

Woodland Habitat Action Plan

A Vision for Wiltshire's Woodland over the next 30 years...

Woodland owners are fully involved in the sustainable management of their own woodlands, and the area of woodlands managed sustainably is increased.

The importance of ancient woodlands is understood and celebrated by Wiltshire's inhabitants, and there is no further loss in the area of ancient woodland and the rich flora and fauna that it supports.

Species which have seen dramatic decline in the past 20 years recover and flourish once again in Wiltshire's woodlands.

Background

This Action Plan encompasses all woodland within the county – ancient and recent semi-natural woodland and plantations of both conifer and broad-leaved species. However some parts of the Plan focus on ancient woodlands, since these are generally the richest in wildlife and once destroyed cannot be recreated.

Some definitions...

Ancient Woodland

Ancient Woodland has had a continuous history of cover since at least 1600AD, with clearing having been restricted to underwood or timber production only. Some ancient woods may be 'primary' in the sense that they are on sites that have always been woodland, back to the pre-Neolithic wildwood. However in many cases ancient woods have been cleared in the distant past: for example they may contain the remains of early Medieval, Saxon, Roman or Iron Age remains. As long as there has been no complete clearance of the site since 1600 such woods are still 'ancient' (Goldberg and Kirkby, 2002).

Recent Secondary Woodland

This term covers all woodland which does not have a history of continuous cover from at least 1600 and which has since that time developed "naturally" or has been planted on formerly non-wooded land. Recent secondary woodlands can generally be distinguished by their structure and also usually contain fewer species than ancient woodlands.

Semi-natural woodland

This term covers all woodland stands and types which do not obviously originate from planting but which exist as "ecologically distinct associations of trees, shrubs and herbs determined by edaphic, climatic and biotic influences" (Peterken, 1982).

Replanted Woodland

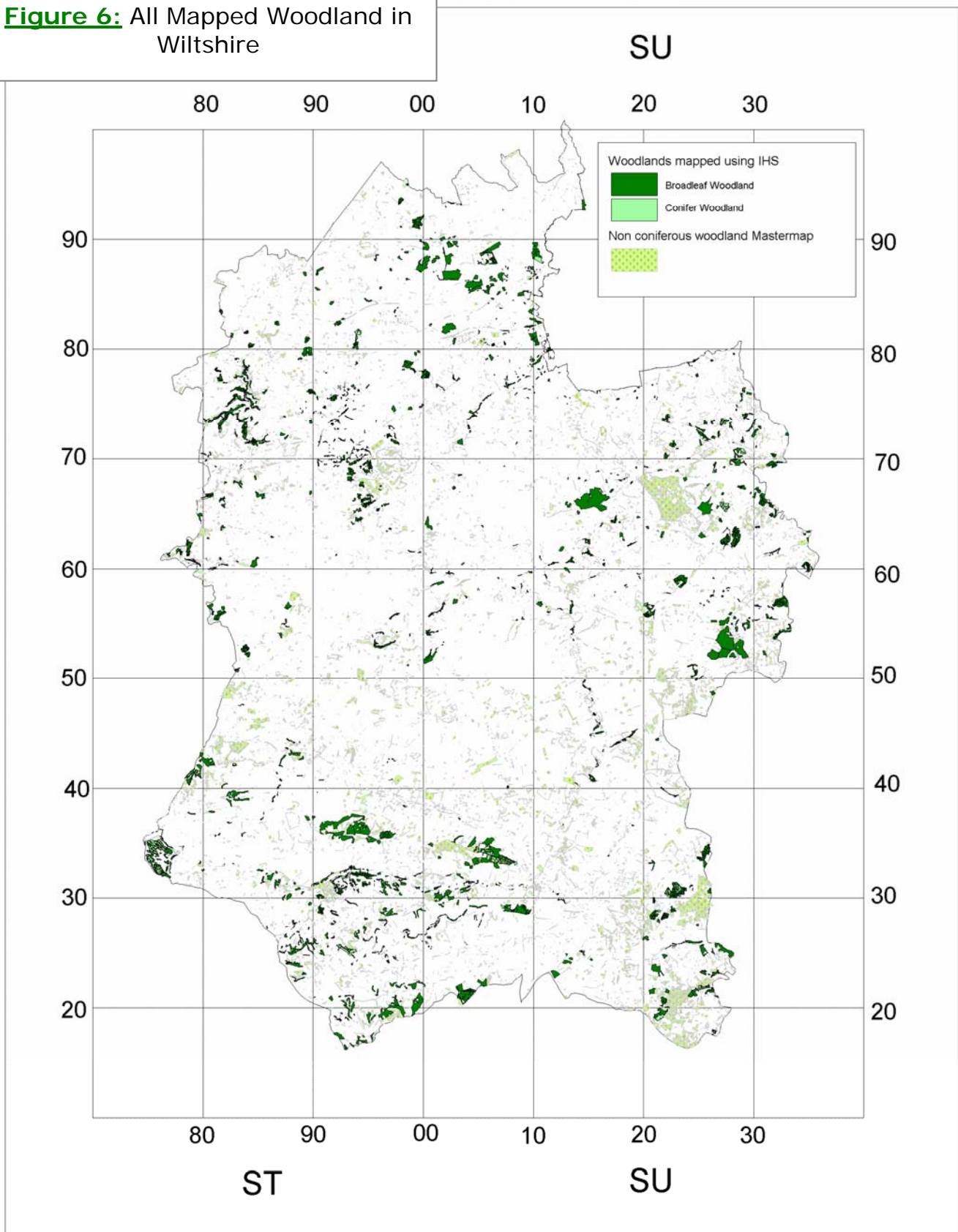
This term covers all obviously replanted woodland of a broadleaved, mixed or coniferous type. This automatically includes plantations of any species not native to Wiltshire, but also to native species planted so densely that the site's semi natural characteristics are suppressed.

