



# Wet woodland

*A guide to management*



# Wet woodland: A guide to management

Wet woodlands, sometimes referred to as carr, occur on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils and often encompass other important habitats creating a particularly valuable wetland mosaic. They are commonly found on floodplains, alongside rivers and streams, on fens and bogs and in damper areas of other woodland types. Sites are usually characterised by alder, birch and willows.

## Why are they important?

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**The majority of wet woodlands are small in size or feature as localised patches in larger woods and have declined over the last century as a result of sites drying up or being invaded by scrub.**

Published figures for this decline are lacking however current estimates suggest the extent of wet woodland in England is between 50,000 to 70,000 hectares.<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, GLNP habitat data suggests wet woodland makes up 286 hectares of Greater Lincolnshire's landscape.<sup>2</sup>

Wet woodlands support a variety of important species including marsh tit, willow tit, song thrush, and noctule and barbastelle bats. They can provide an extremely rich invertebrate habitat and some areas may provide shelter for otters. Mosses and liverworts also thrive in the humid conditions found in wet woodlands.

Many sites, particularly alder woods, have a history of coppice management (the process of cutting trees down and allowing the stumps to regenerate) which has influenced their structure however in the majority of cases this is no longer undertaken.



*Marsh marigold © Clare Sterling*

Decline of wet woodland in Greater Lincolnshire is largely the result of sites being lost due to clearance, conversion to other land use or lowering of water tables through drainage or water abstraction.

Opportunities for new wet woodland creation in the region have occurred however, through restoration of former mineral workings and Forestry Commission grants.

<sup>1</sup> UK Biodiversity Action Plan; Priority Habitat Descriptions. BRIG (ed. Ant Maddock), 2008

<sup>2</sup> For calculations contact the GLNP



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## Managing your woodland

**The selection of your land as a Local Wildlife Site is recognition of the management that has taken place to date in helping to provide a rich habitat for flowering plants and other species. It does not affect how you choose to manage your land in the future, but the GLNP is keen to support landowners who wish to maintain and improve the wildlife value of their site.**

Wet woodlands are generally suited to a low-intervention management regime however some management can help to maintain conservation and amenity value. The methods you choose will depend on various factors such as the size of your landholding and the time and resources you have available to you.

A key consideration when managing wet woodlands is that water levels need to be maintained as many characteristic species depend on moist or waterlogged soils. If hydrological changes outside the wood are unavoidable then you may need to consider ways to minimise water loss from the woodland itself. Any unusual reductions in flows should be reported to the Environment Agency for investigation.

The majority of sites are likely to be relatively even-aged as a result of past coppice regimes and improving the age diversity of your woodland could benefit a range of species. The nature of wet sites means that reintroducing timber management is likely to be difficult and relatively unproductive. Therefore you may wish to consider a small amount of 'felling to waste' – removing one or two trees and leaving them to rot and decay where they fall, providing a good base for moss growth. Consideration could also be given to pollarding of mature willows as this can extend

their lives almost indefinitely providing continuously renewing habitat for invertebrates and fungi. Standing and fallen deadwood is a key feature of wet woodland and should be maintained where possible. In addition to providing habitat for hole-nesting birds and bats, deadwood is also particularly important for invertebrates.

### Top management tips

- Maintain water levels on site
- Encourage age diversity through management and natural regeneration
- Retain natural clearings/edge habitat where possible
- Leave standing and fallen deadwood as key habitat

In contrast to other woodlands, tree planting is unlikely to be necessary as birch, willow and alder all produce large amounts of viable seed to enable natural regeneration of wet woodland areas. Edge habitat and natural clearings within the woodland can be valuable to ground and shrub dwelling species, including many spiders and invertebrates. Some management could be needed to prevent natural regeneration from colonising open spaces.

Careful consideration and appropriate checks should be carried out before undertaking any tree work during bird nesting season: 1 March to 31 August. The Forestry Commission can advise on whether or not a felling licence may be required.



# Further information



*Wet woodlands are home to a variety of mosses © Fran Smith*

A list of good practice links on managing wet woodland for wildlife is available on our website: [www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/](http://www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/)

Funding to support management work may be available depending on individual circumstances. A list of both current national and local grant schemes is available on the GLNP website: [www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/funding](http://www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/funding)

If you are planning to change, or introduce, management on a site then you may need to consider whether protected species such as bats, reptiles or breeding birds use the site. For more information on this visit: [www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences](http://www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences)

The Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre may also be able to provide useful species data for your site: [www.glnp.org.uk/partnership/lerc](http://www.glnp.org.uk/partnership/lerc)

This leaflet is intended as a general overview only - different sites will have different requirements. It is advisable to obtain bespoke/professional advice before any work is undertaken. This guide should not supersede management plans linked to ongoing grant schemes.

## *Achieving more for nature*

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