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Apples, apps, and habitat maps

Survey reveals state of British orchard habitat

A report released today by the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) has found that of around 1 000 hectares of remaining traditionally managed orchard identified in Wales, over a third of sites (35%) are neglected or threatened, and only 7% are in excellent condition. This survey adds significantly to the national inventory of traditional orchards in the UK and knowledge about this habitat.

Traditional orchards provide excellent conditions for wildlife to thrive and are home to at least 1 800 species of wildlife. However, neglect, pressure from land development and changes to agricultural practices, including the use of pesticides and herbicides, led to an estimated 94% reduction in traditional orchard habitat in Wales during the last half of the 20th century and a 90% decline in England.

Following the completion of a similar survey in England, wildlife charity PTES was commissioned by Countryside Council for Wales (now part of Natural Resources Wales) and funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to record and map the number and condition of traditional orchards in Wales. Analysis by PTES reveals that only 7% of Wales' remaining traditional orchards are in excellent condition, 58% good and 35% poor. In their previous study of English traditional orchards published in 2011, PTES announced a similar state of affairs, with nearly half of England's remaining orchards in poor condition (45%), and 9% in excellent condition with the remainder good.

Steve Oram, Orchard Biodiversity Officer at PTES, who led the project, says: "This is a brand new data set for Wales that will help people use and conserve our remaining traditional orchards. By producing local food and cider we can benefit woodpeckers, bullfinches and hundreds of other species associated with traditional

orchards. If this habitat continues to disappear, we face losing not only all that wildlife but also rare fruit varieties, traditions, customs and knowledge.”

Hilary Miller, Natural Resources Wales, adds: “Traditional orchards often provide important areas for our wildlife and in particular pollinators such as bees and butterflies which have declined in recent years. Mapping out the orchards will help us to protect them and preserve local species of apple and other fruit which are an important part of our cultural heritage.”

The year-long project in Wales has involved 120 local volunteers who have visited about 20% of the orchards, recording the species, age and condition of the fruit trees – and contributing some 123 volunteer days to the project. The owners of 145 orchards also responded to questionnaires, providing additional valuable information at a local level.

A new mobile app will make the task of adding sites and collecting data easier, and is open to anyone with access to a smartphone. The *Traditional Orchard and Fruit Tree Survey* app can be downloaded for free from your usual sources.

The inventory project is now underway in Scotland, adding to the data for the UK and providing a practical resource for preserving and managing these habitats.

- Ends -

For more information, to arrange interviews, or obtain images please call Jane Bevan or Susannah Penn at Firebird PR on 01235 835297/ 07977 459 547

Notes for Editors

- The traditional orchard inventory for Wales is available to download from Natural Resources Wales or can be viewed online at www.ptes.org/orchardmaps. The English inventory is also available to download from Natural England.
- A UK Traditional Orchards Habitat Action Plan Group has been set up and work is underway on developing the Action Plan. Natural England and the National Trust are leading this early work, with the support of the People’s Trust for Endangered Species and other organisations such as Common Ground, the Ancient Tree Forum, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the other UK statutory conservation agencies. This UK HAP Group has recognised that producing an inventory of traditional orchards is a very high priority.
- Characteristically traditional orchards consist of a low density of trees set in semi-natural, mainly herbaceous, vegetation. They are cultivated using low-intensity methods such as the

absence of pesticides and the use of grazing animals instead of machines for mowing. This important habitat is becoming rare as we rely increasingly on imports to provide cheap fruit throughout the year. This has left the traditional orchard habitat, an intrinsic feature of the English countryside, at risk from neglect, intensification of agriculture and pressure from land development.

- The value of the Welsh and English inventories is demonstrated by the range of practical ways in which they will be used including:
 - Habitat restoration and creation
 - Identifying orchards in local planning policies and development control
 - Integrating habitat information and species distribution to support conservation action
 - Working in partnership with orchard owners to provide advice and practical support
 - Targeting Environmental Stewardship scheme options for management of traditional orchards

Traditional Orchards

Did you know...?

- The apple is Britain's national fruit and botanically are members of the rose family
- There are over 2,000 varieties of cooking and eating apple in Britain, and hundreds more of cider-making apples
- You could eat a different variety of English apple every day for over 6 years without eating the same one twice
- Domestic apples can trace their origin to NW China and Kazakhstan
- Fruit and vines have been grown in the UK since the Roman occupation and traditional orchards represent a much loved part of our British heritage offering a great range of fruit, places of tranquillity and clues to our past culinary tastes and culture
- Peasgood's Nonesuch, Sheep's Snout, Bastard Rough Coat and Slack my Girdle are just a few of the many genuine traditional British apple names

About PTES

- The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species is a UK conservation charity created in 1977 to ensure a future for endangered species throughout the world. Working to protect some of our most threatened wildlife species and habitats, it provides practical conservation support through research, grant-aid and educational programmes, including wildlife surveys, publications and public events
- The Trust owns and manages two of its own habitat reserves – Briddlesford Woods, an area of ancient woodland on the Isle of Wight and Rough Hill, a traditional orchard in Worcestershire
- More information about PTES can be found at www.ptes.org
- Registered Charity, number 274206

About Natural Resources Wales

- Our purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used, now and in the future. For more information please visit: www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk