

Summer 2009 Newsletter

Mapping Traditional Orchards *Anita Burrough, People's Trust for Endangered Species*



Photo: Chris Richards

The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) is appealing for orchard owners, managers and volunteers to help with their project to map England's traditional orchards.

Traditional orchards, those managed without chemical input, are an iconic and much loved part of the countryside evoking fond memories of bygone days. They also play an important role in maintaining biodiversity and have recently been added to the list of habitats recognised as national conservation priorities in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). Reduced demand for local fruit in the wake of cheaper imports has led to traditional orchards being lost to neglect, development and agricultural intensification. Sadly, English orchards have declined by an estimated 63% since 1950 which has had a detrimental effect on the wildlife this unique habitat supports.

Traditional orchards are hotspots for wildlife, supporting numerous BAP species as well as many classed as nationally rare or scarce. The presence of dead and decaying wood is important for saproxylic invertebrates, several hundred of which occur in orchard habitats. The rare Noble Chafer (pictured) is almost entirely restricted to orchards where its larvae live in the decaying wood of old fruit trees. PTES are lead partner for the Noble Chafer action plan and so have a particular interest in halting the decline of these habitats.



Photo: Matt Smith

Anita Burrough, Orchard Project Officer at PTES says "With the loss of the habitat we face losing rare fruit varieties, traditions, customs and knowledge, in addition to the genetic diversity represented by at least 1800 species that are associated with the habitat."



Photo: Anita Burrough

Existing information about the amount of traditional orchard habitat remaining in England is out-dated, so for the past two years PTES has been mapping traditional orchards in the main fruit growing belt of England. Throughout the next two years, thanks to funding from Natural England and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, PTES are embarking upon the grand task of extending this survey to the whole of England. A national inventory will be produced, detailing the current extent, distribution and condition of traditional orchards. This

will support the habitat action plan, forming a baseline of what remains and helping to focus conservation action and prevent further losses in the future. The resource will be available to everyone interested in traditional orchard conservation and is already being used to assist a variety of orchard-related projects where the data is available. PTES are also working to

Sussex Biodiversity Partnership

c/o Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woods Mill, Henfield, West Sussex, BN5 9SD.

01273 497551

www.biodiversitiesussex.org

raise awareness of the importance of buying local fruit to support these habitats, and encourage correct management of existing and neglected orchards.

In East Sussex, 303 individual traditional orchards have been identified from aerial photographs, covering an area of 330 hectares. Work in West Sussex is in the process of being completed. Volunteers are always needed to help survey these orchards and owners asked to tell PTES about their orchards.



Photo: Sussex Wildlife Trust

To get involved or request further information please contact Anita Burrough by email anita@ptes.org, or by phone 020 7498 4533. Further information on the Traditional Orchard Project can be found from www.ptes.org/orchards. **people's trust for endangered species**

Back to Black - the struggle to save the rare Black Poplar *Fran Southgate, Sussex Otters and Rivers Partnership*



Photo: Neil Wyatt

In 2008 Wakehurst Place, Kew who house the Sussex Black Poplar Nursery, were kind enough to supply Forest Research with cuttings taken from the 34 Sussex Black Poplar *Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*, only 33 of which now survive as mature trees. It has been known for some time that of around 7000 surviving Black Poplar in Britain, most are extremely closely related, having been propagated from cuttings. Forest Research found that in Sussex we really have only five trees (or five genetic clones), three of which are male, and two of which are female.

So why is the Black Poplar our rarest native timber tree and still so threatened? Black Poplars were a popular timber tree until the 19th Century, when faster growing varieties were brought in from abroad. From this point onwards there is no known evidence of a Black Poplar reproducing without hybridising with non-native trees. Even before this, centuries of woodland clearance on floodplains, drainage and development had reduced the Black Poplar to a point where it was a tree mostly planted as cuttings from a parent tree - sustaining its limited gene pool.

It is quite possible that the Black Poplar was never common; however it would have been widespread and found within floodplain woodlands in the distant past. The Sussex Black Poplar Working Group is therefore trying to find locations where its natural floodplain woodland habitat can be restored so that it has a chance at least to reproduce naturally.

For more information about Black Poplar or floodplain woodlands visit the Sussex Otters and Rivers Partnership website <http://www.sussexotters.org/>

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas *Laurie Jackson, Sussex Biodiversity Partnership*

Sussex Biodiversity Partnership is embarking on an exciting new approach to conserving biodiversity in Sussex. 75 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) have been identified, which represent the greatest opportunities for creating and restoring Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats.

