

TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

Scattered traditional orchards and groups of fruit trees help to sustain wildlife links through the landscape of Cumbria. They can also have significant cultural and community value.

UK Priority Habitats covered by this statement:

[Traditional orchards](#)

Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan habitats covered by this statement:

None

Contents

- Description
- Distribution and Extent
- Conservation Issues
- Planning Considerations
- Enhancement Opportunities
- Habitat Targets
- Key Species
- Further Information
- Contacts
- Current Action in Cumbria



Orchard © Stephen Hewitt

Description

Traditional orchards are generally small and managed in a low intensity manner with widely spaced trees over pasture or meadow. Many of these orchards host fruit trees of considerable age. Little information is available on the composition of these orchards, but in the south of the county damsons are widely grown, whilst elsewhere apples are thought to predominate.

The low intensity of the management of these orchards means that they are often hotspots of biodiversity in the countryside. Old fruit trees can support a wide range of uncommon invertebrates and can be important for epiphytic lichens. Orchards can also host important fungal groupings, both of decaying wood and grassland fungi such as waxcaps.

In addition to wildlife traditional orchards contain many old varieties of fruit and there is a high genetic diversity. In Cumbria there are known to be at least 200 local varieties of apple.

Distribution and Extent

Traditional orchards are found throughout the county, but are largely absent from the central Lake District and parts of the west coast. The main concentration however is in the south of the county, particularly in the Lyth and Winster valleys which are noted for their damson orchards.

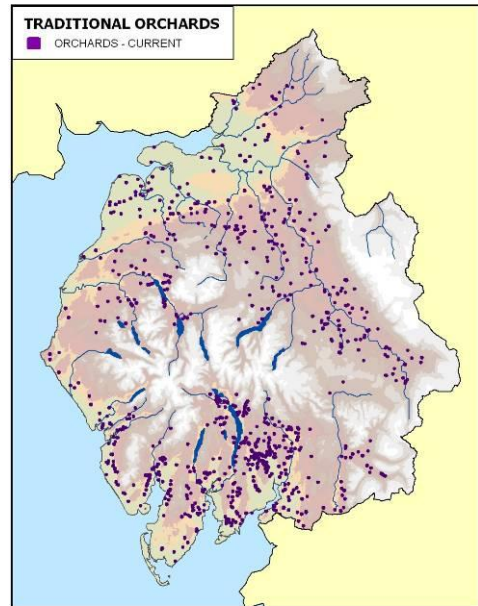
Conservation Issues

Urban development, the need for more profitable crops, and imports of cheap fruit from abroad have all caused the loss of many small orchards. These losses have meant more intensive production in orchards that remain, reducing the value of orchards as diverse wildlife habitats.

Incorporation of orchards into gardens leads to a degradation of the orchard habitat, even if the trees themselves are retained.

Planning Considerations

- PPS9 states that local authorities should conserve important natural habitat types (priority habitats and habitats of principal importance in England), and identify opportunities to enhance and add to them.
- Any development that may impact upon traditional orchards would require an assessment of the likely effects on the habitat and, as necessary, appropriate protection and mitigation measures.
- This priority habitat is easily overlooked in planning decisions as small orchards can be dismissed as a “few old apple trees in a corner of the garden”. They are particularly vulnerable to housing developments, particularly those which involve the development of clusters of houses around farms or barns or indeed any house in the countryside. Existing fruit trees can be protected by condition.
- The biodiversity of orchards can be damaged not only direct impacts, but also by indirect impacts such as the use of the orchard for storing machinery and materials during construction work.
- There are no orchards within the SSSI system.



Distribution of traditional orchards in Cumbria (provided for illustrative purposes only)

Enhancement Opportunities

- New orchard planting with appropriate, and where possible traditional varieties, should be encouraged.

Habitat Targets

- As yet no habitat targets have been prepared

Key Species

The following Key Species could benefit from enhancement of this habitat, or be negatively impacted upon by inappropriate developments on or near this habitat:

Wall butterfly	Bullfinch	Natterer's Bat
Linnet	Barn Owl	Noctule bat
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Song Thrush	Common Pipistrelle
Yellowhammer	Brandt's Bat	Soprano Pipistrelle
Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)	Daubenton's Bat	Brown Long-eared Bat
Tree Sparrow	Whiskered Bat	Hedgehog

Further information

[UK Biodiversity Partnership, Species and Habitats Review 2007](#), Traditional orchards, Summary Statement p111, Habitat Proposal p148

[Habitats of principal importance in England](#) Section 41 NERC Act list

[Westmorland Damson Association](#)

[National Orchard Forum](#)

[Common Ground orchards website](#)

[Environmental Stewardship](#) and [HLS handbook](#)

Contacts

- **Natural England**, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Rd, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7RL, Tel: 0300 060 2122, cumbriaplanning@naturalengland.org.uk
- **Cumbria Wildlife Trust**, Tel: 01539 816300, mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
- **Cumbria Fells and Dales LEADER+ Programme**, The Old Stables, Redhills, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0DT, Tel: 01768 869533, info@fellsanddales.org.uk
- **Sustain Orchards Project Officer**, Tel: 020 78371228, ida@sustainweb.org

Current Action in Cumbria

- Sustain is working on the national orchard project with Leader+ (a European Union funded programme of rural development) to conserve and bring into sustainable management traditional orchards in the Cumbria Fells and Dales Leader+ funded area and elsewhere in the UK. Cumbrian projects include the Damson Development Project and Orchard Link, Cumbria.
- The Environmental Stewardship Scheme run by Natural England provides financial incentives to manage land in a way that is sympathetic to its nature conservation interest with specific traditional orchard options.