

# Wet Woodland



## Description

Wet Woodland occurs on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, usually with Alder, Birch and Willow as the main tree species. It is found on floodplains, as successional habitat on fens, mires and bogs, along streams and hill-side flushes, and in peaty hollows. Wet Woods frequently occur in mosaic with other woodland types and with open habitats such as fens.

Wet Woodland combines elements of many other ecosystems and, as such, is important for many plants and animals. The high humidity favours Bryophyte growth. The number of invertebrates associated with Alder, Birch and Willow is very large and even quite small seepages may be valuable. There are often large amounts of deadwood, and its association with water, including log jams in streams, provides specialised habitats not found in Dry Woodland types. Wet Woodland provides cover and breeding sites for Otter, Water Vole, Noctule Bat and Willow Tit. While few rare plant species depend on Wet Woodland, there may be relict species from former open wetlands on the sites.

## National Status

There are no precise figures for the total extent of Wet Woodland in the UK, but in the late 1980s the Nature Conservancy Council estimated the total extent of this type in ancient semi-natural woodland to be about 25,000–30,000ha. The area of recent Wet Woodland may be at least as large again. Thus, a crude estimate of the total Wet Woodland area in the UK is 50,000–70,000ha. In Yorkshire, surveys have found 343ha, but this is only a small proportion of the real extent.

## Local Status

This type is well represented in the Barnsley area, particularly in streamside areas of Alder or Willow, of which there are 67 examples. There are 18 areas of carr woodland with Worsbrough Reservoir, Elsecar Reservoir and Gunthwaite Dam the best examples, ten examples of wet areas within woodlands and one of scattered Willows. Some 28 of these sites are included in the Natural Heritage Site (NHS) register.

## Legal Status

Some Wet Woodlands that include habitats identified under Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive are protected.

National forestry policies include a presumption against the clearance of any broadleaved woodland for conversion to other land uses, and in particular seeks to maintain the ecological interest of ancient semi-natural woodland. Felling licences will normally be required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by the Forestry Authority. Management of semi-rural woodlands has to be in accordance with guidelines published by the Forestry Authority to receive felling licences or grant-aid.

The sites in Barnsley identified as Natural Heritage Sites have a presumption against planning permission for change of use. Individual groups of trees may be protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) or may be within a Conservation Area.

## Links with other Action Plans

- SAP2 Bats
- SAP3 Water Vole
- SAP4 Otter
- SAP14 Great Crested Newt

### **Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline**

- Clearance and conversion to other land uses, particularly in woods recently established on wetland sites.
- Cessation of management in formerly coppiced sites may encourage succession to drier woodland types.
- Lowering of water-tables through drainage or water abstraction, resulting in change to drier woodland types.
- Inappropriate grazing levels and poaching of soil, leading to a change in the woodland structure and ground flora impoverishment.
- River and flood control projects, preventing natural change.
- Poor water quality due to pollution.
- Invasion by non-native species such as Himalayan Balsam.

- Air pollution affecting Bryophyte and Lichen communities.
- Wet Woodland trees such as Alder are increasingly affected by diseases.
- Climate change, potentially resulting in changes in the vegetation.

### **Current Local Action**

- A number of sites have been listed in the Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as Natural Heritage Sites, recognizing them as locally important sites with a presumption against development.
- The South Yorkshire Forest Project includes a number of sites.
- Survey of Elsecar Reservoir Wet Woodland.

### **Proposed Local Action**

- Provide an inventory of Wet Woodland sites and identify ownership.
- Identify new areas to create Wet Woodland.
- Encourage landowners to leave deadwood within woods where appropriate.
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit.
- Extract any past records, survey and monitor for Grass Snake.

### **BMBC Planning Policy Actions**

- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.
- Encourage the creation of new habitat through the requirement made under Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9, to incorporate biodiversity enhancements into development wherever possible.
- Ensure that Local Development Framework (LDF) policies are in place to protect native Wet Woodlands.
- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.
- Designate Natural Heritage Sites (NHS) and declare Local Nature Reserves (LNR) on appropriate areas of Wet Woodland habitat or instigate other appropriate measures for their protection.

### **BMBC Development Control Actions**

- Consider the impact on native woodlands when assessing planning applications.
- Enforce Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) as appropriate.
- Take opportunities through the planning system to restore or create Wet Woodlands. Explore possibilities of long-term management agreements.
- Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on Wet Woodland, that loss or damage is avoided and that opportunities for enhancement or creation are considered in relevant planning decisions.
- Encourage a review of Permitted Development Rights that currently allow potentially damaging recreational activities for 14 days per year – such as 4-wheel drive trials.
- Through planning control or other land use consultation processes, allow no further loss of areas of Wet Woodland and seek opportunities to enhance existing areas and create new areas through approved development.
- Encourage development control teams to use planning conditions and Section 106 agreements to secure improved Wet Woodland management related to new development.

### **BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions**

- Barnsley MBC countryside sites to be managed so as to contribute to Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Wet Woodland targets.