

Wet woodlands

Wet woodlands occur on land that is waterlogged or seasonally waterlogged soils. They are frequently associated with river valleys, flood plains, flushes and plateau woodlands.

1 Definition

Wet woodlands can be found in a variety of situations where a high water table results from poorly drained or seasonally wet soils. Wet woodland habitats may be identified as containing a range of National Vegetation Classification (NVC) stand types. In Suffolk the following are likely to occur.

- Grey willow - common marsh-bedstraw woodland *Salix cinerea* - *Galium palustre* woodland (W1),
- Grey willow - downy birch - common reed woodland *Salix cinerea* - *Betula pubescens* - *Phragmites australis* woodland (W2)
- Downy birch - purple moor-grass woodland *Sphagnum* sub-community *betula pubescens* - *Molinia caerulea* woodland: *Sphagnum* sub-community (W4c)
- Alder - greater tussock sedge woodland *Alnus glutinosa* - *Carex paniculata* woodland (W5)
- Alder - common nettle *Alnus glutinosa* - *Urtica dioica* woodland (W6)

These stands are found on flood plains as successional habitats on fens and mires, along rivers and streams, by flushes and in peaty hollows. The wet woodlands on the Boulder Clay in Suffolk tend to be considered as part of the ash - field maple - dog's mercury woodland *Fraxinus excelsior* - *Acer campestre* - *Mercurialis perennis* woodlands (W8 in the NVC) and are excluded from this habitat plan. These will form part of the wood pasture/ parkland and mixed woodland plans.

The habitat supports a number of important BAP species in Suffolk. It is believed to be of primary importance for the weevil *Melanapion minimum* and a jumping weevil *Rhynchaenus testaceus*. It is of subsidiary importance for two birds (spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa*



striatus and the song thrush *Turdus philomelos*) and the lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*. Wet woodlands are believed to be used by a number of other BAP species that include a leaf-rolling weevil *Byctiscus populi*, the liverwort veilwort *Pallavicinia lyelli*, barbastelle and pipistrelle bats (*Barbastella barbastellus* and *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and the otter *Lutra lutra*.

2 Current status

2.1 National

This habitat type has been poorly recorded both in Suffolk and

nationally. An estimate for the total area of wet woodland is 50,000–70,000 ha in the national Habitat Action Plan. The Nature Conservancy Council estimated in the late 1980s that nationally there was between 25,000 and 30,000 ha of wet woodland.

2.2 Local

East Anglia is noted in the national context for the concentration of wet woodlands, particularly those on fens. It is estimated that in Suffolk there is less than 100 ha of W5 woodland and 170 ha of flood plain woodlands.

The commonest type of wet woodland in Suffolk is probably the alderwoods, the bulk of which are to be found in the river valleys. These frequently have a history of being coppiced, but are now largely neglected. The strongholds for these woodlands are the Suffolk Broads, the Waveney and Little Ouse Valleys and the Suffolk River Valleys ESA.

Many of the wet birch woods and willow woodlands have developed on open wetland habitats, sometimes after the end of active management.

2.3 Natural Areas

Breckland, Suffolk Coast & Heaths, The Broads, East Anglian Plain, The Fens

3 Current factors affecting the habitat in Suffolk

Wet woodland in the county is affected by numerous direct or indirect factors.

- Recession in low intensity grazing of wetland is increasing the area of wet woodland.
- Fen habitats as they deteriorate frequently develop wet woodland habitats when unmown or undergrazed.
- Direct loss of the habitat through restoration to other land uses (for example fen restoration work).

- Succession causing changes to other drier woodland types brought on by the dumping of silt, cessation of management or changes in water levels.
- Inappropriate or no management causing changes in the structure and flora, leading to poor regeneration and changes in the floristic diversity.
- Loss of disturbance -succession systems due to the loss of natural surface water processes, flooding etc.
- Poor water quality leading to changes in the flora and invertebrate communities.
- Changes in the flow patterns in the land drainage systems causing changes to woodland hydrology.
- Colonisation of the woodland by non-native species for example Himalayan balsam.
- Climate change may have a significant impact on the hydrology and biology of these woods.

4 Current action

- In Suffolk some areas of wet woodland have been given statutory conservation status. Some have been designated within the boundaries of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Others have the additional protection of being within internationally important sites. These include Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and in candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC).
- The Suffolk Wildlife Trust have identified County Wildlife sites (CWSs) which have some protection through the local planning authorities development plans. A number of conservation bodies in the county have reserves that include wet woodland habitats. Tree preservation orders and other policy decisions may also be

responsible for the protection of some woods.

- There is within national forestry a presumption against the loss of broad-leaved woodland to other land uses. Felling licences from the Forestry Authority are usually required if the woods are not covered by plans approved by them. The relevant hydrological policy issues include water level manager plans, Local Environment action Plans (LEAPs), impoundment licences and consents for abstraction and land drainage issued by the Environment Agency.

