

Coniferous woodland

WHAT IS CONIFEROUS WOODLAND ?

Coniferous woodland is defined as those areas of woodland, with less than 20% of broadleaved tree species. Native pine forests of Scots pine are restricted to Scotland, so all areas of coniferous woodland in Durham are of non-native species. Most coniferous woodlands occur as a planted monoculture or single species blocks, as commercial forests.

The close planting and uniformity of species results in limited biodiversity interest. Although, the main habitat of red squirrels in the north of England is commercial forestry plantations. Goshawk and honey buzzards, in some parts of the UK, make use of them for nesting and coniferous plantations in the uplands are an important part of black grouse habitat.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

Coniferous woodland is found throughout the UK and represents about 7% of landcover. There are large areas of coniferous woodland in East Anglia and other lowland areas but the major forestry plantations occur in the north and west e.g. Kielder Forest in Northumberland and Grisedale in the Lake District. The 1980s saw a major growth in coniferous planting, as a result of tax benefits, much of this planting was in the Highlands of Scotland. The previous major planting had been immediately following the Second World War.

WHY IS CONIFEROUS WOODLAND OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Coniferous woodlands are areas of habitat with relatively low biodiversity value which have often been planted on areas which previously had much higher biodiversity value e.g. upland heathland and blanket bog and ancient woodland sites. Nevertheless their large size often means they constitute the main woodland cover in many areas, with the importance in biodiversity such a status confers.

Red squirrels have undergone major declines in population and range throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The stronghold of the British population is in Scotland with remnant populations in northern England and North Wales. The best method of retaining red squirrels is to manage large areas of conifer plantation as pure stands of conifers.

Black grouse use some conifer woods in the uplands for shelter and occasionally as nesting sites.

CONIFEROUS WOODLAND IN THE DURHAM AREA

WHAT IS THE STATE OF CONIFEROUS WOODLAND IN THE DURHAM AREA?

Many of the coniferous plantations in Durham are reaching maturity and the instigation of felling and restocking provides an ideal opportunity to restructure the woodland to achieve a more biodiversity friendly habitat.

WHERE DOES IT OCCUR IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Coniferous woodland covers just over 3% of the Durham area. Mainly in the west and north of the Plan area, with some smaller plantations at mid-altitudes and in the lowlands.

THE BIODIVERSITY OF CONIFEROUS WOODLAND IS AT RISK FROM:

A decrease in the structural diversity of stands and forests through insensitive management.

Wind-throw - the partial felling of coniferous forests changes the outline of the forest and can result in the wind being able to uproot areas of trees causing major structural and economic damage.

Loss of areas of greater biodiversity value.

THE BIODIVERSITY OF CONIFEROUS WOODLAND BENEFITS FROM:

Increasing the percentage of native broadleaves - restructuring provides an ideal opportunity to add more broadleaves particularly around the edges. This should only be carried out in areas where the plantation is not being preferentially managed for red squirrels.

Increasing structural diversity - by adding native shrubs, allowing some areas of clear-fell to regenerate naturally, and diversifying the age structure.

IMPORTANT SPECIES FOR CONIFEROUS WOODLAND:

<i>Black grouse</i>	**	<i>Woodcock</i>	
<i>Goshawk</i>		<i>Pine marten</i>	*
<i>Nightjar</i>	*	<i>Fungi spp.</i>	***
<i>Siskin</i>		<i>Insect spp.</i>	
<i>Crossbill</i>			
<i>Red squirrel</i>	**		

OTHER HABITAT ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO CONIFEROUS WOODLAND:

<i>Upland heathland and blanket bog</i>	*
<i>Upland oak woodland</i>	**

N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.

* indicates action plan produced in 2000.

*** indicates action plan to be produced in 2001.

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TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE BIODIVERSITY OF CONIFEROUS WOODLAND IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
Target 1 <i>Enhance the biodiversity value of all coniferous woodlands.</i>	ONGOING
Target 2 <i>Identify and target all those coniferous woodlands important for the conservation of red squirrels.</i>	2002
Target 3 <i>Identify and enhance all upland coniferous woodlands which may be important for black grouse.</i>	2003

CONIFEROUS WOODLAND ACTIONS			
ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Seek designation as SSSIs for those coniferous woodlands deemed important, and which can be managed preferentially for red squirrels. Use published advice notes to resolve any conflicts of management/designation.	2004	EN, DWT, FC, RANE	2
<u>SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT</u>			
2. Seek opportunities to restructure mature plantations.	ONGOING	FC, DBAP	1, 3
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
3. Identify important biodiversity in coniferous woodlands.	2004	FC, EN, DWT	1
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
4. Provide guidance notes for forestry management for red squirrels.	2004	FC, DWT, RANE, BGP	2
5. Provide guidance notes for restructuring of upland plantations.	2004	FC, DBAP	3
<u>COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY</u>			
6. Raise awareness of importance of species diversity in coniferous plantations.	ONGOING	FC, DBAP	1