

Biodiversity & Nature Recovery



Overview:

Designated wildlife sites that are home to rare habitats and species, including:

- A nationally significant area of chalk grassland including rare flora such as field fleawort, bastard toadflax, musk orchid and burnt orchid, early gentian, chalk eyebright, Chiltern gentian, dwarf mouse ear, tuberous thistle and round-headed rampion; invertebrates such as the wart-biter bush-cricket and important butterfly populations including: adonis blue, silver studded blue, marsh fritillary, chalkhill blue, small blue, silver spotted skipper and duke of Burgundy fritillary.
- Substantial areas of broadleaved woodland and wood pasture, including a significant concentration of ancient woodlands, which provide roosting and/or feeding sites for bat species including Bechstein's bat, barbastelle, greater horseshoe bat and noctule; long-rotation hazel coppice provides important habitat for mammals such as dormice; concentrations of calcareous bluebell woods; and a number of nationally scarce moss species.
- Rare chalk streams and rivers with a high diversity of aquatic plants and invertebrate species including those that are nationally scarce, such as the white-clawed crayfish; supporting nationally and locally scarce bird species; mammals including otters and nationally declining water voles; and healthy fish populations including brown trout, salmon, grayling, perch, chub and dace.
- Arable habitats which are home to rare and colourful arable wildflowers, such as dense-flowered fumitory, slender tare and shepherd's needle, which are dependent on a regular cropping regime. Arable land use also provides feeding and breeding habitat for a number of rare and declining farmland birds including skylark and stone-curlew.
- A rich mosaic of associated wetland habitats creating distinctive valley landscapes including fens, floodplains, water meadows, carr and wet woodland. As an example, the red data book plant summer snowflake survives in seasonally flooded woodlands along the Kennet Valley.
- Opportunities for landscape-scale conservation projects, working across a significant area and administrative boundaries.



The Ecology of the North Wessex Downs

5.1 The breadth of ecological diversity in the North Wessex Downs reflects its varied landscape character, shaped by centuries of human influence and active management. The area includes seven Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which are part of the Natura 2000 ecological network, established under the EU Habitats Directive to protect habitats and species threatened at a European level. The Pewsey Downs SAC is also a National Nature Reserve. It has an outstanding chalk grassland flora and fauna, including nationally important populations of rare species, such as the endemic early gentian. The North Wessex Downs contains 66 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) covering 3,344 hectares, which is approximately 1.9% of the area. An estimated 19,772 ha, or 11.4% of the National Landscape, is classed as Priority Habitat. Nearly three-quarters of this, an estimated 14,459 ha, is deciduous woodland¹.

5.2 The most important habitats for nature conservation in the North Wessex Downs are the remnant areas of chalk grassland; semi-natural broadleaf woodland and wood pasture; chalk rivers, streams and associated wetlands, including wet woodland; and arable farmland managed for conservation.

5.3 Other significant habitats within the National Landscape include remnant heathlands on river gravel deposits in the east, such as Bucklebury Common, areas of semi-natural acidic grassland around Inkpen, lowland dry acid grassland and lowland meadow habitats around Highclere, and the wide grassy verges of the droeways crossing the Downs. Locally, the hedgerow network, springs, remnant watercress beds, road verges and dew ponds serve as important refuges and habitats. Chalk cuttings have magnificent displays of primroses and cowslips each year. This habitat mosaic is especially important for bats, as some species commute 20 to 30 kilometres from their roosts in old trees or outbuildings to forage across insect-rich habitats like wetlands, farmland, wood pasture and grassland.

Chalk Grassland

5.4 Chalk grassland is among the UK's most biologically rich and diverse habitats, with over 40 species of flowering plants found in just one square metre of high-quality turf. Approximately 9% of the UK's chalk grassland is located within the North Wessex Downs. The chalk grassland in the area supports significant populations of the early gentian, a scheduled protected species and one of Britain's few endemic plants. Unimproved chalk grassland is crucial for the survival of many scarce invertebrate species such as the wart-biter bush-cricket and the internationally threatened marsh fritillary butterfly. Other scarce chalk grassland butterflies include the Adonis blue, Duke of Burgundy, chalkhill blue and small blue. This habitat also supports good populations of skylarks.

5.5 Twenty-nine SSSIs within the North Wessex Downs feature chalk grassland, covering a total of 1,421 hectares, which is nearly half of the total SSSI area and 0.8% of the National Landscape. Additionally, 249 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) include a chalk grassland component, covering 2,163 hectares (1.3% of the National Landscape). However, the exact area of chalk grassland within the LWS network is not known. Other, non-statutory, identified sites such as road verges also hold chalk grassland habitat.

