



Natural Beauty and Heritage
Biodiversity

5. Policy Framework - Biodiversity

5.3 Biodiversity

Background

5.3.1 Biodiversity (biological diversity) simply refers to the variety of life on earth. There is enormous diversity in Dorset, due largely to the fact that the county is underlain by an extremely varied geology. This has created a varied range of soils, over which numerous habitats have developed, each supporting a range of plants and animals.



Adonis blue butterfly.

An Exceptional Wealth of Wildlife

5.3.2 The Dorset AONB ranks among the very best for wildlife, with an extremely high proportion of land designated for its wildlife importance. Non-designated areas also contain valuable semi-natural habitats.

5.3.3 A significant part of the AONB is of international importance for wildlife. There are three main designations:

- Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated under the EC Birds Directive in recognition of their internationally important bird life and their habitat.
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated under the EC Habitats Directive for internationally important habitats and their species.

- Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention.

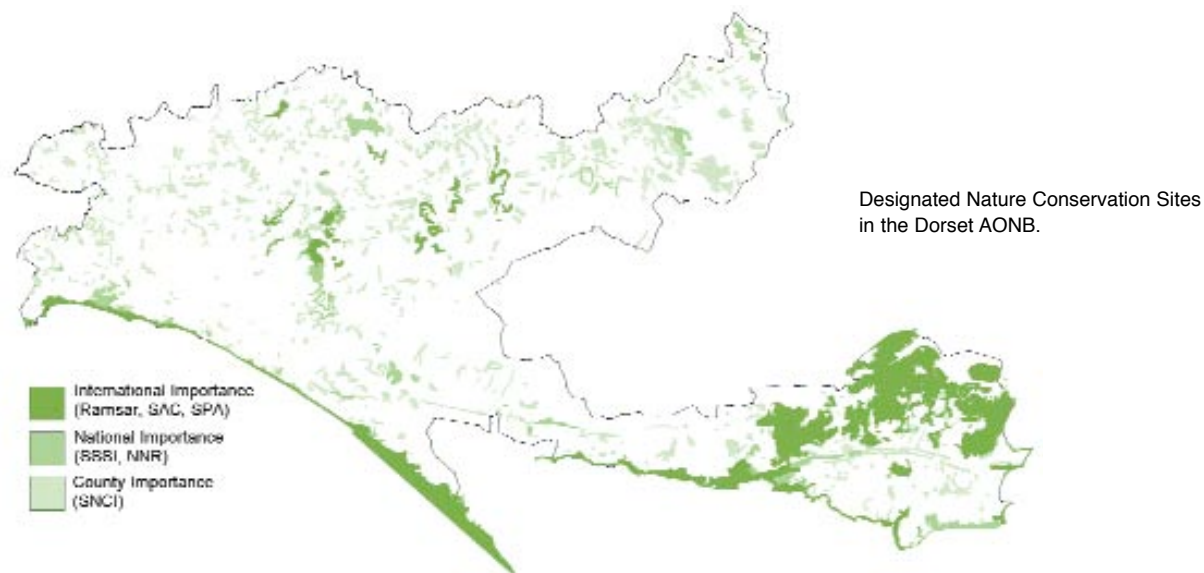
5.3.4 SACs include 7 designations, which cover 70 sites, 4.3% of the AONB. They include the Cerne and Sydling Downs, the West Dorset Alderwoods, Bracket's Coppice, Chesil and the Fleet, the Dorset Heaths and Dunes, the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs and St. Aldhelm's Head to Durlston Head.

5.3.5 There are three Special Protection Areas covering 76 sites (5.1% of the AONB): Poole Harbour, Dorset Heathlands and Chesil and the Fleet. Ramsar sites cover 5.3% of the AONB.

5.3.6 Seven National Nature Reserves (NNRs) lie wholly within the AONB - Stoborough Heath, Hartland Moor, Studland Heath, Arne Reedbeds, Hambledon Hill, Hog Cliff and the Valley of the Stones. A small part of Holton Heath NNR also falls within the AONB. NNRs cover 1.1% of the AONB.

