

Guidance Sheet on the Management, Restoration, and Creation of

Upland Oak Woodland

This good practice sheet is intended as a basic guide for landowners and land managers to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of Upland Oak Woodland and help secure its long-term future. Upland Oak Woodland has been identified as a priority habitat in both the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Blaenau Gwent as it has suffered declines both nationally and locally.

Biodiversity quite simply means 'all living things'. It is the rich variety of wild plants and animals around us together with the habitats that support them.

Local Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species associated with this Habitat include:

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Badger | Pearl-bordered fritillary |
| Fox | Small pearl-bordered fritillary |
| Bullfinch | Striped twin-spot carpet moth |
| Green woodpecker | Southern wood ant |
| Song thrush | Bluebell |
| Spotted flycatcher | Creeping Bellflower |
| Wood warbler | English Whitebeam |
| High brown fritillary | |



Bluebell

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Habitat Description

Upland Oak Woodland occurs on base poor to acidic soils under conditions of high rainfall. These woodlands are found on the higher ground to the west of the County Borough and on valley sides. The main tree species is sessile oak, but birch is also common, together with an understorey of small trees and shrubs of hazel, rowan, and holly. Most of the Upland Oak Woodlands in Blaenau Gwent are ancient semi-natural woodlands which are irreplaceable, having taken many centuries to evolve, and of high biodiversity value.

Factors Affecting Habitat

- Habitat loss and fragmentation.
- Lack of appropriate management – overgrazing, mostly by sheep, and to a lesser extent rabbits, resulting in a loss of ground flora and natural regeneration.
- Loss of traditional management practices such as coppicing, leading to neglect.
- Invasion by bracken that halts natural regeneration and sycamore that changes the composition of woodlands.
- The replacement of woodland with conifers after felling.



Heavy grazing in sessile oak wood

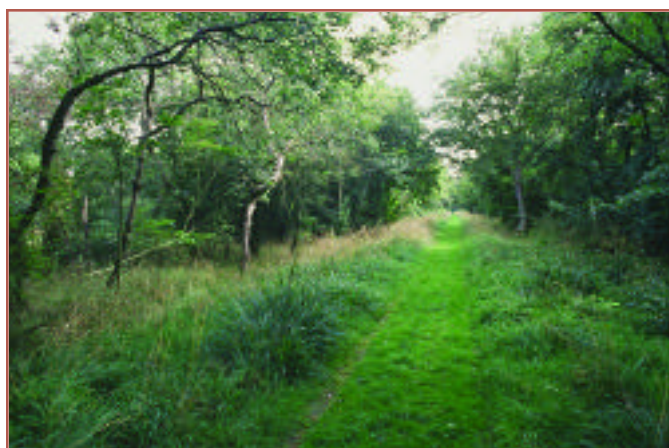
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Good Practice

Protect, maintain, and enhance any areas of Upland Oak Woodland on your land by:

- In remote or inaccessible woods with little human interference, use non-intervention methods. This is where the development of the wood is left entirely to its own devices, except for the removal of invading exotic species such as conifers (sitka spruce, western hemlock), Japanese knotweed, and rhododendron.
- Encourage the natural regeneration of trees and shrubs by fencing off areas of woodland to prevent overgrazing and allow ground vegetation to re-establish. Tree guards and shelters are usually cheaper than fencing for irregular areas and small groups.
- Maintain, and where appropriate, increase the composition of native broad-leaved trees in the woodland. As a rough guide, they must form at least 50% of the woodland. However, 100% is the ideal.
- Look after wild birds by avoiding carrying out any tree work during the bird-nesting season between March-July. Tree work should be carried out between October to March.
- Undertake selective thinning or felling to diversify the woodland habitat and keep the spread of unwanted species such as sycamore in check. Careful selective thinning or felling can be used to manipulate light levels with the aim of increasing tree regeneration and using the retained canopy of trees and shrubs to control invasive ground vegetation, i.e. bracken and bramble.
- Retain any old or large mature trees with cracks, crevices, and hollows as these may be used as roosting sites for bats. If such trees need to be removed, advice should first be sought from the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). Special advice should also be obtained from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council if trees are in close proximity to footpaths, highways, or areas accessible to the public and could be a hazard.

- Promote traditional forms of woodland management such as coppicing and pollarding to create a rich mosaic of habitats and allow greater light into the wood to stimulate ground vegetation such as bluebells. Pollarding differs from coppicing as it involves cutting back the main trunk of the tree to a height of about 2m instead of near the ground level, and is used in old pasture woodland where stock grazes. Coppicing is preferable in woods that are still being coppiced or have been in the last 40-50 years.
- Retain any large coppice stumps as these form rich habitats for mosses and liverworts.
- Create glades and rides to benefit butterflies and birds. Glades should range from 0.5-2ha in size to encourage as wide a variety of wildlife as possible. Rides are valuable if they are wide and sunny (e.g. at least 5m wide dependant on the height of the woodland trees, and less than 20% shade) and curve and alter direction rather than being in a straight line. When managing rides, only mow the central portion, leaving a margin of tall grasses and flowers along the edges.



Well managed woodland ride with tall grasses and wild flowers

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Ancient living oak

© Peter Wakely-EN

- Maintain a mature habitat by leaving standing deadwood and fallen trees wherever possible, providing that this doesn't conflict with the issues of public safety. Create habitat piles with fallen branches and logs that will benefit invertebrates and fungi.
- Encourage birds and bats by erecting artificial nest and bat boxes to mature trees.
- Retain climbers such as ivy and honeysuckle. These plants do not harm trees but create nesting sites for birds and habitats for insects.



Extend areas of Upland Oak Woodland by: Natural Regeneration

This is the preferred option as this maintains the natural distribution of tree species in relation to the site conditions. Natural regeneration can be promoted by group felling, creating gaps of up to 0.5ha in size, and by fencing off areas to prevent overgrazing and allowing trees and shrubs to spread from the existing woodland and colonise new areas adjacent to the woodland.

Planting

- Planting should only be used where natural regeneration is not possible, for instance, where a dense mat of grasses dominates the ground cover preventing germination.
- Ideally, plants should be set into the canopy gaps and areas that have been felled.
- Any planting should be carried out during the winter months between October to March. Frosty or very wet spells should be avoided.
- Tree guards or fencing may be needed where grazing by rabbits, hares, deer or livestock is a problem.
- Trees and shrubs should be locally sourced wherever possible from similar woodlands or native species purchased from reputable suppliers. Suitable species include; sessile oak, pedunculate oak, downy birch, silver birch, and rowan with an understorey of holly, hazel, and crab apple.
- Any new plantings will require careful weeding for 3-5years to encourage healthy establishment. Hand weeding is preferable to spraying.
- Further advice should be sought on types of species to use, planting techniques, and aftercare and management.

Do not carry out any of the following operations without first seeking further advice:

- Burn any vegetation.
- Plough, cultivate, or re-seed with inappropriate seed mixes, roll or chain-harrow.
- Install any new drainage systems, clear out any ditches, reduce existing water levels, or affect natural drainage and wetland features such as pools and flushes.
- Apply any herbicides or pesticides within 10m of Upland Oak Woodland unless spot treating notifiable weeds such as dock, thistle etc., or invasive species such as japanese knotweed, bracken and bramble. Environment Agency approval will be required on herbicide use on or near water-bodies.

- Apply any inorganic or organic fertilisers, such as farmyard manure, slurry, sewage sludge, chicken manure, or fishmeal within 10m of Upland Oak Woodland.
- Apply any lime, basic slag, calcified seaweed, or other materials to alter soil acidity.
- Store any manure, farm wastes, or any other waste on any area of Upland Oak Woodland.
- Introduce game or other intensive practices such as grazing.
- Carry out supplementary feeding or install new watering troughs.
- Carry out thinning or felling operations without assessing the requirements of a felling licence and/or statutory protection such as a Tree Preservation Order.

Trees and the Law

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

Tree Preservation Orders may cover some trees. Before carrying out any work to these trees, you will need to contact the Council to gain the necessary consents.

Felling Licences

Felling of hedgerow trees may require a felling licence. The Forestry Commission issues these. If you fell trees without a licence you may face prosecution.

Further Advice



Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership

Provides advice on the restoration of priority habitats and species within the County Borough.
Tel. 01495 355702



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Administers the Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme that offers landowners and community groups small grants up to £2k for biodiversity projects.

Tel. 01495 356070

Administers Tree Preservation Orders.

Tel. 01495 355546



Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Administers the Tir Gofal Agri-Environment Scheme where grants are available for a wide range of habitat management work on farms.

Tel. 02920 772400



Coed Cymru

Provides free help and advice on; woodland management, timber harvesting, processing, product development and marketing.

Tel. 01495 235354.



Environment Agency Wales

Administers herbicide consents near watercourses **Tel. 08708 506506** and runs the Pollution Hotline **Tel. 0800 807060**



Forestry Commission

Administers felling licences
Tel. 01873 850060.

Please note, the recommendations contained within this sheet are for guidance purposes only. Due to the complexity of individual woodlands and the interactions occurring within them, it is advisable to seek specialist advice with relevant organisations from the early stages. This sheet can also be downloaded from the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership website called 'The Web of Life'. This can be accessed through www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.