

## Introduction to the Wood Pasture and Parkland survey

Wood pasture is an important habitat, positively teeming with life and vital to preserve. If you can't picture what this habitat looks like, you are not alone! This is an understudied, historically overlooked habitat, consequentially general awareness of its existence let alone its value, is low.

We are starting an ambitious new project to map and assess the condition of Wood Pasture and Parkland, and we need your help.

### What is Wood Pasture?

Characterised by big old trees growing in open pasture-land, wood pastures are often derived from medieval hunting forests and old wooded commons. The splendid trees they often contain are some of the oldest living things in our country, providing a direct link with bygone landscapes and homes to many rare and threatened species

Wood pasture is a mosaic habitat which can vary quite a lot depending on historic and current management. The main, essential attributes of wood pasture are:

- **Veteran and/or ancient trees.** There should be trees that have grown in an open habit, which tend to show good lateral branch development or have sunlit areas of the trunk. Veteran trees should contain dead and decaying wood, in the canopy, the trunk and fallen.
- **An open ground layer,** such as grassland, heathland and/or woodland florals. Ideally with grazing animals or a history of grazing.

The density and species of trees and scrub can vary but the presence of veteran trees, an open ground layer are essential components. Where the site is in good condition there will be multiple generations of trees for future continuity, with at least some veteran trees or shrubs.

### Why is it valuable?

Veteran trees are important in and of themselves, but in addition to this they provide food and home for thousands of species, including some of the country's rare and threatened. The high levels of naturally occurring deadwood in these trees supports an exciting habit for specialist fungi, which in turn encourage saproxylic invertebrates, then develops wonderful rot holes used by nesting birds, roosting bats and all manner of other wildlife. Food, shelter and anchorage are provided which support a complex food web and an incredible array of species.

The wider ecology of how veteran trees grow specifically in wood pasture and parkland habitats adds another layer of complexity still. The habitat consistency they have provided over such a long time makes them a vital refuge for multitudes of rare and local species, making this habitat effectively un-replicable in any reasonable time period. For information about what makes this habitat so unique and special for wildlife, please see the 'Wood pasture ecology and value' guide as part of this survey pack.

As with many others habitats, wood pasture is facing many threats. Development, overuse, conversion to arable farmland, climate change and fragmentation to name but a few.

## Why now?

Recently the interest in wood pasture and parkland has been gaining momentum as its contribution to deadwood habitat among others are recognized. In 2014 Natural England published an inventory of wood pasture sites across England. It compiled this using old maps and aerial photography amongst other sources, but this work has not yet been ground-truthed.

Our task is to ground truth the inventory and provide condition assessments for the sites mapped.

## Outcomes of the survey

*The first step of improvement is always measurement. You cannot improve what you cannot measure*

This survey aims to record the extent and condition of wood pasture and parkland habitat across England. This information will become a baseline, to which all future conservation efforts can be compared. It will also be able to guide the efforts of future conservation of this habitat in a comprehensive and informed manner.

By taking part in this survey you are helping us achieve this assessment, contributing to a central record of where these habitats can be found and what condition they are in. This data will enable us to share best practice management advice to individual sites, as well as assess the nationwide condition and connectivity of this habitat.

With many of the species assemblages in wood pasture being the product of a long wood pasture legacy, and often having relatively low ranges of dispersal, it is important to see how well connected this habitat is nationwide, and where the condition of some sites might threaten this connectivity.

The data produced will help landowners and the general public alike recognize the value of this habitat not only for its culture, history and beauty, but as a vital and unique habitat for some of our most threatened species.

## The survey

The survey itself is remarkably simple to conduct. In essence, it requires you to do a structured walk around a site, taking notes of what you see. We will ask you to stand at five separate points and write down information about what you can see around you from that point. Then we will ask you to note the presence or absence of certain features as you walk between these five survey points, these walks provide the transect data. The result is what we call a 'W' survey, with five point surveys and four transects between. There are full instructions on how to complete the survey.

As for the questions themselves, mostly they require counting features such as trees, or estimating percentage cover of grass. We do ask for information about the presence of certain species, but most of these are well known such as ivy, bramble, willow and bracken. We have included a species identification guide to help with this.

## This is a trial stage

Crucially, at this point in time we are trialing the survey process itself. We are testing this survey in your area to make sure we have got the right formula before we roll this out across the rest of England.

For this reason, it is so important to hear your experiences in using it. Please fill in the feedback form as honestly and fully as you can, and send it back to us with your survey forms. Both forms are equally important at this stage.

The feedback you provide us will shape how we run the survey in the future. This means together we can form a survey that is both informative and usable; the only way to make this survey a success.