5.6 Nationally, chalk grassland areas have significantly diminished from their extent in the 1900s. In the North Wessex Downs, chalk grassland declined by 32% between 1968 and 1998. The remaining chalk grassland areas are becoming increasingly fragmented. Currently, small, isolated blocks are mainly confined to steep scarp slopes, dry valleys and pastures around archaeological sites. The total area of lowland calcareous grassland in the North Wessex Downs is estimated at 3,942 ha². It is estimated that the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area, covering about two-thirds of the National Landscape, supports at least 1,250 hectares, which is approximately 3-5% of England's total estimated area of lowland calcareous grassland.



Adonis blue – Peter Eeles

¹ Natural England: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework Statistics Release 2025.

² Natural England: Protected Targets and Outcomes Framework Statistics Release 2025.

Woodland

5.7 The National Forest Inventory shows 21,109 ha of the North Wessex Downs as wooded³, Tree and canopy cover outside woodland is estimated to cover a further 6,579 ha⁴, making a total of 27,688 ha, or just under 16% of the National Landscape area. Of this, 8,824 ha is estimated to be ancient woodland (including plantations on ancient woodland sites)⁵. According to the Woodland Trust, the North Wessex Downs contain two nationally important major concentrations of ancient woodland, centred on the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and the Hampshire Downs; and areas of forest such as Savernake.

5.8 In the North Wessex Downs National Landscape: less than 0.1% of the total woodland area is designated as a National Nature Reserve; 0.5% is designated as Special Areas for Conservation (SAC); 7.5% is designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest; 42.3% is designated as Local Wildlife Site.

5.9 The diverse woodland types that make up these ancient woodlands include significant areas of wood pasture. They support a wide range of species, including woodland birds and important roosting sites for a number of bat species. Of particular importance is the calcareous woodland that supports a range of rare plants including herb paris and green hellebore and provides home to substantial populations of native bluebells (for which Britain has a global responsibility, supporting about half the world's bluebell population)⁶.

Chalk Rivers and Streams

5.10 The spring-fed chalk streams and rivers of the North Wessex Downs support an extremely diverse range of plant and animal communities. Pea mussels and internationally rare floating vegetation of river water-dropwort can be found along their reaches. In turn, the rivers irrigate adjacent areas creating the distinctive valley landscape with its remnant fens and water meadows. The summer snowflake, a Red Data Book species, survives in seasonally flooded sites along the River Kennet. In recognition of their outstanding nature conservation value the Lambourn, Kennet and Hampshire Avon rivers are all designated SSSIs, while the Lambourn, the Hampshire Avon, and the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain – a series of discrete sites supporting the globally vulnerable Desmoulin's whorl snail – are Special Areas of Conservation.

Enclosed Farmland

5.11 Arable cultivation is the dominant land management activity in the area. The North Wessex Downs support a wide range of nationally and regionally important species associated with arable farmland and adapted to colonise land disturbed through tillage. They include farmland birds like stone-curlew and tree sparrow; rare arable plants such as corn buttercup and shepherd's needle; and mammals such as brown hare and harvest mouse. Many of these species are listed as Species of Priority Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and are targets for the Government's strategy to implement commitments under the global Convention on Biological Diversity. An Arable Biodiversity Strategy has been prepared for the NWDNL to help conserve and enhance the nationally important arable biodiversity found within the North Wessex Downs.

5.12 Although the downs are essentially a large-scale landscape, traditional areas of mixed farming, responding to the underlying geology, have resulted in a range of habitats (grassland, scrub and arable land) co-existing in close proximity. This complex of interlinked habitats provides some of the most favourable conditions for the characteristic birds and mammals of the North Wessex Downs, including brown hare, skylark, lapwing, tree sparrow, corn bunting, linnet and grey partridge. Increased cover, nesting opportunities and a wider abundance of food supply occur where arable margins meet wildflower- and insect-rich downland and scrub. This supports an important community of ground-nesting birds and other species typical of arable and unimproved grassland which has been lost from many areas of arable farmland.

5.13 Changes to climate will alter the composition of the natural communities that are characteristic of chalk downland, woodland, streams and arable fields. Diverse natural communities of plants and animals are most likely to survive on soils and in streams with low nutrient status and in large patches of habitat. Given the pressures of climate change and the need to protect and enhance a nature recovery network that enables species migration, habitat corridors along rights of way and habitat networks are of increasing value.

