



eastofenglandbiodiversityforum

biodiversity means a richer environment, better health, an improved economy, enhanced communities

Saving biodiversity requires both coordinated policy and comprehensive action



The stronghold of the increasingly uncommon four spotted moth is in the East of England.

What exactly is biodiversity? It's the sheer variety of life forms, encompassing all mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects and other invertebrates, plants and fungi, down to micro-organisms such as bacteria and viruses. Biodiversity is found in all parts of the environment – both rural and urban. From parks, community greenspaces and Local Nature Reserves to large-scale land and seascapes, biodiversity provides us with a vital and vigorous resource from which we all benefit.

While many habitats have been lost and numerous species put under pressure, or genetic stocks damaged, in the East of England we also have much to celebrate. Here biodiversity is still strong – but despite this the need for protection remains. For protecting and enhancing biodiversity in the East of England is critical to:

- Maintaining healthy functioning ecosystems
- Addressing the historic losses of species and habitats
- Mitigating against the impacts of climate change
- Securing sustainable flood risk and coastal management
- Retaining an attractive region to support economic development
- Creating enduring communities where people want to live and work
- Enhancing our quality of life

This is why biodiversity is so important

The quality of biodiversity, both in terms of species and their habitats, determines the health of the natural world's ecosystems.

An ecosystem's strength is important for people too, as robust systems deliver more services. For instance, flood attenuation occurs naturally in the floodplains where river systems have remained untouched. Thus protection of biodiversity aids the overall resilience of ecosystems, which duly offer more protection to society. Ultimately, improved biodiversity brings economic and social benefits and contributes to enhanced life quality.

To reap the benefits we can derive from biodiversity calls for a coordinated policy and comprehensive action plans.

The tide must turn

It's critical the decline in biodiversity be arrested. For such declines destroy the structure and functions of natural ecosystems. Increasing habitat fragmentation and decreases in species additionally affect the structure and functions of natural ecosystems upon which we depend. If we do not take action we run the risk of losing one of our greatest natural resources. Something that adds incredible value to people's lives will be run down, or simply disappear. Instead, we can do something positive to combine our efforts and deliver a win for biodiversity and a win for the region.

This is why it is vital that any national biodiversity policy be reflected in local action projects on the ground. For taken together these projects deliver concerted regional action, directly contributing to national objectives.

Biodiversity conservation

Following the UN's Earth Summit in 1992, along with another 150 other signatories, the UK ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This was the world's first treaty providing a legal framework for biodiversity conservation. Although involved in numerous conservation projects well before this date, in 1994 the UK launched its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) as the first formal step towards implementation of CBD. The England Biodiversity Strategy followed this in 2002. Now the UK BAP comprises Species Action Plans (SAPs) and Habitat Action Plans (HAPs), all aimed at conserving and enhancing our most threatened biodiversity.

These plans represent the policy backdrop to enable county-level and local organisations to direct action to the habitats and species that are threatened and need most help in the UK. At the local level, biodiversity partnerships have developed their biodiversity action plans setting out what is needed to deliver both national and local priorities. To date, over 162 Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) have been adopted.

The UK BAP and England Biodiversity Strategy recognise that biodiversity is ultimately lost or conserved at the local level. And it is the enthusiasm and support of people in their local communities and workplaces, that will bring about a truly sustainable society.

The East of England Biodiversity Forum –

working together to promote conservation and enhancement of the wealth of wildlife within the East of England.

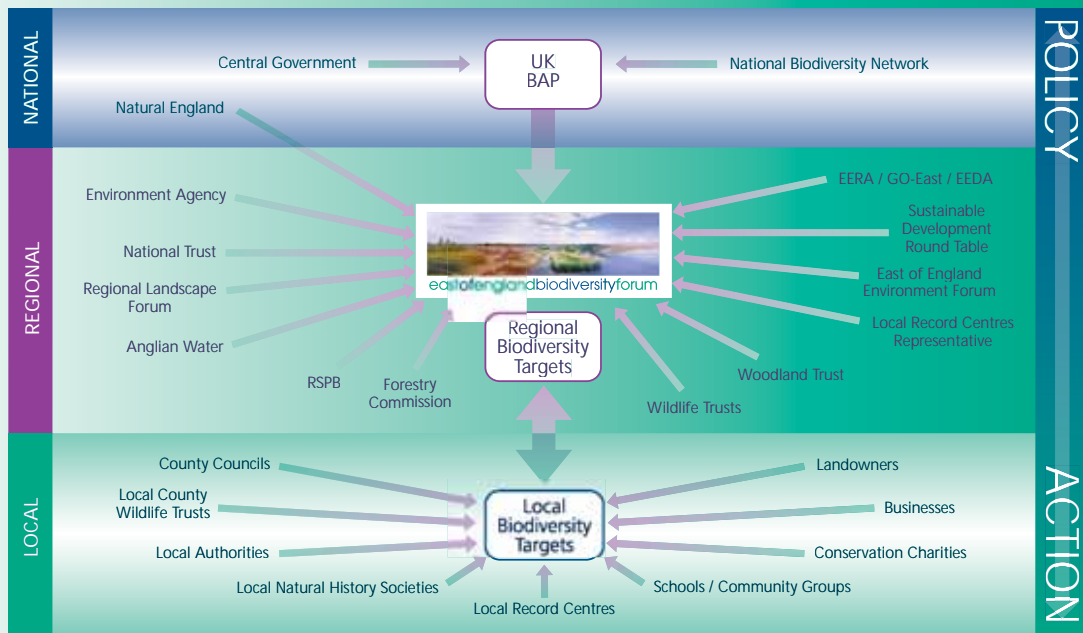


Barton Hills
chalk grassland,
Bedfordshire.

The role of the Biodiversity Forum – a vital bridge between national policy and local activity

Comprising national and regional agencies, county groups, conservation NGO's, professional and amateur experts the Forum, as acknowledged biodiversity experts, contributes to regional policy and sustainable development by providing input as and wherever required. Operating in association with the East of England Environment Forum, the Biodiversity Forum oversees seven vital and interrelated tasks.

The biodiversity protection ecosystem



The Forum, a vital bridge – linking 'top-down' national policy to 'bottom-up' local action, steering the region's contribution to UK biodiversity

- Influencing policy – national, regional and local
- Providing a regional biodiversity audit
- Stimulating projects
- Overseeing the mapping of regional biodiversity
- Establishing regional biodiversity targets
- Communicating success and good practice
- Supporting local action

Policy

The East of England biodiversity asset

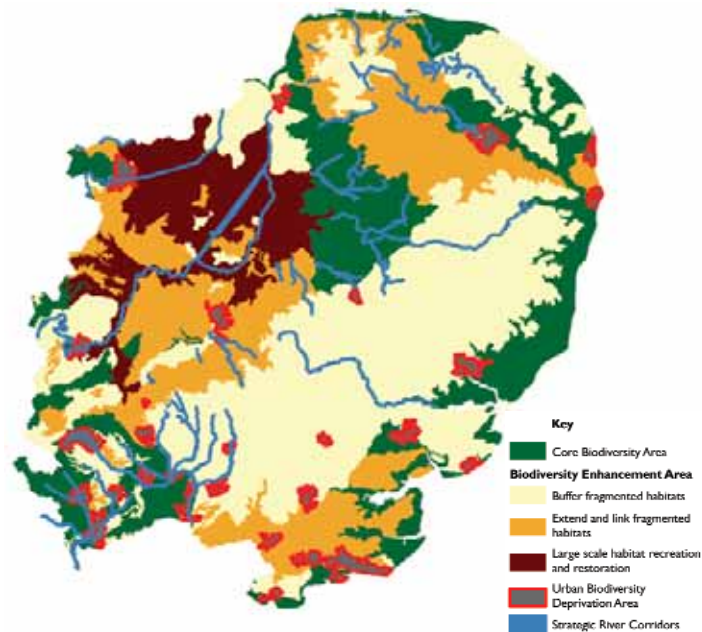
The East of England has a rich and diverse natural environment with a high proportion of some of the UK's rarest habitats and species. The region, with its dramatic and often sharp contrasts, ranges from a long low-lying coastline containing windswept beaches and dunes, and sheltered estuaries teeming with birds, to its large-scale open arable landscape of the peat Fens to the north, extensive lowland heathland in its midst, to the more intimate rolling landscapes of mixed woodland and hedgerows in the south of the region.

Scattered across it are considerable areas of European and international significance, as well as over 500 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) representing almost 7% of its land area, plus three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's). There are also over 3000 county wildlife sites, numerous local nature reserves, allotments and parks. Within these sites, are to be found hundreds of Red Data Book vulnerable species. Clearly, it is a region that is very well worth protecting.

To achieve this end, the East of England Biodiversity Forum has extracted a comprehensive programme of Regional Biodiversity Targets from the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. In addition, the Forum has also accepted the nationally derived Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets:

- i. To reverse the long-term declines in woodland and farmland birds by 2020
- ii. To bring 95% of all nationally important wildlife sites (SSSI's) into a favourable condition by 2010

East of England Biodiversity Network



Regional areas representing biodiversity opportunity and threat are identified and inform local activity

Given the high levels of growth outlined in the East of England Plan, the Forum produced this regional biodiversity network map (left). It highlights the opportunities for protecting, enhancing, restoring and re-creating habitats across the entire region.

It identifies which areas can help to re-establish the connectivity of habitats within it, thus conserving existing biodiversity, or restoring and regenerating biodiversity in areas suffering a deficit. This regional map also provides a basis for more detailed maps to be prepared at the local level.

Policy

Achieving PSA targets will be tough

The East of England's trends in biodiversity, habitat fragmentation and functioning ecological systems give cause for concern. Further, the performance on PSA targets is unsettling. Woodland bird species continue to dwindle, currently down by 9% over the last decade. Farmland bird populations are declining even more dramatically, with numbers down by 47% since 1993. Other key biodiversity indicator species such as native butterflies are undergoing similar rates of collapse. Worse still, 23% of the region's SSSI's are currently in an unfavourable condition. The need for effective action is paramount.

Why 2010?

The European Sixth Environment Action Programme target is to protect and restore the structure and functioning of natural systems and halt the loss of biodiversity in the European Union by 2010.



The Local Biodiversity Partnerships –a diversity of action on the ground across the region

To secure progress on the ground Local Biodiversity Partnerships (LBAPs) have been set up, comprising statutory agencies, NGO's and local authorities in every county. Each of these six county groups has numerous initiatives underway throughout the East of England Region. In the following pages we illustrate the range of these LBAP activities by presenting a small selection of the spatial planning activities, habitat improvement schemes and species protection programmes that are currently underway.



Brecks heathland
re-creation,
Brandon,
Suffolk.

Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership

River corridors

It has long been recognised that habitats along river margins provide valuable wildlife corridors. The partnership has projects underway along the courses of the Rivers Ouse and Flit to improve these links.

Barton Hills – chalk grassland

Management of chalk habitats using traditional breeds of livestock is not only proving effective, but also stimulating public interest and acting as a useful vehicle for education.

Wet woodland

At Flitwick Moor, the partnership's activity has already returned 40 hectares of this 126 hectares wet woodland to a positive condition.



Across the country the water vole has undergone a drastic decline. In the East of England, populations do remain but are dispersed. Every county has a water vole SAP and all are working to reverse this trend.

