

DRAFT

Orchards East Forum

Traditional Orchards Habitat Action Plan (if we want to call it that...)

1. Introduction

There have been a number of orchard projects and county initiatives within the eastern region since the first Apple Day was promoted by Common Ground nationally in 1990 and then supported by the Biodiversity Action Planning process. Although no longer formally supported by Government, orchard Habitat Action Plans have sought to promote and conserve orchards and their associated functions and continue to do so. This recently included a project – Orchards East – which provided an academic survey and approach to their understanding, complementing the continuing work of the East of England Apples and Orchards Project and various county groups. Having ended, the OE working group continues as a Forum for discussion of consideration of all-things orchard with a wide range of interested parties.

To help support this group, its ideas and potential projects both regionally and locally, a Habitat Action Plan has been drafted to facilitate this process, capture the activities and help document projects and achievements. A working document, it is a tool to engage with members of the Forum, for the Forum, to make the most of ideas, understanding and developing projects. It provides a structure to promote the continued networking that the Orchards East project generated and giving its collective work a profile which can also be presented to a wider audience.

The structure for this planning statement is based upon the original national Habitat Action Plan for orchards, but also incorporates information and actions from each county HAP where available and updated accordingly following the completion of the Orchards East project.

2. Background

Traditional orchards were added to the list of Priority Habitats under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (published in August 2007) and are defined as including the following characteristic features:

- A mixed plantation of fruit tree varieties, with trees propagated on vigorous rootstocks and trained as standards or half-standards.
- Orchards managed in a low intensity way, with little use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers and often grazed by cattle or sheep or cut for hay.
- Supporting at least five fruit trees within 20 metres of each other's crown edges.
- Having a low density of planting resulting in trees being widely spaced – approximately 200 trees per hectare or less, around 8 m apart – although this can vary from 3 metres in some plum orchards to 20 metres in perry pear and cherry orchards, reflecting regional differences.

- Including trees that are long-lived and allowed to reach the veteran-hollowed and gnarled stage. These can be well over 100 years old.

Orchards support a wide range of wildlife due to the mosaic of habitats they encompass including fruit trees, standing and fallen dead wood, scrub, grassland and hedgerows. Collectively they mirror a form of wood pasture habitat, when mature with an open canopy largely over grassland which creates a distinctive microclimate and significant edge effect throughout. Fruit buds were valued by Bullfinches - once a pest but now relatively uncommon along with the orchards - whilst fruit tree blossom is an important nectar and pollen source for moths, butterflies and bees. The fruit is an important food source for mammals, birds and insects. Hedgehogs were supposed to collect apples on their spines! The trees are also valuable hosts for mistletoe and epiphytic lichens. Standing and fallen dead and decaying wood provide nesting sites for some birds including lesser spotted woodpecker and historically Wryneck which used to be associated with orchards, now largely a very rare migrant. They provide excellent foraging resources for bats and hosts for important for deadwood invertebrates (e.g. Noble chafer beetle), fungi and bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). Boundary hedges surrounding orchards protect the trees from frost and wind damage and also provide additional habitats for wildlife. Reptiles and amphibians may also be found if conditions are suitable, particularly where pond features are also present.

The Traditional Orchards HAP for the eastern region will include orchards that are currently managed at a low level of intensity and remnants of old orchard sites with fruit trees on them.

3. Current status

Traditional orchards are found throughout the region but have declined dramatically...

Section on History, distribution, numbers etc. within the region – to include Nurseries, fruit cultivars. No more than a page or two if possible? Tom W

Map 1: Historic orchard distribution in the eastern region.

4. Current factors causing loss or decline

- Economic changes leading to neglect: with the gradual loss of historic fruit markets and a cultural decline in the use of local fruit, there was little commercial incentive for orchard owners to retain and manage orchards as productive resources.
- Difficulty of harvesting economically from tall trees re Health and Safety.
- A decline in traditional management practices including grazing, pruning, cutting, tree management/replacement has resulted in many remaining orchards being in a derelict state, either with a few remnant trees or reversion to scrub or woodland.
- Pressure to provide extra housing and the general lack of any significant legal protection has resulted in the direct loss of orchard sites to development. Historically orchards have been fragmented and incorporated into gardens as

low-density development increased throughout the region. Currently numerous such 'garden' orchards are themselves threatened by development as backland plots are sought for building.