Woodland in Wiltshire

Before man's arrival in Wiltshire it is likely that most of the county would have been covered by primary woodland of some type. The woods which now remain and are ancient in origin generally exist on sites relatively less favourable for farming.

The distribution of woodland and woodland types is also closely related to geology. The limestone plateaus and hills in the north west of the county are largely bare of woodland but by contrast, many of the steep sided valleys and coombes have remained wooded and the fertile moist soils support rich woodlands.

Figure 6: All Mapped Woodland in Wiltshire



WSBRC 2008

Figure 6 illustrates the extent of woodland in Wiltshire that has been mapped by the WSBRC. Ancient woodland cannot currently be distinguished. The National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (Forestry Commission, 2002) estimates that the total area of woodland in Wiltshire in blocks of over 2ha amounts to 26,624ha.

A provisional Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) for Wiltshire was published in 1987 by the Nature Conservancy Council, and also considered all woodland blocks of over 2ha. The AWI estimates the extent of ancient woodland in Wiltshire to be 12,714ha - 53% of the woodland in the county or 3.7% of Wiltshire's total area. This indicates that just under half of the total woodland cover is secondary – either plantation or naturally regenerated woodland on formerly non-wooded sites.

Important Woodland Sites in Wiltshire

A total of 1350ha of Wiltshire's woodland is designated as SSSI, including Savernake Forest, Langley Wood and Cranborne Chase described below. Other important sites include Bentley Wood SSSI (which has an exceptional butterfly assemblage), Grovely Wood, Great Wood, Longleat and Stourhead.

Savernake Forest (Forestry Commission)

One of the largest woods in Wiltshire, contains outstanding lichen flora and a wide variety of other plants including species with nationally restricted distributions

- Exceptional diversity of fungi, well over 500 species
- Several beetles, flies and moths with nationally restricted distributions, including the Scarce Brown Streak (*Aplota palpella*), a UK and WBAP moth
- At least 25 butterflies breed on the site including Purple Emperor and White Letter Hairstreak
- The Forest harbours Wood Warblers, Turtle Dove and Woodcock, as well as Tree Pipits and Spotted Flycatcher which breed on the woodland edge.
- Range of mammals including Dormice and bats

Cranborne Chase (part of Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB)

Straddling the Dorset/Wiltshire border, Cranborne Chase woodland derives from an ancient hunting forest. It provides some of the best examples of extensive coppice woodland in the country and the coppice regime is centuries old.

- 160 species of lichen recorded – 13 of which are rare in England, including *Usnea articulate* (WBAP and UKBAP) a formerly widespread species which is extremely susceptible to sulphur dioxide pollution and now virtually confined to the south west.
- 57 plant species associated with ancient woodland
- Over 80 species of moss and liverwort
- Over 120 species of moth and 30 species of butterfly including Pearl-Bordered Fritillary

Langley Wood National Nature Reserve and SSSI (Natural England)

This is an extensive tract of ancient forest on acid clays in the south of Wiltshire and within the New Forest National Park. There is no continuous history of grazing or coppicing and the site has been modified by man to a lesser degree than most woodland in lowland England. There is a very large range of woodland stand-types which reflects variation in soils and drainage. This has produced an exceptionally rich and varied woodland both structurally and botanically:

- The epiphyte lichen flora is particularly rich and some of the beard lichens are particularly luxuriant
- Wide range of breeding birds including BAP species: Nightingale, Nightjar, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Wood Warbler
- One area of young plantation supports a rich community of butterflies including Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Duke of Burgundy, both of which are very rare in the New Forest.