Heather Webb

Partnership Coordinator, Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Partnership,
Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford MK42 9AP
01234 228063
www.bedsbionet.org.uk

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership



If well managed a fen ditch is an invaluable habitat for invertebrates – Freshwater HAP

Fens

Since September 2005, a Fenland Drainage Ditch Officer has been in post charged with raising the profile of wildlife associated with drainage ditches and promoting wildlife-sympathetic ditch management.

Orchards

Orchards are extremely good habitats for bryophytes, invertebrates and birds. Working with the East of England Apples and Orchard Project, this initiative is seeking to safeguard traditional orchards in the county by commissioning survey work and organising orchard skills workshops.

Reedbeds

In Cambridgeshire, Wicken Fen and the Great Fen Project are large, landscape-scale projects designed to restore the fenland habitat. Together they aim to create 6700 hectares of fenland over the course of the century, thus contributing hugely to the wetland BAPs.

Fabiola Blum

Partnership Coordinator, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership,
Cambridgeshire County Council, Box ET 1001, Castle Court, Castle Hill, Cambridge CB3 0AP
01223 718573
www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/biodiversity/partnership/

Essex

Biodiversity Project

Reedbed

The 1.2 hectares St Peters Well reedbed on Mersea Island, which is fed from natural springs, is one of the largest in the Blackwater estuary SSSI. Along with an annual management plan, work is now underway to secure improved water retention and water movement

around the site. This will safeguard the future of the reedbed and counter the effects of periodic inundation by salt water as well as encourage reedbed expansion.

Scrub clearance in this vulnerable coastal habitat is protecting a rare moth



Fisher estuarine moth

Skippers Island in Hamford Water is the key site in England for this rare moth and is the

main population centre for its foodplant, hog's fennel. It is a low-lying island, threatened by the coastal flooding resulting from sea level rise, so substantial areas of scrub have been cleared to allow the fennel and moth to move upslope away from the immediate threat.

Stag beetle

Effort is being dedicated to monitoring this beetle's populations in semi-natural habitats, such as hedges, across the county.

Gen Broad

Coordinator for the Essex Biodiversity Project, Essex Biodiversity Project, c/o Joan Elliot Visitor Centre, Abbots Hall Farm, Great Wigborough, Colchester, Essex CO5 7RZ
01621 862981
www.essexbiodiversity.org.uk/projects.htm

Hertfordshire

Biodiversity Partnership



This oak-hornbeam wood at Bricket Wood Common is undergoing protection and is an excellent example of a semi-natural woodland HAP in action.

Hornbeams

This extremely hard wood (hence its alias 'hardbeam') had a supreme reputation as fuel, hence possibly its concentration around London and is a distinctive feature of south Essex and south-east Hertfordshire woodland. Its growth is being actively encouraged at a number of sites.

Reedbed creation

A new reedbed, aimed at providing habitat for the bittern, has been created at Rye Meads. The new wetland includes ditches, shallows, pools and deeper areas of water that will constitute ideal habitats in which bitterns can feed and roost. This not only contributes towards the local bittern and wetland action plans, but also the UK BAP priority species requirements.

Water voles

The Hertfordshire Water Vole Project has conducted surveys in 2004 and 2005 along 40kms of rivers, ditches and lake banks. Overall, 16% of sites showed signs of water vole activity with strongholds remaining on the River Chess, River Mimram, River Purwell and parts of the Lea Valley. During this period American mink, that predate on these voles, have also been recorded on all main rivers in Hertfordshire.

Catherine Wyatt

Hertfordshire Biodiversity Officer, Hertfordshire Biodiversity Partnership, c/o East Herts Council, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, Herts SG13 8EQ
01992 531478
www.hef.org.uk/nature/biodiversity

Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership

Guidance and mapping initiatives

This partnership recently developed a biodiversity supplementary planning guidance that has now been formally adopted by nearly every local planning authority in the county. It has also prepared a biodiversity opportunity map of Norfolk that identifies areas of strategic importance for the creation of an ecological network.

