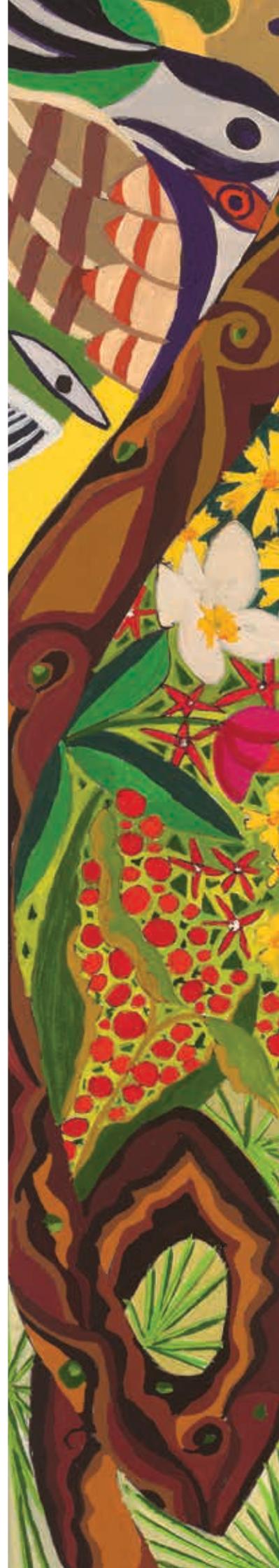


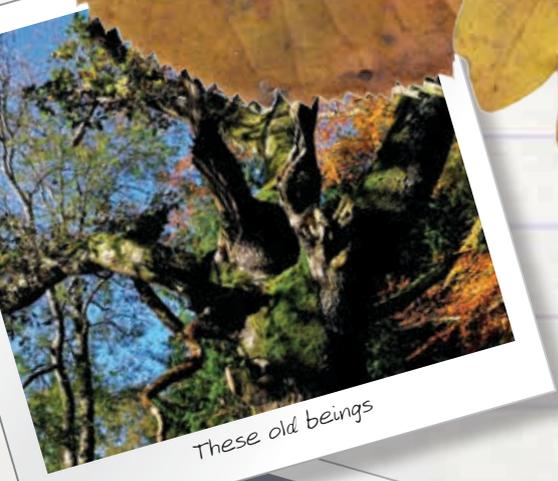
# Natural Environment

*'One Thousand  
Ancient Trees'*





What can they tell us?



These old beings

# One Thousand Ancient Trees

What can they tell us?  
These old beings  
A constant presence  
In the changing landscape  
Home to two ravens  
Swinging and croaking through the air.



Why do they grow here?

Why do they grow here?  
In this mixed mosaic  
Of Chalk and Sand,  
Prickly Poppies  
Shepherd's Needle  
Corn Marigold  
Weasel Shout  
And Night Wing Catchfly,  
Sweet honey for bees  
With long licking tongues.



Who lives here?  
Lapwing feeding in fallow ground  
Grey Partridge nesting in cereal margins  
Yellow Wagtails flitting in open crops  
Turtle Doves hovering in hedgerows  
Waiting for that Fat Bird of the Barley,  
The Corn Bunting.



## 9. Natural Environment

*Our natural resources such as geology and soils, air and water provide the fundamentals of life itself; both for the rich diversity and abundance of wildlife that thrives across the AONB, and ourselves. We need to better understand, promote and value all that the natural environment provides us with, to conserve and enhance it and address the increasing uncertainties caused by climatic, economic and social change.*

9.1. Special characteristics and qualities that makes this AONB special, as a whole, with regards to the natural environment:

- Main geological features are chalk plateaux, scarp and dip slopes, clay with flint deposits and valleys - both dry and occupied by rivers and streams.
- Rich ecological character - expressed in the diversity of habitats including the distinctive species-rich chalk downland, clear fast flowing chalk streams and rivers, ancient and calcareous woodlands and rare chalk heath and water meadows.
- Clear water supporting important fish and other aquatic species that are sensitive to changes in water quality.
- Extensive tracts of arable land supporting some rare farmland birds and arable plants.
- Cranborne Chase is particularly notable for its unusually high proportion of ancient woodland within a chalk landscape. This is largely due to its historic status as a royal hunting area.
- Areas of woodland actively managed by coppicing.

### Aim

9.2. We want the sustainable management of all natural resources in the AONB. The AONB will be a place where wildlife thrives and is able to move freely across the area. The natural environment will be resilient to the effects of climate change.

### Achievements to date

- **South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project** - The project concentrates on working with farmers to provide habitat for six bird species, which have suffered the worst declines (see Appendix 16). Farmers are encouraged to adopt measures that provide nesting habitat and foraging areas. There are other wildlife benefits, particularly for rare arable plants and the brown hare. Funded until 2004 by Natural England work is currently funded by Wessex Water. Since 2009, 85 farmers have received advice on creating and managing habitat for farmland birds. Over 600ha of habitat has been created specifically for farmland birds and rare arable plants. The Project Officer appeared on the BBC Countryfile programme to promote the project in 2013.
- **Arable Plant Distribution 2013** - Report on rare arable flora 'hotspots' together with indications of where good arable flora communities are likely to be present.
- **Stepping Stones Project** - In collaboration with the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and North Wessex Downs AONB, creating wildlife networks that link good chalk grassland habitats. This is a three-year project involving communities, farmers, biologists and volunteers across 60,000 hectares surrounding Salisbury Plain.
- **Training of Volunteers** - Around 50 volunteers have been trained to provide the Environment Agency with early warning of water pollution at 24 sites; to identify signs of Ash Dieback caused by the fungus *Chalara fraxinea*; and to identify and record ancient,



veteran and 'notable' trees through the Hampshire County Council funded Ancient Trees Project. Over 150 trees have been recorded in five parishes.

## Key issues

- **Fragmented and Isolated Habitats** - The Government is committed to halting the loss of wildlife and expects AONB Management Plans to deliver a part of the solution. It wants natural systems and networks that are fit for purpose, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people<sup>17</sup>.
- **Farmland Wildlife** - Many species of birds, butterflies, plants and mammals that were once common across the AONB are in decline.
- **Valuing the Benefits We Receive from the Natural Environment** - There is a need to prove that the natural environment provides benefits of measurable value to society and to improve understanding of that fact to all.
- **Land Management Practices** - Some land management practices can lead to a decline in wildlife and reduce soil and water quality.
- **Alien Species, Pests and Pathogens** - These increase costs for farmers, foresters and landowners and increase uncertainty.
- **Climate Change** - Ongoing climate change may pose a threat to the characteristic landscapes and natural beauty of the area as habitats evolve.

## The Issues Explained

9.3. The natural capital<sup>18</sup> that the AONB area holds in trust is very high in quality and quantity. The chalk grassland and rivers, with their rare wildlife, are of international importance. A significant proportion of the woodland is of ancient origin and the area contains some of the best stands of ancient trees in Europe<sup>19</sup>. The extensive tracts of arable land support rare arable plants and are a stronghold for farmland birds.

9.4. As stated in 'Making Space for Nature', the creation of a landscape that has 'bigger' wildlife sites of 'better' quality, more species and individuals, and is 'better joined up', is a key aspiration in this Plan<sup>20</sup>. The majority of the land needed to achieve this is currently under some form of agricultural, forestry or game management. It is vital that habitat improvement and creation becomes a part of viable land management systems and businesses.

9.5. During the last few decades, management regimes that were focussed solely on creating higher crop yields have led to habitat change and the loss of wildlife. Since the 1970s, the UK populations of many of our farmland birds have been in steep decline. In the south west, farmland bird numbers fell by 45% between 1970 and 1994; and a further 8% between 1994 and 2007. Populations of rare arable plants have declined dramatically over the past 60 years. They are the most critically threatened group of wild plants in the UK.

## Ecosystem Markets Task Force

9.6. On 5th March 2013, the Ecosystem Markets Task Force published its Final Report. The report states the business case for why nature matters. It makes practical recommendations for both Government and business, where interventions would assist in the creation and development of new markets, enhancing opportunities for growth that also benefit the environment. The report affirms that business is often unaware of its true reliance on nature, and that a new approach is needed to maximise opportunities and manage future risks.

<sup>17</sup> Defra (2011) Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services

<sup>18</sup> The natural environment of the AONB is of very high quality. This is sometimes referred to as its 'natural capital'. (see Appendix 11)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ancient-treehunt.org.uk/ancienttrees/findingthem>

<sup>20</sup> Lawton, J.H., Brotherton, P.N.M., Brown, V.K., Elphick, C., Fitter, A.H., Forshaw, J., Haddow, R.W., Hilborne, S., Leafe, R.N., Mace, G.M., Southgate, M.P., Sutherland, W.J., Tew, T.E., Varley, J., & Wynne, G.R. (2010) Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network. Report to Defra.



