenant we have been able to agree and fund works in Monsal Dale to benefit both wildlife and the landscape.'*

Hurt's Wood a new beginning



This September the National Trust will start work in Dovedale on what will be the largest forestry operation in the area for 90 years. Why are the National Trust planning to fell trees within this famous Peak District dale ?

Hurt's Wood is a plantation of larch trees planted in the mid-nineteenth century to produce timber. The tall and straight trees which we see today would make the foresters who planted them proud, but the exotic larch trees are of limited value to wildlife. Beneath them there is little regeneration, and the woodland floor is dominated by grasses and nettles.

Some of the trees are very fine specimens, but closer inspection reveals that they are reaching the end of their lives. Around the edges in particular, the less sheltered trees are beginning to die. Several trees have actually snapped or been blown over by the wind. It is clear that the plantation, which at the end of the day was planted to be felled, is at a point where it should be cleared, or left to die and fall down by itself.

The opportunity to carry out the felling in a controlled way in order to improve the biodiversity and landscape of the valley has come through the funding of the project provided by the Ravine WoodLIFE Project. The work is being carried out by a local contractor

under close supervision of Trust wardens. Neighbouring farmers and landowners have graciously allowed us access over their land which is vital to carry out the felling and extraction. The timber will be converted into logs which will be sold for use in the construction industry.

As to the future of Hurt's Wood, we will retain some of the hardwood trees which survive within it, construct a fence on the boundary of the native woodland towards Dovedale, and reintroduce grazing to the cleared area. Above the plantation and to the west, the dalesides are extremely rich with wildflowers and fungi, and through careful management the woodland floor will gradually increase in biodiversity to match them.

Hanging around!



The steep sided valleys in which ravine woodlands are found, make these woods difficult to safely access. Whilst this dangerous terrain has helped protect these sites from disturbance and ensured that trees have survived, it also makes carrying out any necessary conservation management difficult. In Chee Dale, the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust have used highly skilled contractors to access the steepest slopes using roped access rock climbing techniques. This has allowed non-native sycamore trees to be controlled in otherwise inaccessible locations.

Deer Park to be recreated



A nineteenth century deer park is to be reinstated at the Woodland Trust's Little Doward, a wooded hill in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as part of the Ravine WoodLIFE Project. Little Doward is home to rare plants such as hutchinsia and fingered

sedge as well as several unusual types of whitebeam. In places, however, regeneration of scrub is taking over areas of grassland and rocky slopes and smothering the rarities.

'The restoration of some of the old deer park walls and the erection of new fences will allow us to reintroduce controlled grazing by deer and sheep, which is the best way to make sure that this species-rich habitat is protected', says senior woodland officer Paula Keen. 'We're delighted to be involved in the Ravine WoodLIFE project as we've long believed that, if we are to ensure the long-term viability of our native woodland, we need to work with others at a landscape scale.'

Coppicing: traditional woodland management

Large areas of woodland in the Wye Valley used to be managed by coppicing to produce charcoal to fuel lime kilns and furnaces for smelting. With the decline in these industries, so areas of coppice have fallen into neglect. Coppice management maintains areas of open ground and young re-growth within a woodland, and these areas can provide important habitats for species of moths and butterflies, together with dormouse.

At Highbury Wood National Nature Reserve, English Nature are re-instating coppice management over seven acres of neglected hazel coppice. Rides within Highbury are being improved to enable local contractors to access these coppice coupes and extract cut material. This will enable coppice management to be sustained in the long term.



Looking after the veterans

Veteran trees are important both for wildlife and historically. The nooks, crannies and dead and dying wood within these magnificent old trees, provide food and shelter for a huge range of fungi, insects, birds and animals. These trees also provide a direct link with the landscape created by our forefathers, and have lived through hundreds of years of history.



The Forestry Commission England are managing the mature beech trees on Offa's Dyke at Shorncliff to allow them to safely grow on to become true woodland veterans.

Let there be light!

The heavy shade cast by a dense woodland canopy hinders the growth of many woodland plants and can even prevent the regeneration of less shade-tolerant tree species.



At Blackcliff, the Countryside Council for Wales, working with the Forestry Commission Wales, have carefully felled beech trees to thin the tree canopy over almost 26 acres of woodland. The gaps in the canopy opened up by this thinning will encourage the natural regeneration of native trees and woodland plants. This regeneration will enable a more natural woodland structure to develop with trees of different ages growing together and woodland understorey to develop.

The diverse woodland structure created provides a far wider range of habitats for insects, birds and other animals than exist within a woodland of densely growing, even aged trees.

Deer in the Wye Valley

The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) office, in conjunction with the Wales Deer Initiative, has just published a leaflet and booklet about deer in the Wye Valley.

The leaflet 'Deer in the Wye Valley' provides an introduction to the deer species found in the Wye Valley, and the management issues associated with them. The accompanying booklet (of the same title) provides more detailed information, including advice of deer management.

Copies of both the leaflet and booklet, produced through the Ravine WoodLIFE Project, are available by calling the AONB office on 01600 713977.

SPECIES FACTFILE

LIME

Two species of lime tree are native to the UK. Small-leaved lime (*Tilia Cordata*) is native as far north as the Lake District and was the last major tree to reach Britain after the last Ice Age. It is much commoner than the other native lime species; large-leaved lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*) which is restricted to more southerly areas of the UK.

In areas where small-leaved and large-leaved lime both occur, such as the Peak District and Wye Valley, they tend



to hybridise to produce a third species: common lime (*Tilia x vulgaris*) and it is this species that is most commonly planted.

Both large-leaved and small-leaved lime can produce viable seed in the south of Britain. However, little natural regeneration survives as lime is very palatable to numerous browsing animals ranging from voles to deer.

Lime can also regenerate by layering or by self-coppicing. Old self-coppiced lime trees in the Lake District are believed to be some of the oldest living trees in Britain.

How do I find out more?

Please contact the Project Manager at:

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The Project Partnership:

A partnership receiving match funding from the European Community, managed by WWF with English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission, the National Trust, Wye Valley AONB, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust.

The LIFE-Nature Programme:

The LIFE Programme is a European Community initiative which provides funding to encourage sustainable development and assist in the implementation of the European Commission's environmental policies.

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Forestry Commission
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Ravine WoodLIFE at Eden

As part of the Canopy Season of woodland conservation events, the Ravine WoodLIFE Project was invited to exhibit at the Eden Project in Cornwall. Over a busy weekend last September, hundreds of visitors were able to meet Project staff and find out more about the woodlands of the Peak District and Wye Valley and the work of the Project Partnership.

Sycamore – a threat to native woodlands?

Whilst foresters have long appreciated the value of sycamore as a timber producing tree, conservationists have seen this non-native species as a threat to the wildlife interest of UK native woodlands.

In the past, the management of native woodlands for conservation would have required an attempt to be made to remove all sycamore from a woodland, frequently requiring great effort and expense. However, as a result of increased understanding this policy is changing.

Sycamore was believed to be a highly invasive species, which if left uncontrolled would come to dominate a native woodland and reduce the value of the site for wildlife. A number of recent studies have shown that this is not necessarily the case and that sycamore frequently struggles to regenerate beneath its own canopy and that the more shade tolerant seedlings of native trees such as ash dominate where there is little disturbance.

As the Project woodlands are amongst the most important native woodland habitats in the UK a long-term sycamore control programme will be implemented on many sites to restore the past natural species composition of these woodlands. This programme will see the careful selection and felling of trees to gradually reduce the proportion of sycamore. Depending on the age and number of sycamore trees present, this gradual felling may not fully remove all the sycamore for hundreds of years.

Through the Ravine WoodLIFE Project research is being carried out to add to our understanding of how sycamore behaves within the woodlands of the two Project areas, and provide further guidance for future management.

Deadwood – bringing woodlands to life

As part of the Ravine WoodLIFE Project, we are killing carefully selected trees by ring barking them or injecting them with a herbicide. It may seem strange that a woodland conservation project is killing trees but this allows us to artificially create deadwood habitats in woodlands where little deadwood is present.



Deadwood is a vitally important part of a healthy woodland ecosystem. The fungi that breakdown deadwood are a source of food for 1,700 species of insects in the UK, including 330 Red Data Book species. These insects in turn form an important source of food for many bird and bat species. The Greater Spotted Woodpecker relies on deadwood insects for 97% of its winter food. The rot holes and cavities formed as a tree dies also provide shelter for nesting birds and roosting bats. Thus dead and dying trees are important for a wide range of woodland wildlife.

Whilst the Project is also aiming to secure the long-term survival of trees to form sources of deadwood naturally, we are also creating standing and fallen deadwood habitats artificially to provide deadwood in the short term.



Satellite technology

Project survey work within the Peak District Project area is making use of Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites to accurately map the location of important trees. The narrow, steep sided valleys and woodland tree canopy mean that receiving satellite signals is difficult, but working with contractors we have developed a cost effective GPS survey technique to map individual trees.

PROJECT PARTNERS:



A large print version of this leaflet is available.

A BIGGER, better website?

The Ravine WoodLIFE Project website went live in May 2004 and since then has been visited by thousands of people worldwide. As the Project continues to gather pace, we're keen that the website keeps up and becomes an essential source of information for those with an interest in woodland conservation and the woodlands of the Wye Valley and Peak District SAC's in particular. In May this year a mass of additional information was added to the website and we will continue to update and add to the site. Visit the Project website and let us know what you think at:

www.RavineWoodLIFE.org.uk