5 **Action plan objectives and targets**

1 *Improve knowledge of extent, distribution and quality of wet woodlands in Suffolk.*

2 *Identify wet woodlands that may need clearance to restore higher priority habitats.*

3 *Improve the targeting of the Woodland Grant Scheme to assist in wet woodland habitats.*

4 *Maintain the existing extent of high quality wet woodland.*

5 *Initiate measures to achieve favourable condition in 100% of wet woodlands within SSSIs and Special Areas of Conservation, and in 80% of the total resource by 2004. Achieve favourable conservation condition over 70% of the designated sites and 50% of the total resource by 2020 where appropriate.*

6 *Fully restore to site native species 50% of the sub-optimal wet woodlands by 2010 and complete this by 2015 where appropriate.*

7 *Maintain and strengthen populations of key BAP species associated with wet woodlands including, a weevil *Melanapion minimum*, a jumping weevil *Rhynchaenus testaceus*.*

8 *Achieve the favourable management of 25% of wet woodlands by 2005 and of 50% by 2010.*

9 *Develop new wet woodlands.*

10 *Develop favourable conservation status guidance.*

6 Proposed action with key local partners

ACTION	KEY LOCAL PARTNERS	TIMETABLE				
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
A. Policy and Legislation						
Develop Suffolk guidance on the appropriate balance of minimum intervention, coppice and high forest across the variation of the wet woodlands	EN, FC, LAs, SBRC, SWT		*	*	*	*
Encourage the development of forestry/landscape strategies to provide a context for, and to compensate for losses due to, other habitat restoration projects, and to promote the expansion and positive management of wet woodlands	CA, EA, EN, FC, LAs		*	*	*	*
Evaluate implications of water level management plans and LEAPs for the expansion, restoration and management of these woods and seek changes as appropriate	EA, EN, FC, MAFF/FRCA, IDBs	*	*	*		
B. Site safeguard and management						
Designate those wet woodlands approved by the EC as SACs under the Habitats Directive	EN, DETR					*
Ensure that the SSSI coverage of wet woodland sites is adequate through periodic review of the sites in the series	EN					*
Promote the use of long-term management plans (20yr+) by woodland owners aimed at integrating the appropriate diversity of species and structure, to benefit nature conservation, and other management objectives	AW, EN, FC			*	*	*
Continue to support existing agricultural, woodland and landscape schemes and initiatives that benefit wet woodlands. Encourage new schemes in areas not covered by existing ones. Review existing schemes to ensure better management for wet woodlands	CA, EN, FC, LAs, MAFF/FRCA	*	*	*	*	*

ACTION	KEY LOCAL PARTNERS	TIMETABLE				
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Promote and implement the management, compensatory planting where cleared for other habitat restoration, and restoration of wet woodland in all woodlands through e.g. Forest Design Plans	FC, FE, AWP, EN, FWAG, LAs, private owners	*	*	*	*	*
Identify priority areas for woodland expansion, for example around small sites, to connect sites, to restore hydrological zonation of woodland; to create new large floodplain forests, whilst avoiding other priority habitats	CA, EA, EN, FC,					*
Implement relevant priority species action plans, through the integration of management requirements and advice	EN, FA, LAs, SCC	*	*	*	*	*
D. Advisory Develop and promote training on the conservation management of semi-natural woodland including the special features and conditions that apply in wet woods in Suffolk	AWP, EA, EN, FC, LAs, SWT		*	*	*	*
Encourage and provide advice on the marketing and sustainable use of products from wet woods as a means of supporting appropriate management	AWP, FA, LAs	*	*	*	*	*
Provide advice to woodland managers on appropriate management regimes for wet woodland. Include grazing regimes within wet woods and promote the management of deer in areas where they are, or might become, a significant limitation on the regeneration and spread of wet woodland	AWP, EA, EN, FC, MAFF/FRCA, FWAG, LAs	*	*	*	*	*
E. Future research and monitoring Implement systems for recording the occurrence, distribution, management and composition of wet woods	EN, EA, FC, SBRC, SWT		*	*	*	*
Research developing a small suite of demonstration wet woodland sites where detailed structure, process and species monitoring is carried out to complement condition assessments adopted by the statutory agencies	EA, FC				*	

ACTION	KEY LOCAL PARTNERS	TIMETABLE				
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Consider developing a site in Suffolk for the re-creation of flood-plain forest, including both hydrological, wildlife conservation, economic and amenity considerations	EA, EN, FC, LAs, SWT				*	
Implement appropriate surveillance and monitoring programmes to assess progress towards action plans targets	EN, FC, SBRC	*	*	*	*	*
F. Communications and publicity						
Devise a Suffolk strategy for the distribution of appropriate advisory material to woodland managers	EA, EN, FC, LAs			*		
Produce advisory leaflets to fill any significant gaps in the advisory materials	EA, EN, FC, LAs			*		