## Report to Defra from the Ecosystem Markets Task Force - March 2013

*“Business is often unaware of its true reliance on nature. Natural systems provide us with food, shelter, water, energy, health and air and protect us from costly floods. In many cases, nature’s resources and services can provide all these dividends indefinitely, provided we look after them”.*

The Task Force presents five priority business opportunities that deliver substantial benefits for both nature and business:

- Biodiversity Offsetting: securing net gain for nature through planning and development
- Bio-energy and anaerobic digestion on farms: closing the loop by using farm waste to generate energy
- Sustainable Local Woodfuel: active, sustainable woodland management supporting local economies
- Nature-based Certification & Labelling: connecting consumers with nature
- Water Cycle Catchment Management: integrating nature into water, waste water and flood management

‘Realising nature’s value: The Final Report of the Ecosystem Markets Task Force’.  
March 2013

[www.defra.gov.uk/ecosystem-markets/files/Ecosystem-Markets-Task-Force-Final-Report-.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/ecosystem-markets/files/Ecosystem-Markets-Task-Force-Final-Report-.pdf)

- 9.7. There is an increase in the number of alien species, pests and pathogens entering the natural environment. Currently there are around 30 new pests and diseases affecting livestock, and 15 affecting trees in the UK. These are having a harmful effect on the natural environment, our places and our livelihoods. Several alien species, pests and pathogens (specific figures unavailable) are affecting the natural environment of the AONB.
- 9.8. Climate change continues to influence the natural world. The AONB’s climate is likely to become warmer and wetter in winter, and hotter and drier in summer. There will be more extreme weather events resulting in droughts and floods. County councils now have a duty to manage surface water flood risks<sup>21</sup> and this is likely to involve the AONB team. Uncertainty and severity in the weather system poses very real threats to our way of life and our environment.
- 9.9. Although it is possible to reduce the effects of climate change with positive action, significant changes will still occur. This is because past emissions have already raised carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. The area needs help to adapt to the impacts of climate change in a way that helps to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. Further climate change information and the range of mitigation and adaption measures are shown in *Appendix 9*<sup>22</sup>.

21 Flood and Water Management Act 2010

22 Responding to the impacts of climate change on the natural environment: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase (NE116), Natural England, March 2009 <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/52003?category=10003>



## Objectives and Policies

| OBJECTIVE  | POLICIES  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>NE A</b> <i>Coherent and resilient ecological networks are established and maintained across the AONB</i></p>  | <p><b>NE1</b> Work with partners, such as relevant Local Nature Partnerships, to initiate, encourage and support landscape scale projects which seek to enlarge and link important habitats that are fragmented or isolated, restoring those that are damaged or degraded, and improving the quality of the surrounding environment.</p>              |
|  | <p><b>NE2</b> Support landowners, managers, communities and volunteers to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity including veteran trees, ancient woodland, species-rich grassland, arable landscapes, rivers and wetland areas as vital components of the AONB landscape, alongside more uncommon habitats such as still waters and marshes.</p> |
|  | <p><b>NE3</b> Encourage agri-environment schemes and specific prescriptions that deliver the improvements in habitat quality consistent with the establishment of a coherent and effective ecological network.</p>  |
| <p><b>NE B</b> <i>The benefits and services provided by the natural environment are understood and accurately valued by decision-makers at all levels.</i></p>                                     | <p><b>NE4</b> Research and distribute relevant information that will provide decision-makers with the accurate and appropriate data for better decision-making.</p>   |
|  | <p><b>NE5</b> Support research programmes, such as Wessex BESS<sup>22</sup>, which enable option evaluation and decision-making.</p>  |
| <p><b>NE C</b> <i>Everyone, particularly business and community leaders, have a better understanding of the potential effects of climate change in the AONB and the actions they can take.</i></p> | <p><b>NE6</b> The AONB Team will record its own carbon footprint, in order to encourage others to do the same, by the end of 2015 and undertake action to reduce it.</p>  |
|  | <p><b>NE7</b> Promote and work with relevant organisations on climate change mitigation and adaptation measures that are appropriate for the AONB landscape and communities</p>   |
|  | <p><b>NE8</b> Promote good practice for climate change adaptation to businesses in the AONB.</p>  |
| <p><b>NE D</b> <i>All pests, pathogens, and invasive non-native species causing harm in the AONB are being effectively addressed</i></p>   | <p><b>NE9</b> Work with partners and landowners, such as the Wildlife Trusts, the River Avon Invasive Species Forum, the Source to Sea project and others to prevent the importation of pests and pathogens and initiate, encourage and support action that will reduce the harm caused by alien invasive species.</p>                                |

(Additional Information: Natural Environment Appendix 29)







“People make  
the land.  
It's all about  
relationships”

*Tracy Adams, Farmland Bird Project*