

Lowland mixed
deciduous woodland
A guide to management



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The majority of Greater Lincolnshire woodlands can be described as lowland mixed deciduous woodland. They encompass a full range of soil conditions and comprise a mixture of shrub and tree species that shed their leaves annually. These woods are less frequent in the coastal grazing marshes and the fens due to the land type and history.

Why are they important?

Nationally the coverage of woodlands has steadily been increasing over the last hundred years due to planting of new woodlands, both coniferous and broadleaf. Greater Lincolnshire has seen little overall change in this period, and has one of the lowest figures for woodland cover in England.

Published figures vary significantly, but current estimates suggest the extent of deciduous woodland in England is 967,000 hectares.¹

In 2018, GLNP habitat data includes 5,465 hectares of lowland mixed deciduous woodland amongst Greater Lincolnshire's farmed landscape.²

The majority of Greater Lincolnshire's woodlands are dominated by oak and ash but there is an important small-leaved lime component found in central Lincolnshire, being the northern most native limit for this species.

Lowland mixed deciduous woodlands are one of the most diverse habitats found in the county, both structurally, and in species composition.

Large, older trees within woodlands support a wide array of unique microhabitats from the root system to the canopy, and are therefore responsible for a lot of the structure and wildlife diversity that can be found.



Wood anemones © Fran Smith

Standing and fallen deadwood has immense value in this respect too, providing habitat and a food source for many common and unusual invertebrate, fungi, lichen and bryophyte species.

Spring wildflowers are probably their most adored characteristic. Bluebells, wood anemones, wild garlic and others flower early in the year to take advantage of the sunlight before the canopy is dominated by leaf cover.

Due to agricultural influences, Greater Lincolnshire's woodlands are typically small and isolated. This often means their biodiversity can be more acutely impacted by environmental stresses and makes sustainable management challenging.

However, many characteristics typical of woodlands can be attributed to centuries of traditional management. Current economic and amenity use can be compatible with biodiversity success providing all aims are considered together.

¹ Forestry Commission, Woodland Area, Planting and Publicly Funded Restocking, June 2017

² 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, however the GLNP is keen to support landowners who wish to maintain and improve the wildlife value of their site.

Any mixed deciduous woodland can be managed for conservation gain. Low intervention regimes may be suitable, however 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 is for management to be feature specific. This should aim to identify and enhance the valued features of a woodland, such as age structure, future timber trees or deadwood.

Due to their biodiversity and cultural importance, measures to look after older trees should be taken. Practices such as gradually ‘halo thinning’ around their crowns can help ensure their long-term survival by reducing competition, but be careful to avoid sudden and extensive changes which may be to their detriment.

Thinning practices can have many potential benefits and promoting a more diverse ground flora is one of these, as light levels coming through the canopy to the woodland floor are increased.

If clear felling is undertaken, thickets of brambles and nettles that may arise do have ecological merit, offering food, nesting and sheltering opportunities to many species. Broadleaved trees can either be planted or allowed to regenerate

through this layer, and as the canopy recloses the brambles and nettles will begin to recede allowing new opportunity for ground flora.

Fallen and standing deadwood should be left in situ where possible and levels increased after management works. Ideally there should be a large piece of deadwood within sight at any point in the woodland.

Top management tips:

- Have a plan for which woodland features require the most management attention
- Look for opportunities to connect the woodland to the wider landscape

Climbing plants such as ivy or honeysuckle may look restrictive to a tree’s development, however they only use the tree for support and offer good nesting and feeding resources to wildlife.

One of the most beneficial actions for small and fragmented areas of woodland is to expand their coverage and connect them to the wider landscape. This can be achieved by planting new woodland to buffer old ones and through the creation of hedgerows.

Careful consideration and appropriate checks should be carried out before undertaking tree work to avoid damage to any nesting or breeding animals. The Forestry Commission can advise on whether or not a felling licence may be required.



Further information



Deadwood amongst a carpet of bluebells © Luke Hartley

A list of good practice links on managing woodlands for wildlife, as well as information on the threat from pest and diseases and ways to ensure the longevity of your woodlands, is available on our website: www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/lowland-mixed-deciduous-woodland

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

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

The Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre may also be able to provide useful species data for your site: 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.

Achieving more for nature

GLNP Banovallum House, Manor House Street, Horncastle, Lincolnshire, LN9 5HF
T: 01507 528398 E: info@glnp.org.uk www.glnp.org.uk

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