The activities in these BOAs will be reviewed over the coming year to enable identification of projects and partnerships that will secure conservation action and contribute to the targets of the BAP. For further information see <http://www.biodiversitysussex.org/> or email lauriejackson@sussexwt.org.uk

Otterly Brilliant Volunteer Required *Fran Southgate, Sussex Otters and Rivers Partnership*

After an absence of nearly 40 years in Sussex, otters are starting to make a slow comeback, with individuals migrating into the area to search for new territory on an increasingly regular basis. It seems timely then to set up a team of dedicated volunteers who can keep an eye open and an ear to the ground for their imminent return.



Photo: Hugh Clark/Sussex Wildlife Trust

If you regularly walk near a wetland or river and would like to be trained as a Sussex otter spotter, we'd love to hear from you. Sussex Otters and Rivers Project is holding regular training days for local volunteers. For more details see www.sussexotters.org or email fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk

News

East Sussex County Council Farewell and best wishes to Dr Alex Tait who has recently retired as County Ecologist at East Sussex County Council, and congratulations to Dr Kate Cole who succeeds him in this role.

South Downs National Park Congratulations to all those who worked towards the announcement that the South Downs will be Britain's 15th National Park.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust The trustees of Froglife and the Herpetological Conservation Trust have agreed to merge the two existing organisations to form one single organisation. Details and timescales have not been finalised, and the two organisations will continue to exist as separate entities but will be working increasingly closely with each other to a common set of goals.

Funding Deadlines

- SITA Small Grants Scheme (grants of £250 - £5000) **15 June 2009**.
- SITA Enriching Nature Programme (grants up to £175000) **24 June 2009**.
- Biffaward Flagship Grants (grants up to £500000) **1 July 2009**.
- Action Earth Grants (grants up to £50) **31 July 2009**
- Veolia Environmental Trust (grants of £25000 - £40000) **31 July 2009** (for expressions of interest).

Look out for

- The new **Sussex Biodiversity Partnership website** <http://www.biodiversitysussex.org/>
- **England Biodiversity Strategy - Climate Change Adaptation Principles** <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdf/biodiversity/ebs-ccap.pdf>
- **Natural England's Green Infrastructure Guidance** http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/Product.aspx?ProductID=cd_a68051-1381-452f-8e5b-8d7297783bbd

- **The Feasibility and Acceptability of Reintroducing the European Beaver to England**
http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NECR002_tcm6-10287.pdf
- **Migrant Butterflies and Moths** - Butterfly Conservation are continuing their summer time survey for the migrant Humming-bird Hawk-moth and Painted Lady butterfly. Be sure to report any sightings <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/>



Upcoming Events

June 7: Open Farm Sunday events will be held throughout the UK to enable people to learn more about farming. Search for an event near you on the website <http://www.farmsunday.org/ofs/home.eb>

June 7: A Springwatch festival will be held in Stanmer Park with family activities and a chance to talk to representatives from organisations including RSPB, South Downs Joint Committee, Sussex Wildlife Trust and local groups.

July 4: The Royal Entomological Society holds its first Insect Festival in York. The Festival will feature traders, exhibitors, natural history societies and lectures for all those with a fascination for insects. http://www.royensoc.co.uk/events_ifest_body.php

August 16-21: The 10th International Congress of Ecology will be held in Brisbane, Australia. The theme is Ecology in a Changing Climate, and ecologists from around the world will explore how global climate change has impacted and will further impact ecosystems and the services they provide to human communities.

September 1-5: The 2nd European Congress of Conservation Biology will be held in Prague. The theme is From Science to Practice, and aims to explore ways in which communication can be improved between conservation biologists, policy makers and land managers.

September 4: Creating a new prosperity: Fresh approaches to ecosystem services and human well-being. A seminar at The Royal Geographical Society, London to draw together elements of five preceding trans-disciplinary seminars on ecosystem services

Is there something we should know about? Got an article you would like us to include?

Email Laurie with the details if you would like something included in a future newsletter. The deadline for submissions for the next edition is 21 August 2009.

Laurie Jackson
Conservation Officer-Biodiversity
Sussex Biodiversity Partnership
 Woods Mill
 Henfield
 West Sussex
 BN5 9SD.

Telephone: 01273 497551
 Email: lauriejackson@sussexwt.org.uk