

## Habitat Action Plan: Upland Mixed Ashwoods

### Current status and Importance

- There is no precise data on the total extent of upland ashwoods in the UK, but a crude estimate places the total area of upland ashwood at 67,500 ha.
- The largest examples occur on limestone and well-drained, base-rich soils, but the type is also found on more acid poorly drained soils where there is flushing of nutrients. Often these latter are just small fragments of woodland with irregular margins or narrow strips along flushes, riparian tracts, outcrops and steep banks.
- The upland mixed ashwoods in Kirklees fall within the latter category.
- Mixed upland ashwoods are amongst the richest habitats for wildlife in the uplands.

### Species use

- This habitat is characterised by the presence of ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and elm (*Ulmus gabra*) in the canopy, with hazel (*Corylus avellana*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*) in the understorey.
- Ground plants include; bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), false brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), ramson (*Allium ursinum*), enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*), ivy (*Hedera helix*), herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), wood sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*).
- The alkaline bark of old ash (and elm where it still survives) can support an important lichen flora, particularly the *Lobarion* lichen community. Within Kirklees these communities have been impoverished as a result of air pollution.
- Upland mixed ashwoods also harbour a rich invertebrate fauna, which may include uncommon or declining species. The remains of dead trees such as old elm trees provide habitat for rare beetles, flies and other invertebrates.

### Conservation Issues

- Dutch elm disease has changed the structure and composition of many woods since the early 1970s. Canopies opened by disease may be subject to higher rates of wind throw, and invasion of the gaps by unrepresentative species becomes more likely, for example, Sycamore.
- Unsympathetic forest management where choice of broadleaf species planted, or methods of working do not yet reflect published guidelines. This is more likely to be a problem outside Forestry Commission administered Woodland Grant Schemes.
- Removal of dead trees, as a public safety measure (properly managed, these represent a beneficial habitat feature).
- Effects of air pollution, especially on lichen and bryophyte communities.

NB Whilst other pressures exist the above are most relevant to upland mixed ashwoods in Kirklees.

### Objectives

- Protect existing upland mixed ash woodland from development and inappropriate use or management to prevent habitat deterioration. Maintain policies to prevent habitat loss.

- Maintain and manage areas of upland mixed ash woodland appropriately within the upland oak woodland to create greater structural and species diversity and maximise their value for important species' populations.
- Restore suitable sites (i.e. those with alkaline flushes) to upland mixed ash woodland.
- Monitor the extent and quality of the habitat to gain a more accurate assessment of its status in the district.

### **Target areas for habitat management and creation**

- The habitat is primarily found within the Valley Slopes zone at higher elevations and within upland oak woodland habitat.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at [www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)

NB Natural England must be consulted on any proposal within nationally and internationally designated sites.

### **Targets**

- To be included in Upland Oak Woodland targets.

### **Key Links and Organisations**

- Site protection: Kirklees Council, Peak District National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Natural England.
- Management and restoration through Woodland Grant Scheme: Forestry Commission.
- Management and restoration of mixed ash woodland in Kirklees: Kirklees Council, White Rose Forest, Colne Valley Tree Society,
- Survey: Kirklees Wildlife and Landscape Advisory Forum, West Yorkshire Ecology.

### **See Also**

- [UK BAP Upland Mixed Ashwoods Habitat Action plan](#)
- [UKBAP: Upland Oak Woodland](#)
- [Forestry Commission](#)
- Guidance for the management of Woodlands: Kirklees Council Environment Unit. ([www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity))