

# Urban habitats - cities, towns and villages

## WHAT ARE URBAN HABITATS?

Urban habitats cover any development of buildings and related infrastructure whether for housing or industrial use. For the purpose of this Plan urban habitats are taken to mean any settlement, whether city, town or village, including all habitats within the settlement boundary, however that is defined.

## WHERE ARE THEY FOUND IN THE UK?

Cities, towns and villages are distributed across the UK. They tend to be concentrated in lowland areas, but settlements occur at almost all altitudes with the exception of the highest uplands. The density of settlements is greatest in the southern part of the UK, though major conurbations do occur in Scotland.

## WHY ARE URBAN HABITATS OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Urban habitats can contain important species and communities. In addition they provide refuges for wildlife which are being forced from their preferred rural environment, as a result of changes in habitats or management.

Large urban conurbations are generally warmer, subject to lower wind speeds and have greater rainfall than surrounding rural areas. This can lead to longer growth periods for many plants and allow for the extension of their range northwards. Untidiness amongst humans can provide new food supplies which some species are able to exploit e.g. foxes and badgers raiding dustbins.

Urban wildlife is frequently more accessible too members of the community than rural wildlife and contributes to their quality of life. This proximity allows for direct intervention and greater understanding of the factors affecting a range of species.

## URBAN HABITATS IN THE DURHAM AREA

## WHAT IS THE STATE OF URBAN HABITATS IN THE DURHAM AREA?

The draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North East (May 1999) aims to achieve sustainable development by providing a framework that delivers environmental, social and economic objectives without threatening the viability of the natural, built and social systems, on which the delivery of those objectives depends.

Current estimates suggest that the population in the area as a whole, will remain stable but that the number of households will increase and an allowance has been made in regional planning guidance for a growth of almost 11% in housing stock between 1996 and 2016. There are about 4000ha of land identified for industrial or business development, including both brown-field and green-field sites. It is expected that further provision of sites will be necessary in East Durham and North Sunderland. There will be green belt extensions into South Gateshead, North West and central Durham and between Sunderland and Seaham.

## WHERE DOES IT OCCUR IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The major urban areas in Durham are in the north east and east of the area with Gateshead, South Tyneside, Durham and Sunderland being the largest centres of population. However smaller towns and villages occur across the whole area, decreasing in size and density in the west and north of the area. The built environment occupies about 8% of the area.

## THE BIODIVERSITY OF URBAN HABITATS IS AT RISK FROM:

Pressure from development, the continuing need for housing, industry and associated infrastructure.

Lack of awareness of biodiversity value of habitats within urban habitats.

Increasing air, noise and light pollution.

## THE BIODIVERSITY OF URBAN HABITATS BENEFIT FROM:

Provision for nature conservation in strategic planning documents.

Use of sustainable principles in future developments.

Development of corridors to link areas of wildlife value.

## IMPORTANT SPECIES FOR URBAN HABITATS:

|                      |                   |     |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----|
| <i>House martin</i>  | <i>Fox</i>        |     |
| <i>House sparrow</i> | <i>Water vole</i> | **  |
| <i>Swift</i>         | <i>Bats</i>       | *** |
| <i>Hedgehog</i>      |                   |     |

## OTHER HABITAT ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO URBAN HABITATS:

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Built environment</i>            | * |
| <i>Parks and amenity grasslands</i> | * |
| <i>Transport corridors</i>          | * |

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

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

# Urban habitats - cities, towns and villages

## TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE BIODIVERSITY OF URBAN HABITATS IN THE DURHAM AREA:

**Target 1** To maintain and/or enhance the biodiversity value of all urban habitats. For example, all urban residents should be able to enter an urban green space of at least 2ha within 0.5km of their home.

DATE

2008

**Target 2** Provision should be made for Local Nature Reserves in every urban area at the minimum level of 1ha per 1000 population, in addition there should be:  
A 20ha site within 2km of all residents.  
A 100ha site within 5km of all residents.

2010

**Target 3** To develop and enhance habitat corridors.

ONGOING

| URBAN HABITAT ACTIONS                                                                                                                                  |         |                           |                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------|------------------|
| ACTION                                                                                                                                                 | DATE    | POSSIBLE PARTNERS         | MEETS TARGET NO. |
| <u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>                                                                                                                          |         |                           |                  |
| 1. Inclusion of wildlife and nature conservation policies in all strategic planning documents.                                                         | 2005    | LAs, ONE North East, GONE | 1, 2, 3          |
| 2. Define targets for nature conservation in urban habitats.                                                                                           | 2005    | LAs                       | 3                |
| <u>SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT</u>                                                                                                                   |         |                           |                  |
| 3. Encourage the development of a network of Local Nature Reserves in all urban areas.                                                                 | 2010    | LAs, EN, DBAP             | 2                |
| <u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>                                                                                                                         |         |                           |                  |
| 4. Assess criteria for the selection of urban LNRs.                                                                                                    | 2008    | LAs, EN                   | 1, 2             |
| <u>ADVISORY</u>                                                                                                                                        |         |                           |                  |
| 5. Advise all appropriate bodies/organisations on best practice in managing urban habitats for wildlife.                                               | ONGOING | DBAP, DWT, LAs, EN        | 1, 3             |
| 6. Encourage the use of 'Making a Difference', 'Planning for Biodiversity in N.E. England' and other appropriate guidance documents, where applicable. | ONGOING | DBAP, LAs                 | 1, 2, 3          |
| <u>COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY</u>                                                                                                                     |         |                           |                  |
| 7. Raise awareness of the importance of urban wildlife and urban habitats.                                                                             | ONGOING | DBAP, DWT, LAs, EN        | 1                |