

Guidance Sheet on the Management, Restoration, and Creation of Wet Woodland

This good practice sheet is intended as a basic guide for landowners and land managers to conserve and enhance the biodiversity value of wet woodland and help secure its long-term future. Wet 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 serious 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:

Barbastelle bat	Spotted flycatcher
Greater horseshoe bat	Turtle dove
Lesser horseshoe bat	Great crested newt
Otter	Small pearl-bordered fritillary
Pipistrelle bat	Creeping bell flower
Bullfinch	Ramsons
Song thrush	



Ramsons

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Habitat Description

Wet Woodland occurs on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, typically found occupying river flood plains. The dominant tree species include alder, birch, and willows. These woodlands are found on soil types ranging from nutrient rich to nutrient poor soils. Wet woodlands are rare and highly fragmented throughout Wales, and often occur as mosaics within other important woodland habitat such as Upland Mixed Ash Woodland and Upland Oak Woodland.



Willow alder swamp

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Factors Affecting Habitat

- Habitat loss and fragmentation, in particular, arising from development along rivers or stream corridors.
- Lack of appropriate management – coppicing and inappropriate grazing leading to a lack of natural regeneration.
- Changes to the hydrology on which wet woodland depends as a result of flood alleviation schemes and development, leading to drier woodlands.
- Alder disease reducing alder populations.
- Water pollution reducing the quality of sites.
- Invasion by introduced non-native species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam that reduces the ecological value of woodland sites.

Good Practice

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

- Leave small areas of wet woodland, and the wettest parts of larger wet woods unmanaged due to the difficulty of carrying out operations without damage, except for the removal of exotic species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. Ash may sometimes dominate an alderwood due to its ability to regenerate by seed under lower light levels and may also need to be controlled.
- Encourage the natural regeneration of trees and shrubs by fencing of areas of woodland to prevent overgrazing and allow the ground vegetation to re-establish. Some light grazing is acceptable as it is a natural part of the ecology of wet woods.
- 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 is best carried out between October to March.
- Encourage partial cutting of wet woodland at infrequent intervals for firewood and other local markets. Willow and alderwoods will sprout vigorously after cutting. Systematic management of wet woods for wood production is not usually a realistic option.
- 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, seek advice 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 may 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. 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 where stock grazes. Pollarding should only be carried out on young trees

under 50 years. A coppiced system is generally the most appropriate at 20-25 year intervals, although alder is best coppiced at intervals of between 10 and 20 years.

- Retain large coppice stumps as these form rich habitats for mosses and liverworts.
- Maintain open areas as glades within the woodland to benefit butterflies and birds. Glades should range from 0.5-2ha in size to encourage as wide a variety of wildlife as possible.
- Maintain a mature habitat by leaving standing deadwood and fallen trees wherever possible providing that this doesn't conflict with issues of public safety. Create habitat piles with fallen branches and logs that will benefit invertebrates and fungi.



Moss and fungi covering a tree in wet woodland

© Paul Glendell-EN

- Encourage birds and bats by erecting artificial nest and bat boxes to mature trees.

Extend areas of Wet 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.
- Adjacent areas of extensive blanket mire and wet ground recently used as arable land or pasture may be suitable for planting.
- 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 common alder, goat willow, grey willow, and downy birch.
- Any new plantings will require careful weeding for 3-5 years 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 within Wet Woodland and/or the immediate surrounding area as this may cause the woodland to dry out.
- Apply any herbicides or pesticides within 10m of Wet Woodland unless spot treating notifiable weeds such as docks, thistle, etc., and invasive species such as himalayan balsam. 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 Wet Woodland.
- Apply any lime, basic slag, calcified seaweed, or other

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.

materials to alter soil acidity. Store any manure, farm wastes, or any other waste on any area of Wet 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

Provision of 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

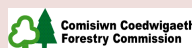
Provides free help and advice on woodland management, timber harvesting, processing, product development and marketing.

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