³ *Natural England: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework Statistics Release 2024.*

⁴ *Forestry Research: Trees out of woodland revised statistics August 2024.*

⁵ *Natural England: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework Statistics Release 2025.*

⁶ *G. Vines (ed.) 2004 Bluebells for Britain Plantlife, Salisbury.*



Nature Conservation and Recovery

5.14 *Making Space for Nature*, a review of England's wildlife sites and its ecological network, chaired by Sir John Lawton and published in 2010, identified Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as having great potential "to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network". The key message from this report, which was adopted in policy through the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, was that to safeguard the country's wildlife habitats and species it was essential to "make space for nature". It advocated that this could be most readily achieved by making existing sites that are important for wildlife "bigger, better and joined up" and by creating more such sites. The aim of this is to create a sustainable, resilient and more effective ecological network for England.

25-Year Environment Plan

5.15 The UK Government Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published a 25-Year Environment Plan (25YEP) in 2018. Among the commitments made in the Plan were to commission a review of protected landscapes and develop a nature recovery network⁷.

The 25YEP set out 10 goals for the environment:



- GOAL 1:** Thriving plants and wildlife
- GOAL 2:** Clean air
- GOAL 3:** Clean and plentiful water
- GOAL 4:** Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides
- GOAL 5:** Maximise our resources, minimise our waste
- GOAL 6:** Using resources from nature sustainably
- GOAL 7:** Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- GOAL 8:** Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards
- GOAL 9:** Enhancing biosecurity
- GOAL 10:** Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

⁷ Natural England: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework Statistics Release 2024.

Environmental Improvement Plan

5.16 The Environment Act 2021 commits the Government to refresh the 25 Year Environment Plan every five years. The first review was published as the Environmental Improvement Plan in January 2023. This retained the 10 Goals set out in the 25YEP and set out an 'apex goal' of improving nature, which is supported by all the other goals. Following the General Election in 2024, the Government initiated a review of the Environmental Improvement Plan.

5.17 In January 2024, DEFRA published the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF), which outlines ten Targets that Protected Landscapes bodies, relevant authorities and partners are expected to prioritise. These relate to Goals 1, 7 and 10 in the Environmental Improvement Plan.

5.18 Some targets are action focused, while others set a clear numerical target for how much Protected Landscapes are expected to contribute as areas to the national targets. The paper adds that *"targets should be seen as a minimum contribution rather than a limit on a Protected Landscape's ambition"*.

5.19 It is important to emphasise that the PLTOF states: *"The targets are for the Protected Landscapes as places (the geographic area covered by the designation). Action will be coordinated by Protected Landscape bodies through their statutory management plan. It will be the responsibility of all stakeholders, partners and land managers in the area to support their delivery"* and that *"the framework will empower Protected Landscape bodies, relevant authorities, farmers, land managers and other organisations to work together in planning and targeting resources and activity."*⁸

30by30

5.20 In 2019, under the umbrella of the National Landscapes Association, the family of National Landscapes launched the Colchester Declaration. This is a formal commitment to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change. The commitments include that, by 2030: at least 200,000 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in National Landscapes will be in favourable condition; at least 100,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside protected sites will have been created / restored in National Landscapes; and at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in National landscapes following the principle of the right tree in the right place.

⁸ Policy paper: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, DEFRA 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-landscapes-targets-and-outcomes-framework/protected-landscapes-targets-and-outcomes-framework>



5.21 National Landscapes also pledged to publish Nature Recovery Plans with priorities in their areas for achieving these national commitments.

5.22 The independent Landscapes Review was commissioned by the Government as an action from the 25YEP and chaired by Julian Glover. The Glover Review recommended that “*National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries*”, and that they “*should be at the centre of coordinated action to integrate effective ecological networks with landscape objectives and other uses, including farming, education, recreation, tourism and the provision of other ecosystem services.*”

5.23 Internationally, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted in 2022 at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. This Framework supports the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and sets out targets for 2030 and goals for 2050. The UK is a signatory to the Convention and has adopted the target to conserve 30% of land, waters and seas by 2030, often referred to as 30by30.

5.24 In a document published in October 2024, the Government stated that “*Delivering the UK’s 30by30 target on land in England requires urgent and significant action to drive nature’s recovery. This will require a strategic approach, to address the scale of action needed, and ensure a diverse and well-connected network of 30by30 areas. This approach also supports our wider objectives for nature’s recovery, food security and beyond.*”⁹

5.25 Two of the PLTOF targets, T1 and T8, are apportioned by Protected Landscape (see Table 4). It is expected that the primary focus of T1 will be enhancement, restoration and creation of species-rich calcareous grassland, which is the top priority habitat in the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan. Other contributions will come from chalk stream restoration, floodplain meadows and grazing marsh and lowland fen, arable field margins and other in-field measures, restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), and heathland restoration / creation. At the time of writing, information for the area of wildlife-rich habitats within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape outside protected sites (Target T1) was not yet available.

Table 4: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework: Apportioned EIP Targets for the North Wessex Downs National Landscape

National Target	North Wessex Downs National Landscape	
	Increase (ha) by 2030	Increase (ha) by 2042 (T1) by 2050 (T8)
T1 Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline of 0).	3,000	14,000
T8 Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from a 2022 baseline of 0).	400	1,750

5.26 Target T8 is more challenging in terms of landscape character, given almost 16% of the landscape already has tree canopy or woodland cover and important landscape character types such as Open Downland are not suitable for new woodland planting. Constraints include the open character of much of the designated landscape; the impact planting would have on historic monuments and landscape character; conflicts between tree-planting and priority habitats and species such as calcareous grassland, arable wildflowers and ground-nesting birds; and the loss of productive arable land. However, because the target goes beyond conventional afforestation, relating instead to all kinds of tree canopy cover, there is significant scope for well-considered expansion without conflicting with landscape character and the area’s valued qualities. In particular, there are opportunities buffering and linking ancient woodland sites, restoration and creation of wood pasture landscapes, restoring and creating new traditional orchards, promoting many more large hedgerow trees, street trees within settlements and sensitively designed agro-forestry. It should be noted that the canopy will take some years to develop and the relatively low target for 2030 should be read with the understanding that a larger area will need to be addressed by then for the 2050 target to be met.

⁹ Policy paper: 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps, DEFRA, 2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criteria-for-30by30-on-land-in-england>

5.27 It should be noted that some of the 10 targets are not applicable to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, while others require further guidance and clarification from DEFRA.

Nature Recovery Plan

5.28 Through the Colchester Declaration we pledged to produce a Nature Recovery Plan for the North Wessex Downs. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan¹⁰ was informed by wide consultation and launched in 2023.

5.29 The Nature Recovery Plan sets out the National Landscape Partnership's priorities for nature, working with partners, stakeholders and community groups. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but sets out the status of key habitats and identifies species occurring within the National Landscape that are of particular significance. It identifies actions, targets and practical opportunities to reverse the declines and losses we have witnessed over recent decades.

5.30 The biggest current threat to our habitats and species is climate change. The Nature Recovery Plan, informed by the Climate Change Adaptation Manual 2020, identifies habitat vulnerability to climate change and suggests measures that will help our key habitats to be more resilient in the face of increasing global temperatures and changing weather patterns. Other threats include intensive agriculture, intensive game shooting, urbanisation, disturbance pollution and the spread of invasive non-native species.

5.31 In tandem with an urgent need to tackle climate change and other threats, we need to do more to allow nature and wildlife to recover and to support natural processes to function. Ill-considered actions to sequester carbon and mitigate climate change can have an adverse impact on biodiversity, as well as the landscape character and natural beauty for which the National Landscape is designated. Nature recovery must be planned, hand in hand with climate change actions, in ways that conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty in line with its national and international status as an IUCN Category V Protected Landscape.

5.32 The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership encourages activities that: improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management; increase the size of current wildlife sites; join, or enhance connections between, sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones'; create new sites; reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

5.33 These actions are designed to help establish a Nature Recovery Network that meets the needs of wildlife and people today, and one that is more resilient to future pressures, including climate change. There are trade-offs between these actions: the more we do to improve the quality of existing sites or to enhance the wider environment, the less we will need to do to create new sites. Our actions need to be adaptive, adjusting to what works as we progress.

Biodiversity Duty on Public Authorities

5.34 The Environment Act 2021 strengthened the biodiversity duty on public authorities. The duty requires them to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration, and act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

5.35 Under the Environment (Local Nature Recovery Strategies) (Procedure) Regulations 2023, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs sets out the requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). The Government has appointed 48 responsible authorities to lead on preparing LNRSs for England. There are four LNRSs covering parts of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape: Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, including Swindon. Each LNRS must agree priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. Every strategy must contain a) a habitat map of the most valuable areas for wildlife, b) a list of opportunities to improve nature in the future and c) a written statement of biodiversity priorities. Responsible authorities are expected to work with other organisations and partners in their area to agree what should be included in their LNRS. At the time of writing the LNRSs are at various stages of development. The priorities in the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan have informed the preparation of the LNRSs. It will be important to ensure that the agreed LNRSs reflect the Nature Recovery Plan for the NWDNL and that the latter is aligned with and complements the LNRSs. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape will act as a delivery partner, convening partners, encouraging collaborative action across the National Landscape, developing projects and facilitating or supporting delivery.

¹⁰ Nature Recovery Plan, NWDNL Partnership 2023, <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NWD-AONB-Nature-Recovery-Plan-Version-1-Sept23.pdf>

National Planning Policy and Legislation

5.36 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out measures to conserve and enhance the natural environment, including protecting and enhancing sites for biodiversity, minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks. Further, it makes clear that Local Plans should *“take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.”* Green infrastructure is a *“network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities”* and it helps address and mitigate the impacts of climate change, providing for recreation, biodiversity, health and wellbeing. On a detailed level, the NPPF highlights the importance in development of incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs.

5.37 The Environment Act 2021 created a new biodiversity net gain (BNG) condition for planning permissions. All applicable developments are now required to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was before. A biodiversity metric is used to calculate the BNG of a development. As an incentive to focus nature recovery actions in the most strategic locations, development projects that create, enhance or recover habitat in locations which are mapped in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy are given a higher biodiversity value than they would receive elsewhere.

Recording

5.38 The Biological Record Centres and Historic Environment Records Centres serving the North Wessex Downs play an important role as the main repositories for information on the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the National Landscape and its setting. In addition to gathering data and evidence from specialists, there is scope for greater use of citizen science, engaging the public in biological recording / monitoring of key species and habitats, including the presence of invasive non-native species.

“At length the snow ceases and the wind drops to a whisper; then over the hill-top the lapwings start up again and wheel in phantom flight, shrieking their weird night call.”

EDWARD THOMAS (1878-1917)



Water vole – Mark Bridger with Shutterstock

Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Key Issues

Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the National Landscape's Biodiversity and Nature Recovery Valued Qualities:

- a) Recording – significant gaps in our understanding of the distribution and abundance of habitats and species across the National Landscape and how to manage it most effectively for biodiversity.
- b) Habitat fragmentation degrading ecosystem functionality. Dispersal and colonisation potential of wildlife populations is constrained, leading to loss of genetic diversity and risk of local extinctions.
- c) Climate change – impacts of flooding, winterbournes, watercourses, carbon sequestration, vulnerable habitats, changes in the climatic range of species (both losses and gains). The resilience and response of species, such as shifts in distribution, will be strongly influenced by habitat availability and connectivity.
- d) Continuing uncertainty over future UK land management patterns, in particular the future role of protected landscapes in farming and the potential for environmental land management schemes (ELMs) to deliver significant biodiversity improvements across the farmed landscape, and retain improvements secured through past land management support schemes.
- e) Direct and indirect effects of agricultural intensification and land management changes having continued negative impacts on farmland habitats and species.
- f) Lack of management and other pressures leading to the loss and degradation / decline of priority habitats and species.
- g) Nesting success and productivity is often insufficient to reverse declines or even to sustain current populations of many ground-nesting birds.
- h) Negative impacts of invasive non-native species on native wildlife and habitats.
- i) Economic fragility of low input / extensive farming systems and cost of replacement infrastructure (fencing, water supplies etc.) leading to loss or deterioration of semi-natural habitats through poor management.
- j) Need for grazing – lack of livestock to manage remaining areas of semi-natural chalk grassland and restored or newly created grassland, movement restrictions, recreational pressure, bovine tuberculosis testing and movement regulations.
- k) Degradation and loss of river and wetland habitats through inappropriate management, development, increasing water demand, pollution, eutrophication, past human engineering, shading and climate change.
- l) Lack of or poor management of much woodland, including ancient woodland and hedges causing a decline in biodiversity.
- m) Existing green infrastructure network – erosion of lane and byway verges by increased traffic use and larger vehicles, lack of resources and management to maintain biodiversity and secure enhancements.
- n) Change from the use of grass gallops (some of which retain remnant areas of chalk grassland) to artificial surfaces in the racing industry.
- o) Increased recreational pressure, with dog-worrying of livestock, disturbance to vulnerable ground-nesting birds, and erosion of chalk grassland and other fragile habitats.
- p) Development within the NWDNL and its setting – direct loss of habitat and wildlife and creation of obstacles to nature recovery networks through built development, and indirect impacts, e.g. increased recreational pressure from bigger human population, increasing population of domestic pets, domestic lighting affecting invertebrates and bats.
- q) Pesticides in the environment adversely impacting terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates (inc. pollinators).
- r) Lack of reliable, coherent long-term resources necessary to recover nature at scale, e.g. to meet 30by30 challenge.
- s) Dearth of experienced and skilled advisors with agri-ecological skills to advise farmers and land managers.
- t) Threat of smaller, family farms that may support more biodiversity having to be sold and absorbed by bigger, highly commercial agri-businesses.
- u) Green finance and markets still evolving with challenges for farmers and landowners to understand opportunities and find trustworthy viable partners.
- v) Nature poverty, people not having, or not understanding how to have, access to nature.
- w) Plastics polluting the environment especially streams / rivers, including micro plastics and plastics used in farming.

Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Priorities

1. Collaborative action to implement the NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan, aligned with Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
2. Action to meet DEFRA targets and contribute towards 30by30, as set out in this Plan.
3. Develop an expanded and connected nature recovery network in the North Wessex Downs which is resilient to the impacts of climate change and allows the free movement of habitats and species throughout the landscape and beyond.
4. Foster a more equitable partnership between people and their natural environment, ensuring land use decisions respect nature, farming practices share space with nature and recreation is effectively managed to protect vulnerable habitats and species.
5. Enable landscape-scale initiatives that respond to the central position of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape within the geography of the *Big Chalk*.



Yellowhammer – Simon Booker



*Wetland generation, Sulham
– David Olinski*



*Short-eared owl, Marlborough
Downs – David White*

Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Policies

BNR 01

Support the delivery of NWDNL Nature Recovery Plan priorities and targets in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. To ensure effective management of all priority habitats and species in the National Landscape.

BNR 02

Resist proposals which will lead to the direct or indirect degradation or loss of nationally or locally designated wildlife sites, priority habitats or populations of protected and priority species.

BNR 03

Encourage a co-ordinated and consistent approach by Local Nature Recovery Strategies to nature recovery networks, aligned with North Wessex Downs priorities, across the National Landscape and its setting.

BNR 04

Support farmers and land managers in restoring, creating and maintaining a resilient network habitats with thriving populations of key species, guided by the Nature Recovery Plan and LNRS priorities.

BNR 05

Support efforts to understand and respond to the localised impacts of climate change on vulnerable habitats and species within and surrounding the North Wessex Downs, to improve resilience and adaptation.

BNR 06

Encourage and support landscape-scale action for habitat management, restoration and creation.

BNR 07

Support and encourage actions to enable grazing on all the main grassland areas of the National Landscape.

BNR 08

Support the development of initiatives to safeguard and develop habitat corridors and ecological networks throughout the National Landscape, and in particular to enhance the ecological value of road verges and similar linear features such as public rights of way and National Trails.

BNR 09

Support Catchment Partnerships and other key stakeholders including water companies to promote and deliver projects to conserve, restore and enhance chalk streams, rivers and other waterbodies to achieve good ecological status.

BNR 10

Encourage and support restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites and protection and management of woodland generally for nature recovery, as well as its recreational, carbon storage and economic value.

BNR 11

Encourage greater connection between people and the natural environment, promoting responsible access to nature in appropriate locations and effectively communicate its value to people.

BNR 12

Support the County Biological Record Centres and Historic Environment Records Centres serving the North Wessex Downs as the main repositories for information on the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the National Landscape and support initiatives to engage the public in biological recording / monitoring.

BNR 13

Support research, including to understand the causes of declines in key species such as ground-nesting birds and support appropriate action to rebuild populations, and use of tools such as citizen science to monitor the impact of habitat restoration and improved management practices in the National Landscape.

BNR 14

Secure maximum biodiversity gain and protection of ecosystem goods and services through innovative use of emerging environmental mechanisms including Environmental Land Management schemes, natural capital, carbon markets, biodiversity net gain etc.

BNR 15

Resist proposals which have a likely significant effect (either alone or in combination with other plans and projects) upon a European designated site unless it can be ascertained following an appropriate assessment that they will have no significant adverse effect on the integrity of the site concerned.

BNR 16

Realise the potential for actions that align nature recovery with the rich cultural heritage of the North Wessex Downs, e.g. hedge restoration and management, arable reversion to grassland on historic monuments, sensitive woodland management etc.



Small tortoiseshell – Pippa Palmer