5. Current action

5.1. Legal status and site protection

Opportunities for the protection of traditional orchards include the following:

- The strongest protection for the ecology of orchards would be from designation as an SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest). There are no orchard SSSIs in the region, either wholly or in part. (TRUE???)
- Some orchards may be included within the grounds of an Historic Park or garden, or included within the curtilage of a listed building. Some examples of this in the region include Audley End in Essex and Dunsley Bungalow in Hertfordshire.
- Orchards – being a Priority Habitat - are listed in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) Section 41 as habitats of principle importance. This provides a significant status although with limited legal impact.
- As a priority habitat, orchards would need to be considered as part of an Agricultural EIA by Natural England if sites were proposed to be lost due to proposals for agricultural improvement.
- Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are designated by Local Authorities in consultation with Natural England but are a statutory designation. To declare an LNR, the local authority must have a legal interest in the land, either by ownership, lease or management. An orchard could be declared a Local Nature Reserve or could be protected as an element within a Local Nature Reserve. There are a number of such sites across the region that are protected in this way - Chorleywood Community Orchard (a recent planting) in Hertfordshire,
- TPOs (Tree Preservation Orders) can be used by Local Authorities to protect fruit trees where it is in the interest of amenity to do so. Amenity can also include scarcity and wildlife value. There are no / some known orchard sites protected by TPOs in the region. (TRUE??) Similarly, trees will have a measure of protection if included within a Conservation Area. Some conservation Area statements are known to include orchards.
- The identification of sites as Local Wildlife Sites is a non-statutory process. Orchard Wildlife Site criteria will vary across the region, but would usually need to meet the national BAP definition.
- Orchard sites are afforded some protection by planning policies in a number of District Local Plans, or through generic policies covering the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and its habitats and species.
- Orchards can also be protected (or new sites created) through conditions and Section 106 agreements as part of the planning application process, although this may not prevent loss of trees prior to an application being made.
- Traditional Orchards are included on the Section 41 (S41) List of Habitats of Principal Importance in England used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies in implementing their Biodiversity Duty to conserve and enhance

biodiversity under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 and the Environment Act 2021.

Whilst these measures may appear to give orchards a good level of protection, in reality there is limited genuine protection which would prevent fruit tree removal, and there has been little interest in developing such from Natural England.

5.2. Measures targeting the habitat for support.

5.2.1. Grant Aid for restoration, management and guidance

The Government's agri-environment scheme Countryside Stewardship offers support for management for projects in Mid-Tier and Higher-Tier Schemes. Eligible orchards must be mapped as a Traditional Orchard on the Priority Habitat Inventory (see MAGIC website). Further information see [BE4: Management of traditional orchards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). This includes positive incentives for the maintenance and restoration of existing traditional orchards, the recreation of small orchards on sites that either contain remnant trees or are known to have been orchards in the past and the planting of new orchards.

Other funding bodies are available – such as the Tree Council or local authorities. See also , [Grant fundraising for your community orchard - The Orchard Project](#)

5.2.2. Organisations engaged in supporting orchards

These include East of England Apples and Orchards Project www.applesandorchards.org.uk , Orchards east Forum www.orchardseastforum.org and a number of currently active county groups – Norfolk, Suffolk, Bedfordshire and Essex. (links??). Nationally, information and advice on orchards can be obtained from the People's Trust for Endangered Species <http://www.ptes.org/> . Nationally the Orchard Project has been very successful in promoting orchards in larger urban areas, especially London [The Orchard Project - Bringing community orchards to cities and towns](#) . The only orchard within the region they have been involved with appears to be at Waltham Abbey.

People engaged with these groups include range from professional staff, academics, Local Government Officers, professional arboriculturalists, researchers, ecologists, Biological Records Centres, Museums, food historians, Sustainability projects, orchard owners and others, all of which contribute to the networking group.

Collectively they seek to:

- To conserve and maintain the remaining traditional orchards and create new ones where appropriate and encouraging appropriate management.
- To promote and encourage a greater appreciation of the region's orchard heritage, local food opportunities and healthy eating.
- To create and maintain a database of sites and cultivars.
- To maintain and enhance the biodiversity associated with Traditional Orchards.
- To promote activities associated with orchards across the communities

- Promote the use of orchard produce where possible.
- Encourage community engagement and interest across all age ranges.

5.2.3. Research and recording

A number of detailed county surveys have been undertaken – including Hertfordshire and Suffolk. These were supplemented by the University of East Anglia-led survey project 2016 – 2019 (CHECK), the results of which have now been formally published by the University of Hertfordshire.

