

Hedgerow Habitat Action Plan

Scottish Biodiversity List habitat:	Yes
UK Biodiversity List of Priority Habitats:	Yes

Summary

Hedgerows are vital to the countryside, playing an important role to biodiversity due to the species and structural diversity they provide. Furthermore, due to their linear nature, they provide a unique opportunity to connect habitats. Major threats to hedgerow habitat in North Lanarkshire include poor management practices, as well as a lack of knowledge of the overall extent and condition of the hedges.

Habitat Profile

Hedgerows play an important role in the countryside in terms of biodiversity. Traditionally used to create field boundaries, they provide a means to connect habitats, as well as providing a wide range of species shelter and foraging habitat. Bats, Hedgehogs and birds are only but a few animals that benefit from hedgerows.

A hedgerow is defined as any boundary line of trees or shrubs over 20m long and less than 5m wide, and where any gaps between the trees or shrub species are less than 20m wide. Any bank, wall, ditch or tree within 2m of the centre of the hedgerow is considered to be part of the hedgerow habitat, as is the herbaceous vegetation within 2m of the centre of the hedgerow. All hedgerows consisting predominantly (i.e. 80% or more cover) of at least one woody UK native species are covered by this priority habitat, where each UK country can define the list of woody species native to their respective country. Climbers such as honeysuckle and bramble are recognised as integral to many hedgerows, however they require other woody plants to be present to form a distinct woody boundary feature, as such they are not included in the definition of woody species. The definition is limited to boundary lines of trees or shrubs, and excludes banks or walls without woody shrubs on top of them.

As well as hedgerows being rich in species the associated banks, ditches and un-mown margins are also important for wildlife.

The High Hedges Act 2013 came into force on April 1st 2014. A high hedge is defined by the Act as a hedge that is formed wholly or mainly by a row of two or more trees or shrubs, is over two metres in height and forms a barrier to light. The Act aims to provide a solution to the problem of high hedges, where neighbours have not been able to resolve the issue amicably, by providing an effective means of resolving disputes over the effects of high hedges which interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of domestic property. The inclusion of Hedgerow as a priority habitat will ensure the biodiversity value will be fully considered during any planning decision associated with the High Hedges Act 2013.

Normally associated with farmland landscapes, hedgerows can also play an important role in contributing to green corridors within urban landscapes and linking green spaces to

protected sites within the wider landscape. They are also extremely important within a lowland farmland setting where they provide semi-natural and structurally varied habitat.

Current Status

In Scotland it is estimated that there is 46,000km of hedgerow.

In Scotland, the length of hedges decreased by 7% between 1998 and 2007 and a third of actively managed hedges were judged to be in good structural condition in 2007. According to the Countryside Survey (2007), species richness in hedgerow margins decreased by 22%, which included declines in food plants of birds (22%) and butterflies (21%). There is currently no information about the length of hedgerow in North Lanarkshire nor its condition but it likely reflects national trends in regards to reduction of habitat and quality.

Current Factors Affecting This Habitat

- Neglect (no cutting or laying) leading to hedgerows changing into lines of trees and the development of gaps. This reflects modern high labour costs and loss of traditional skills.
- Too frequent and badly timed cutting leading to poor habitat conditions, the development of gaps and probable species changes.
- Loss of hedgerow trees through senescence and felling, without encouraging replacements.
- Use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers in close proximity to the bases of hedgerows, leading to nutrient enrichment and a decline in species diversity.
- Removal of hedges for agricultural and development purposes.

Current Actions

- Through planning consultation responses Greenspace Development advice the safeguarding and enhancing existing hedgerow and further native species rich hedgerow inclusion in new developments.
- The Seven Lochs Volunteers carried out hedgerow enhancement works at Gartcosh Local Nature Reserve this helped to expand the hedgerow and also to fill in any areas of fragmentation.
- RSPB have set out guidance for farmer on Arable Field Margins and Field Margins for Grassland, Both emphasize the importance of these margins along hedgerow for birds, mammal and invertebrates.

Proposed Objectives, targets, and actions

Objectives

1. Maintain and enhance hedgerow habitat
2. Identify new opportunities for Hedgerow creation

Action	Meets Objective Number	Action by	Target
Site safeguard and management			
1.1 Maintain and enhance hedgerow habitat on all NLC Local Nature Reserves (LNR)	1	NLC	All LNRs to have hedgerow in favorable condition by 2025
1.2 Hedge laying training courses for local volunteer groups.	1	NLC, Volunteer groups	Target key sites with established volunteer group –eg. Brownsburn LNR, Cumbernauld Community Park and Greenhead Moss in 2024
1.3 Plant 20km of new hedgerow	1,2	NLC	To be completed by 2025
Monitoring and research			
2.1 Identify extent of hedgerow habitat in North Lanarkshire	2	NLC	To be completed as GIS exercise by end of 2023
2.2 Identify key areas to improve habitat connectivity between protected sites e.g. Sites of Importance of Nature Conservations (SINC)	2	NLC	Mapping exercise by end of 2023
Communication and publicity			
3.1 Recommend hedgerow management and planting along new and upgraded roads. Encourage better management of hedgerows especially those within NLS ownership	2	NLC	Produce guidance note by 2023. To be distributed to land managers and NLC staff that deal with hedgerows.

References

Countryside Survey, 2007. Scotland Results from 2007
UK Biodiversity Action Plan

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