Coastal

Norfolk supports a rich array of coastal habitats, including saline lagoons, littoral chalk, sand dunes, and maritime cliffs and slopes. Local action plans for all these habitats have been prepared and the Coastal BAP Topic Group is actively engaged in promoting them.



Hedge and farm margin HAPS

Field margins

Farmers are being encouraged to establish 6 metre field margins, benefiting both farmland birds such as the corn bunting, grey partridge and skylark, plus wild flowers such as the corn marigold.

Also, a "Farming and Biodiversity Practitioners'

Forum" has been established, to promote best practice and encourage the exchange of information among the farming community. The launch of the new agri-environment schemes, with their specific reference to biodiversity and BAP habitats and species, has underlined the importance of this forum.

Scott Perkin

Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership, Planning and Transportation Dept,
County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, Norfolk NR1 2SG

01603 222112

www.norfolk-biodiversity.org

Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership

Heathland

The partnership has been involved with both vital preparatory work and actual heathland re-creation schemes across the county.

East of England Heathland Opportunity Mapping Project

The Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership steered this mapping/modelling project with the Suffolk Biological Records Centre. The modelling is informing the future of heathland by identifying priority areas for heathland re-creation. Whilst the mapping is indicating where best to target resources and efforts.

Breckland heath re-creation

Various heathland re-creation schemes are already underway across the county. In north-west Suffolk, English Nature and the Forestry Commission have been the key players in returning almost 400 hectares of Thetford Forest to Brecks heathland.

Dingy skipper

Butterfly Conservation, with the support of the BAP partnership, undertook a survey of past colonies and sites. Forest Enterprise is aware of the remaining breeding areas in King's Forest and the rides supporting dingy skipper have been designated as conservation rides with a management prescription.



A real success story – careful hosting of these rare birds means they have the most substantial northerly breeding territory in Europe.

Mary Norden

BAP Development Officer, Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership, SBRC, Ipswich Museum, High Street,
Suffolk, IP1 3QH.

01473 400251

www.suffolkcc.gov.uk/e-and-t/countryside

Now's the time for action

It is vital that regional and local activities continue if the condition of the East of England's biodiversity is to improve. Of course this will take time, money and effort. All three of these vital ingredients are in short supply so the Forum, along with its county partners, are always in need of support.

You can help

Your help and support are vital to ensure that our region's environmental heritage is preserved and the East of England decline in biodiversity is halted. If you think you can contribute, have ideas for your own local projects, or you'd like to participate in any of the county initiatives, just contact the Forum's Regional Biodiversity Coordinator, or any of our county partners.

REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- Integrate biodiversity within regional policies, programmes and strategies
- Engage with, and support, the work of the East of England Biodiversity Forum

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

We are especially keen to speak to decision-makers in regional and local government and environmental organisations. We would like to encourage you to:

- Support your local biodiversity partnership and find ways of building their needs into your community strategies
- Manage your own land holdings for biodiversity benefit
- Consider biodiversity needs when undertaking planning, health and education decision-making

LANDOWNERS, BUSINESSES AND PEOPLE

There are many ways in which landowners and their managers, or businesses with estates or sited in key locations, as well as private individuals can help biodiversity throughout the East of England:

- Just supporting partner organisations in managing a local 'wildspace' could be a great service
- Improving your own garden or grounds to become more wildlife-friendly would be beneficial
- Helping to monitor specific species could be invaluable
- Participating in the BBC's Breathing Places scheme would be worthwhile
- Even learning about your local birds, flowers and insects and teaching youngsters about them could help safeguard the future

If you want to help, all you need to do is contact the Forum or your county partnership and they will advise you on the next step.



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Working for Wildlife

Catherine Weightman,
East of England Biodiversity Coordinator,
East of England Biodiversity Forum,
c/o East of England Development Agency,
The Business Centre, Station Road, Histon,
Cambridge CB4 9LQ

Telephone: 01223 484643



East of England Development Agency