

## **DANE VALLEY WOODLAND PROJECT**

### **Background**

The River Dane and its tributaries tumble south westwards from the gritstone uplands of the South-West Peak through steep sided valleys lined with oak and birch woodland. The Upper Dane valley on the border between Cheshire and Staffordshire and largely within the Peak District National Park supports an almost unparalleled (in the Peak District) concentration of ancient semi-natural woodlands on largely steep inaccessible slopes and stream sides. These woodlands dominate the local landscape fringing the farmlands, filtering the views and framing the rivers and streams. They are rich in history, wildflowers and woodland birds but are seriously under threat from grazing animals (including deer), and a lack of woodland management. The woodlands are identified in the National and Peak District Biodiversity Action Plan and the Peak District Landscape Strategy and Action Plan as a priority for proactive action, with these plans seeking opportunities for woodland creation as well as enhanced management. The core woodlands are Cheshire Wildlife Trust Wildlife Sites, identified by the Trust as sites of particular importance for wildlife and as foci for positive conservation work. The Dane Valley woodlands are also identified as a priority for positive action by the RSPB and the Forestry Commission, with the latter offering enhanced grant rates within the England Woodland Grant Scheme with the objective of reversing the decline in threatened woodland birds. Natural England has recognised the significance of these woodlands by adopting a landscape scale approach to the negotiation of Environmental Stewardship Schemes in this area. The woodlands are also valued by local people as a source of revenue from game, firewood and grazing but also as a backdrop to their communities and a place for recreation.

The Dane Valley Woodland project seeks to increase understanding of the woodland resource amongst all sectors of the local community including the threats to its future and the conservation opportunities. Through this greater understanding the project aims to achieve sustainable woodland management. The project includes opportunities for local people and volunteer involvement in wildlife survey and monitoring, in historical research and data collection, in practical conservation management connected to the woodlands and in the development of appropriate interpretation. This will sit alongside developing and implementing innovative management plans for the woodlands.

The project takes a landscape scale approach to the conservation of Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and seeks to involve all sectors of the community in the delivery of conservation gains and in achieving a greater understanding of, and involvement in the landscape.

### **Project Aims**

1. To increase understanding of the importance of woodlands in the Dane Valley and the issues surrounding their conservation amongst conservation organizations, landowners, organizations and individuals with shooting rights, local people and visitors to the National Park.
2. To secure favourable management of the woodlands largely through the negotiation of Environmental Stewardship and England Woodland Grant Scheme agreements.
3. To involve local people particularly school children in the management of the woods

## **Project Elements**

### **A). Survey**

- Ecological survey identifying opportunities and constraints to woodland management
- Volunteer bird and bat surveys
- Fungi surveys of woodland and fringing grassland sites co-ordinated by Cheshire Wildlife Trust
- Deer counts
- Survey for non-native invasive species particularly Himalayan balsam and for veteran trees through the use of publicity and leaflets encouraging local people to record these species during the course of their work and leisure activities.

### **B) Land Management Advice/Support & Research**

- Provision of advice to landowners on woodland management including:
  - Help with applications for Environmental Stewardship and England Woodland Grant Schemes;
  - Co-ordination of woodland management work including the development of innovative management techniques and liasing with contractors. We hope that this will develop into an exploration of the benefits of co-operative working between landowners making for example extraction of timber an economic possibility

### **C) Production Of A Deer Management Plan**

### **D) Awareness raising and Education**

- Schools programme
- Interpretation projects
- Programme of walks and talks

### **E) Oral History Project to be co-ordinated by a consultant**

### **F) Historical Research in partnership with volunteers and local history societies**

### **G) Conservation Action including:**

- Construction of bird and bat boxes
- Tree seed collection and growing on
- Tree planting events on the PDNPA land at Danebridge

## **Project Funding**

1. Core work of the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts and the Woodland Trust
2. Individual holding Environmental Stewardship and England Woodland Grant Schemes agreements
3. Heritage Lottery Fund 'Your Heritage' funding for the community elements of the project including survey, historical projects, awareness raising/education and community conservation action

Opportunities for additional funding are also being considered.

## **Project Management/Implementation**

Overall management of the project lies with the Peak District National Park Authority. In practice however management will be overseen by a steering group including representatives from relevant organizations and the local community including landowners.

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