Pictures: Savernake Forest, Tom Cairns/WWT

Species characteristic of Woodland Habitats

As shown by the case studies above, woodlands, and particularly ancient woodlands can contain a rich species diversity of vascular plants, lichens, mosses, liverworts, butterflies, moths, birds and mammals. Woodlands are also important for bats, as they provide shelter and cover and a wide diversity of insect food. Dead trees are often valuable in providing roost sites for bats.

The dramatic decline in many familiar farmland birds has been well documented over recent years, however many woodland species are now also exhibiting similarly worrying trends. For example Lesser Spotted Woodpecker numbers decreased by 81%, Spotted Flycatcher, 71%, Nightingale, 63%, and Woodcock, 74%, between 1980-2005 (Common Birds Census).

The Wiltshire BAP Woodland HAP contains separate actions for Willow Tit and Nightjar, as well as the Dormouse.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

The Nightjar is a summer migrant that has been declining in numbers and range for much of the last century – the decline in range has been about 52% between 1968-92 (UK BAP Nightjar SAP). The species now breeds mainly in southern England, and where found in woodland, Nightjars nest in clearings and areas of clearfell. An increase in forestry clear-fells as a result of major storms and forest management have assisted recent increases, with over 50% of the total population found in this habitat in 1992. Actions have therefore been included in the Wiltshire BAP to provide more of this habitat, in line with the RSPB's work towards meeting targets in the UK BAP.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

Willow Tit numbers decreased by 76% between 1980-2004 (BTO Common Bird Census/Breeding Bird Surveys), and it now has Red List status and is considered one of the fastest declining species in the UK. Action has been included in the Wiltshire BAP to try and understand some of the reasons behind this decline.

Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*

In England the Dormouse has become extinct in up to 7 counties (comprising half of its former range) in the past 100 years. Although Dormice are still widespread in southern counties (Devon to Kent) they are patchily distributed. Population densities everywhere are less than 10 adults per hectare, even in good habitats. Fragmentation of woodland, leaving isolated non-viable populations is one of the main factors causing decline. Short distances, possibly as little as 100m, form absolute barriers to dispersal, unless arboreal routes are available.



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Progress Highlights since 2002

New Woodland Planting

101ha of new woodland were planted in the ancient Royal Hunting Forest of Braydon in north Wiltshire between 2002-2005 by partners such as GWCF, WWT and FC, as part of the Jigsaw Challenge, to expand and link existing semi natural woodland. The Jigsaw Project was introduced by the Forestry Commission in England in recognition of the fact that many of our semi-natural woods are fragments of historically more extensive woodland, and that this fragmentation must be reversed.



Tree planting in the Braydon Forest – Paul Darby/WWT

Dormice

Wiltshire Mammal Group

During this period, the Wiltshire Mammal Group has continued to monitor 80 nest boxes erected in Savernake Forest, with Dormice found on nearly every visit. The Mammal Group also carried out a 20 box study in the south of the county at Oysters Coppice which has yielded a Dormouse nest.

The Mammal Group recently scouted a new site in west Wiltshire by carrying out a Habitat Assessment and Nut Hunt. The group has now set up 52 boxes, built by Mammal Group volunteers, in March 2008 ready for monitoring beginning in May. A further site near Rodbourne has had 100 nest boxes set up in it, which will be adopted by the Wiltshire Mammal Group in 2009. Finally, talks with the Swindon Rangers has identified Stanton Park as a possible receptor for 50 more boxes to become another National Dormouse Monitoring Site of the Wiltshire Mammal Group later in 2008.

20 Mammal Group volunteers have now begun training towards their Dormouse handling licence.

Salisbury Plain

In November 2007, Imber Conservation Group (ICG) and Defence Estates Environmental Support Team (DE EST) carried out a Nut Hunt at Ranscombe Bottom, an area of coppice woodland on the edge of Salisbury Plain. Evidence of Dormice was found, and subsequently a small team made up of representatives from ICG, Aspire Defence and the DE EST put out 50 new 'state of the art' summer residence dormouse boxes at Ranscombe. The boxes will be monitored, and the monitoring work will contribute to the National Dormice Monitoring Programme (NDMP), coordinated by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species and Natural England. The Bulford Conservation Group, with the assistance of EST, are planning to put up a further 50 Dormouse boxes at Everleigh Ashes over on the East side of the Plain.