5.3.7 The AONB contains 70 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) which cover 8.6% of the area, or 98.1km². SSSI's are of national importance, but may also include features of international significance. They are designated for their wildlife and/or geological interest.

5.3.8 Outside SSSIs there are many other fragments of semi-natural habitat such as ancient woodlands, grasslands and small pockets of heathland which receive no statutory protection. Some of these have been selected as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest or SNCI's. There are 625 covering 59 km² or 5.2% of the AONB. There is also one Local Nature Reserve (LNR) within the AONB.



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5.3.9 Dorset contains 23 UK BAP Priority habitats (out of a total of 45) - this figure excludes marine habitats, which lie outside the boundary of the AONB.

Current Trends

5.3.10 The state of Dorset's biodiversity is dependent upon a number of factors. Changes may result from local management operations or broader national or international issues such as climate change or agricultural policy.

5.3.11 Over the last decade there have been a number of changes. Some species have colonised the area - little egrets first bred at Brownsea Island in 1996. Other species have increased such as the Adonis blue butterfly, Dartford and Cetti's warblers, nightjar and woodlark and otter. However, many species have declined including arable plants, marsh fritillaries, lapwing, grey partridge and corn bunting - farmland species declined nationally by 36% between 1970 and 1998.

Key Issues

5.3.12 The key issues affecting biodiversity in the AONB include:

- Protection: only 8.6% of the AONB is protected by SSSI legislation. Therefore most of the semi-natural habitats within the wider countryside are not covered by this legislation.
- Habitat loss and fragmentation caused by agricultural intensification, forestry, mineral extraction and development.
- Lack of management, often due to changing economic climate, leading to loss and degradation of habitats. E.g. poor markets for timber and livestock leading to lack of woodland management and grazing.
- Changes in river and floodplain management have resulted in habitat degradation and flooding in some areas.



A flooded water meadow.

- Access and recreation pressure causing damage to fragile habitats and disturbance to key species.

- Awareness: there is a need for more improved partnership working to make better use of resources, and public involvement in biodiversity initiatives, particularly habitat restoration schemes. Biodiversity needs to be better integrated into environmental, social and economic strategies to ensure they are adopting a sustainable approach from the outset.
- Poor water quality, both fluvial and coastal, resulting from both diffuse and point source pollution, e.g. siltation, nutrients, pesticides etc.
- Global warming may affect the viability of some species and affect river flows and sea levels.
- Species issues: there have been major declines in many species associated with farmland, whilst introduced and invasive species (e.g. mink, grey squirrels, signal crayfish, Himalayan balsam) may damage native species and habitats (e.g. ancient woodlands planted with conifers). Use of seeds / stock not of local provenance may result in loss of genetic integrity.
- Funding: grant schemes are limited and do not always cover real costs incurred by farmers and land managers. Many smaller local authority grant schemes are no longer available.
- Advice: there is a need for improved and more integrated provision of advice and information to landowners and managers on appropriate management and best practice - face to face visits, information / publications and demonstration sites and events.
- Monitoring: because of the importance of the resource more data should be collated to monitor trends and use as indicators of the health of the AONB. This should include SSSI condition monitoring and farmland birds Public Service Agreement targets.

Key Opportunities

5.3.13 The key opportunities for biodiversity in the AONB include:

- PSA targets for SSSI's and farmland birds provide nationally comparable figures that can be used as indicators for monitoring the health of the AONB. Other organisations such as Butterfly Conservation have developed national monitoring programmes.
- There are opportunities to develop landscape or ecosystem scale initiatives for biodiversity, to buffer and link often highly fragmented

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semi-natural habitats.

- A number of biodiversity partnerships, including the Dorset Biodiversity Partnership and Purbeck BAP Steering Group have been established to strengthen the co-ordination and targeting of conservation activity in the county. There is a major opportunity to support these partnerships in the delivery of biodiversity targets within the AONB.
- CAP reform and the review of agri-environment schemes with development of the new Entry Level Scheme may offer improved resources for management and conservation of biodiversity.
- Local produce initiatives may offer increased markets making management of grassland and heathland habitats more viable.
- Recent legislation (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) should lead to improved protection and management of nature conservation interest, for example through environmental assessment requirements and targets / protection for statutory sites.

Current Activity

5.3.14 Numerous organisations and individuals are working to deliver biodiversity targets in the AONB in a number of ways:

- **Co-ordination.** At both the county and local level, biodiversity work is co-ordinated through an officer working to a steering group. There are currently two plans which cover the AONB - the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy (co-ordinated by Dorset Wildlife Trust) and the Purbeck Local Biodiversity Action Plan (co-ordinated by the Purbeck BAP Steering Group). There are also a number of themed working groups such as the Dorset Heathland Forum, Dorset Woodland Forum, Joint Dorset Marine Committee, Dorset Coast Forum, Chesil and the Fleet Advisory Group, Poole Harbour Study Group, Wetland Working Group, Local Nature Reserve Project and the Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) Project. It is important to ensure that the work of these existing groups can contribute to the implementation of this plan.
- **Monitoring and recording.** DEFRA and its agencies e.g. English Nature, Environment Agency, etc are required to carry out specific monitoring as part of their statutory duties e.g. SSSI condition assessments, water quality. English Nature have a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to ensure that 95% of

SSSIs are in favourable condition by 2010. Currently, 80% of SSSIs within the AONB meet the PSA target. The DEFRA agencies fund a variety of organisations to carry out additional monitoring and recording where required. A co-ordinated survey and monitoring programme for Dorset has yet to be established, although this may be developed as part of the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy. The Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) already carries out specialist surveys, manages and stores ecological data, and is in a good position to carry out this role. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) also carry out a wide range of biological monitoring, some of which is in the AONB. In addition, surveys and monitoring are carried out by a wide variety of national and local agencies, organisations, companies, societies and clubs e.g. Dorset Bird Club and Butterfly Conservation.

- **Management.** Most national organisations have reserves in the area, and carry out direct conservation management. A variety of other private land managers, companies and public bodies carry out conservation management on their land. Management agreements with land managers through agri-environment and English Nature schemes also significantly contribute to conservation management. English Nature carries out management on SSSIs to meet PSA targets within the Dorset AONB. The Environment Agency is also carrying out a range of management work including Water Level Management Plan implementation on the Lower Frome and Piddle and fisheries work on the Stour. Land owners and managers are supported by a number of advisors or ecologists from DCC, FWAG, DWT and DAAS or conservation teams that carry out practical management such as the DCC Ranger Service. Species conservation work is also carried out by a variety of organisations such as the Herpetological Conservation Trust (reptiles and amphibians), Butterfly Conservation, Dorset Bat Group and Dorset Otter Group. Some land managers employ ecologists to advise on estate management, such as the The National Trust, British Petroleum and the Lulworth Estate. Mineral sites now have restoration plans under planning law to recreate habitats. Significant areas of the AONB have Heritage Management Plans for Inheritance Tax Exemption. Heritage Lottery funding has been brought into the area for heathland management through the Hardy's Egdon Heath Project (Tomorrow's Heathland

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Heritage). Marketing the benefits of produce from sensitively managed heritage sites could support their future management.

- **Enjoyment and understanding.** A wide variety of statutory and non-statutory organisations offer young people and adults an opportunity to enjoy and understand more about wildlife.
- **Wider benefits.** Conservation activities play a wider role in the social and economic well being of the AONB, such as health benefits, local employment, wildlife tourism and public participation in environment management. The quality of the environment is a key element of the overall quality of life.

Related Policies and Strategies

5.3.15 The need to protect the variety of life at a global level was recognised at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992, at which over 150 heads of state signed 'The Convention on Biological Diversity'. This recognised the importance of conserving biodiversity, and committed signatory states to developing and implementing action plans. These have been produced at a number of geographical levels, which feed up and down into each other:



- National: *'Working with the Grain of Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for England'* (DEFRA, 2002)
- National: *'Space for Nature: Landscape Scale Action for Woodland'* (Woodland Trust, 2002)
- Regional: *'Action for Biodiversity in the South West: a series of habitat and species plans to guide delivery'* (prepared by a wide partnership, 1997)
- Regional: *'Rebuilding Biodiversity'* (South West Wildlife Trusts, April 2003)
- Regional: *'South Central Regional Action Plan for Butterflies and Moths'* (Butterfly Conservation, 2000)
- County: *'Dorset Biodiversity Strategy'* (Dorset Wildlife Trust working with partners, 2003)
- Local: *'A Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Purbeck'* (Purbeck Biodiversity Steering Group, 1998)

5.3.16 Policies, strategies and legislation relating to biodiversity include:

- *'EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora'* (92/43/EEC) 1992
- *'EC Council Directive on Water Frameworks'* (2000/60/EC)
- *'Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981'* (as amended)
- *'Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000'*, Section 4: greater protection for SSSIs
- *'England Forestry Strategy'*, (Forestry Commission, 1999)
- *'England Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 (South West Region)'* (MAFF, 2000)
- *'Planning Policy Guidance 9 - Nature Conservation'* (ODPM)
- *'Dorset Heaths Natural Area Profile'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'Isles of Portland and Purbeck Natural Area Profile'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'Wessex Vales Natural Area Profile'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'The South Dorset Coast Maritime Natural Area Profile'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'South Wessex Downs Natural Area Profile'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'Blackdowns: A Nature Conservation Profile'* (English Nature, 1998)
- *'Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan'* (Poole Harbour Steering Group, 1995)
- *'Poole Harbour Management Policies'* (Poole Harbour Co-ordinating Group, 1991)
- *'Dorset Heathland Strategy'* (Dorset Heathland Forum, 1990)
- *'Dorset Coast Strategy'* (Dorset Coast Forum, 1999)
- *'Making Purbeck More Special: a Strategy for the Purbeck Heritage Area'* (Purbeck Heritage Committee, 2002)
- *'Lyme Bay and South Devon Shoreline Management Plan'* (Posford Duviver, 1998)
- *'Portland Bill to Durlston Head Shoreline Management Plan'* (Mouchel, 1998)

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5.3.17 Dorset AONB Policy Framework - Biodiversity

Policy Aims

- The restoration, conservation and sustainable management of habitats and biodiversity in the AONB as guided by national, regional and local biodiversity strategies.
- Reverse the decline of priority species as guided by national biodiversity policy and the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the importance of biodiversity.
- Ensure that biodiversity is recognised within all policy as a cornerstone and key indicator of environmental health and environmental capacity.
- Make best possible provision for likely impacts of climate change due to global warming.

Policy Objectives

- B1. Promote the conservation and viability of key habitats such as heathland, ancient semi-natural woodland, grassland, freshwater and coast and associated species in the AONB.
- B2. Ensure healthy and stable populations of species dependent upon general farmed countryside and mixed habitats such as gardens, parklands and urban areas within the AONB.
- B3. Help promote thriving coast and marine ecosystems able to support sustainable harvesting and fisheries.
- B4. Ensure appropriate management of statutorily designated sites and locally important wildlife sites in the AONB.
- B5. Seek opportunities for the good management, conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity with co-operation of landowners and land managers.
- B6. Increase awareness and understanding of wildlife and the importance of integrating biodiversity conservation policy within wider decision making.
- B7. Support and promote measures to manage introduced invasive species where they are causing harm, as identified in Biodiversity Action Plans.

- B8. Monitor and provide information on the status of key habitats and species in the AONB.
- B9. Implement the UK and Purbeck Biodiversity Action Plans and Dorset Biodiversity Strategy in the AONB.
- B10. Create additional coastal and freshwater habitats to take account of the likely losses from coastal erosion and sea level rise.
- B11. Develop integrated initiatives which demonstrate the links between biodiversity, landscape quality and economic potential.
- B12. Understand changes in biodiversity and an ongoing assessment of the likely effects of climate change.