(Description of methodology Tom W).

In 2009, the University of Hertfordshire led a Big Lottery-funded community science project, OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) East of England, carrying out research and involving people in exploring and recording the wildlife within orchards with a particular focus on mosses, liverworts, lichens and fungi growing on and around different varieties of fruit trees.

PTES (People's Trust for Endangered Species) undertook the mapping of orchard priority habitats, the results of which can be found on MAGIC [MAGIC \(defra.gov.uk\)](http://defra.gov.uk).

Biodiversity Recording (Paul R)

5.2.4. Advice and guidance

Specialist advice can be provided by a number of organisations and individuals engaged with arboriculture, pruning, tree planting, countryside management or orchard conservation bodies generally. This also includes running specialist courses for professionals and the wider public. Examples include:

(LIST?)

East of England Apples and Orchards Project – which also maintains and provides a fruit tree nursery which includes regional cultivars for sale.

5.2.5. Practical opportunities for orchard managers

Opportunities to support or help promote existing fruit growing and processing businesses are also encouraged – such as small artisan juicing facilities.

5.2.6. Publicity and Marketing

Various regional and county groups have sought to promote and encourage a greater appreciation of the region's orchards and fruit growing heritage through giving talks and orchard guided walks, holding orchard open days, providing juicing demonstrations and displays at events such as Farmers Markets, Country Fairs, in schools and at Apple Days. In turn, numerous local community orchards also hold events and activities.

There is also increasing interest from sustainability groups promoting tree planting and local food initiatives and use of local produce.

A comprehensive information pack on Hertfordshire Orchards was produced in 2006 including their history, conservation and management and orchard leaflets were printed.

Several regional experts have been involved with publishing identification guides – Michael Clark from Hertfordshire has written a number of well-known books, whilst Peter Laws has been a major contributor to the Fruit ID project. Monica Askey and Tom Williamson authored a book on orchard recipes from Eastern England [Orchard Recipes from Eastern England By Monica Askey & Tom Wilkinson \(Paperback\) | Jarrold, Norwich](#), whilst Tom has produced The Orchards of Eastern England published by the University of Hertfordshire [The Orchards of Eastern England | University of Hertfordshire Press \(herts.ac.uk\)](#).

6. Traditional Orchards Habitat Action Plan

This structure broadly follows the national Orchards HAP.

Objectives

- To prevent further loss of Traditional Orchard habitat;
- To manage and restore remaining Traditional Orchard sites;
- To create new Traditional Orchard habitat where appropriate and ensure local / heritage fruit varieties are included in planting schemes;
- To further research into orchard and fruit history, biodiversity and food connections;
- To promote and raise awareness of Traditional Orchards and their biodiversity value to key target audiences such as orchard owners, land managers, local authorities and the general public;
- To promote training in orchard management;
- To encourage their conservation through their use for local food initiatives where possible;
- To provide a regional network to link key stakeholders or representatives to share related knowledge and skills;
- To identify and pursue opportunities for improved conservation and protection;
- To provide a focus for regional expertise and support.

Targets (do we want to do / support / amend these??)

- To ensure no substantive traditional orchards are lost to development.
- To improve the condition of orchards to favourable where possible - restore x Traditional Orchard sites by 202x
- To increase the extent of Traditional Orchards - create x traditional Orchard habitat by 202x
- To ensure training courses are provided.
- To hold x awareness raising events annually
- To undertake x biodiversity surveys in orchards

(Targets like these can be generated till the cows come home. In reality, there usually are no cows left to come home. Whilst all very well, as with BAP plans they represent an aspirational wish list of ideals with limited hope of delivery – otherwise we wouldn't still be discussing orchards or indeed any other habitats. The Local Nature Partnership process was supposed to deliver the means to achieve this... Do we want to retain these, expand them or reduce them etc. given they still represent a pro-active statement of intention. We are not reporting to anyone on any success against which we would be measured but could do if we so chose and this may help with supporting further grants etc. in due course. Or should they simply reflect the key work programmes of members that are deliverable?). All to comment!

