



GLNP
GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE
NATURE PARTNERSHIP

Traditional orchards
A guide to management



Traditional orchards: A guide to management

Traditional orchards are comprised of fruit and nut trees planted in permanent grassland, managed in a low intensity way. To be classed as priority habitat they should include a minimum of five trees with the edges of the crown less than 20 metres apart. While many traditional orchards are associated with historic farmsteads or country estates, a generation of newly planted community orchards has recently emerged.

Why are they important?

Traditional orchards have declined significantly since the Second World War but those that remain are the legacy of both domestic and commercial fruit production before cheaper imports became more widely available.

Current estimates suggest the extent of traditional orchards in England is 15,601 hectares.¹

In 2018, GLNP habitat data for traditional orchards in Greater Lincolnshire is very limited, due largely to a lack of survey effort to date, with just 18 hectares currently on record.²

A key feature of traditional orchards is that they are composite habitats which can include trees, grassland, hedgerows, scrub and ponds. This mosaic makes them a valuable resource for a wide range of birds and mammals as well as supporting fungi, various lichens and plants such as mistletoe.

The habitat variation also supports an array of different invertebrates. Fruit blossom can provide an important early source of pollen and nectar for pollinators while loose bark and crevices in the trees themselves offers important overwintering habitat. In older orchards particularly, saproxylic invertebrates that are dependent on decaying



Pear blossom © Paul Lane

wood often thrive in rot holes and hollow trunks.

Some sites have added cultural significance for preserving local heritage fruit trees which have otherwise largely disappeared with the popularity of more commercial varieties.

The loss of traditional orchards is the result of a combination of factors but includes the development of sites for housing and changes in agricultural practices leading to conversion to arable use. Decline in quality of many sites has also resulted through neglect leading to a loss of biodiversity value. In relatively recent history however, agri-environment schemes and community initiatives have seen the restoration and creation of a small number of orchards across the area.



¹ Natural England, Extent and condition of priority habitats, April 2015

² For calculations contact the GLNP

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Managing your orchard

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.

There are a number of good practice management techniques for traditional orchards, however the methods you choose will depend on various factors such as the size of your site and the time and resources you have available to you.

A key consideration is that management should be low intensity, avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers wherever possible to maximise the biodiversity of the site.

Pruning is an essential part of orchard management as it helps to develop and maintain tree size and shape and stimulate new growth. Both formative pruning of young trees and maintenance of more established ones should aim to keep an open crown which lets in light and air and avoids the crossing over of branches.

Small growth should be cut back to an outward facing bud to encourage new growth away from the centre of the tree. Larger cuts should be made cleanly, taking them back to the trunk or a major branch to enable the tree to heal and reduce the risk of disease getting in.

Pruning of apple and pear trees is traditionally done in winter when the tree is dormant while stoned fruit (e.g. cherries and plums) should ideally be pruned during the growing season to

reduce the risk of infection from fungal disease.

To maintain longevity of your orchard it is important to plant some new trees. Choice of tree may depend on what you want to use the fruit for (e.g. cooking or juicing) and whether you want to include local varieties. Where possible use a mulch to maintain a vegetation-free circle of roughly one-metre diameter around the new tree to reduce competition and help provide essential nutrients.

Top management tips

- Prune stoned fruit trees in spring/summer
- Prune apple/pear trees in winter
- Keep base of new trees clear
- Manage grassland to encourage a diversity of flowering plants

To promote and maintain species-rich grassland on the orchard floor, management should seek to encourage a diversity of flowering plants. Recommended management would be for a hay crop to be cut and removed between July and September with autumn aftermath grazing. Where grazing is not a viable option, the grassland can be maintained through cutting and removal alone, ideally with efforts to vary the cutting height across the site to benefit invertebrates.

The presence of dead or decaying wood provides a very valuable habitat so try to leave some in situ or piled up in a corner of the orchard taking care to remove any that is diseased. Likewise, windfall fruit can provide an important source of food for a variety of birds and invertebrates during the winter so try to retain some if possible.



Further information



Apple trees © Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service

A list of good practice links on managing traditional orchards for wildlife is available on our website: www.glnp.org.uk/your-land/habitat-management/traditional-orchards

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 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

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