List of key HAP actions

Action	Start date	End date	Partners
1.1 Regulation: Policy and legislation			
Ensure orchards are protected by inclusion in Local Plan policies.	2022	Ongoing	LPAs, TWTs
Consider SPD for orchards (or all priority habitats).	2022	2022	LPAs TWTs
1.2 Regulation: Existing site safeguard			
Defend important orchard sites when threatened by damaging development.	2022	Ongoing	LPAs, TWTs, OEF, LOGs
Support the application of TPOs to protect orchard trees/sites where appropriate.	2022	Ongoing	LPAs
Use Biodiversity Net Gain process to maintain Traditional Orchard sites.	2022	Ongoing	LPAs, TWTs, LOGs
Identify suitable orchards for LNR (Local Nature Reserve) designation.	2022	Ongoing	LPAs, LOGs
Ensure orchards are included within Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Networks	2022	2025	LRCs, LPAs,
Local Wildlife Site designation – criteria etc.	2022		LRCs, LWSP
2.1 Management: Existing Sites			
Use Biodiversity Net Gain process to enhance Traditional Orchard sites.	2022	Ongoing	LPAs, WT
Encourage the uptake of agri-environment scheme options for the maintenance and restoration of Traditional Orchards.	2022	Ongoing	FWAG, farm advisors
Ensure management of Community Orchards is supported by communities	2022	Ongoing	LOGs
2.2 Management: New Orchards			
Encourage the establishment of new Community Orchards.	2022	Ongoing	LOGs
Encourage new School Orchards	2022	Ongoing	HOI HMWT
Encourage the planting of local heritage fruit varieties and keep a record where appropriate.	2022	Ongoing	LOGs,

Encourage the uptake of agri-environment scheme options for the creation of Traditional Orchards.	2022	Ongoing	FWAG, FAs
Support new orchards as part of Local Nature Recovery networks.	2022		LNRS
3.1 Skills and knowledge: research and monitoring			
Conservation of genetic resource - Fruit ID. Pursue funding nationally (identified in National HAP)	2022	2025	OEF, ON
Provide fruit ID service	200?	Ongoing	EAAOP
Crab Apple Project with ON	2021		OEF (PR)?
Rootstock longevity study	2021		OEF (AB)?
Continue biodiversity surveys (topics?- Noble chafer)	2022	Ongoing	OEF
Develop local and regional collections (including those already in existence) – as reference sites	2010	2025?	EAAOP, OEF, LOGs
Continue updating orchard inventories and historic information	2016-	Ongoing.	LRCs
Monitoring of historic sites – condition assessments	2022		OEF, LOGs?
Ensure Local Biological Record Centres have all available orchard data necessary for their records purposes and information.	2022		LRCs
3.2 Skills and knowledge: Advice, guidance and practical support			
Networking for Community orchard communities	2022	Ongoing	OEF, LOGs
Tree Planting, Veteran tree management, pruning courses	2022	Ongoing	PTES, OEF, EAAOP, LOGs
Nursery development in prisons	2019?		GG
Investigate Tree Warden situation.	2022		OEF
Training days for orchard owners			PTES, OEF? EAAOP
Train the trainers – encourage new generation of experts	2021		OEF
4 Sustainable Economic Management			
Marketing and funding of orchard produce projects	2022		OEF
Still Good Food project and similar.	2021		OEF (MA)
Sustainable orchards through food	2021	2021	OEF
Network between produces and retail / hospitality outlets	2022		OEF?
Explore ways of reaching or influencing consumers re local produce	2022		OEF?
Reduce fruit waste – food banks	2022		OEF?
Encourage a food culture using local fruit	2022		OEF?
5. Communication: Publicity and Marketing			
Website	2021		OEF
Apple Days	2022		EAAOP, LOGs
Wassails	2022		LOGs
Blossom Days	2022		OEF? LOGs

Develop advisory material – a regional orchard pack – or website with similar objectives.	2022		OEF
Explore other ways of reaching or influencing orchard managers.	2022		EEAOP? OEF?
School education pack / projects	2022		EEAOP
Promote folklore of orchards	2022		OEF?

Abbreviations:

LPAs – Local Planning Authorities

TWTs – The Wildlife Trusts

LOGs – Local Orchard Groups (involves constituent Community Orchards etc)

OEF – Orchard East Forum (will include individual members)

LRCs – Local Record Centres

LWSPs – Local Wildlife Site Partnerships

FWAG – Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups

FAs – Farm Advisors – whoever is out there advising farmers!

LNRS – Local Nature Recovery Strategy – will involve a number of key stakeholders.

ON – Orchard Network (national forum).

PTES – Peoples Trust for Endangered Species

EEAOP – East of England Apples and Orchards Project

GG - Greener Growth

Martin Hicks

On behalf of OEF

Jan 2022