Picture: Dormouse box © MOD

Firecrest at Center Parcs

This species is a regular breeder at Longleat, and in 2007 a total of 16 breeding pairs were recorded. It is estimated that there are around 30 pairs of Firecrest in the southwest of England in total, and as approximately 50% of the UK population of Firecrest are found in the southwest of England, it is therefore possible that this site holds over 25% of the total UK breeding population. Center Parcs BAP Target 10 focuses on Firecrest, and numbers have been monitored annually at Longleat since 1994.

Changes since 2002

Planning and Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) now requires local planning authorities to have regard to areas of ancient woodland when granting planning permission.

Extract from PPS9: *"Ancient woodland is a valuable biodiversity resource both for its diversity of species and for its longevity as woodland. Once lost it cannot be recreated. Local planning authorities should identify any areas of ancient woodland in their areas that do not have statutory protection (e.g. as a SSSI). They should not grant planning permission for any development that would result in its loss of deterioration unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location outweigh the loss of the woodland habitat. Aged or 'veteran' trees found outside ancient woodland are also particularly valuable for biodiversity and their loss should be avoided. Planning authorities should encourage the conservation of such trees as part of development proposals."*

In 2007 Defra published "A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests" (the ETWF Strategy). The Strategy embraces a number of new policy directions such as climate change as well as policy updates in environmental and social issues across Government. It was strongly influenced by regional aspirations for the local delivery of benefits from trees, woods and forests. It can be downloaded from the Defra website – www.defra.gov.uk.

Links with existing Plans

South West Biodiversity Implementation Plan

Section 10: Woodlands and Forestry

Other sections of the Wiltshire BAP

Rivers Streams and Associated Habitats HAP: wet woodland covered under this HAP

Bats SAP: As outlined above, woodland habitats are also important for bats, actions for which are covered under the Bats SAP.

Hedgerows Action Plan: hedgerows are important as linkages for maintaining dormice metapopulations

Cotswold Water Park BAP

Woodland Habitat Action Plan

New Forest BAP

The New Forest National Park is in the process of producing a Management Plan and BAP for the New Forest. These are likely to establish generic actions building on detailed actions from the Hampshire BAP (relevant HAPs in the Hampshire BAP are those for Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and Hedgerows)

Center Parcs BAP

Target 17: Broadleaved woodland

Taking the Wiltshire BAP Woodland HAP Forwards

It was decided that as the Woodland, Wood-pasture and Hedgerows Habitat Action Plan working groups contained representatives from the same organisations, they should be taken forwards together. Therefore a combined working group has been set up to progress all three Action Plans. Ian Briscoe of the Forestry Commission will lead on the Woodland and Wood-pasture Plans, and Roger Griffin from Natural England will lead on Hedgerows.

References:

The Common Birds Census (CBS) was developed in 1964, and was the first survey to identify dramatic declines in many species, particularly amongst Farmland Birds. The CBS has now been replaced by the Breeding Birds Survey (BBS) developed in joint partnership in 1994 by BTO, JNCC and RSPB. More information from the BTO website: www.bto.org.

Confederation of Forest Industries (ConFor) website: www.confor.org.uk

Bowsher, P. (1987) *Wiltshire Inventory of Ancient Woodland (Provisional)* Nature Conservancy Council

Goldberg, E. and Kirby, K. (2002) *Ancient Woodland: Guidance Material for Local Authorities*. Natural England Publication number AWG1.

Smith, S. and Gilbert J. (2002) *National Inventory of Woodland and Trees, England: County Report for Wiltshire*. Forestry Commission. Download from: www.forestry.gov.uk/inventory

The UK BAP Species Action Plans for Dormouse and Nightjar can be viewed on the UK BAP website: www.ukbap.org.uk. They were originally published in: *Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report - Volume II: Action Plans* (December 1995, Tranche 1, Vol 2, p86 (Dormouse) and p.53 (Nightjar))

Wiltshire BAP Woodland Action Plan – Targets and Actions

Objective WO1: Prevent the loss of ancient woodland						
Target	Target Measure	Action	Action Measure	Partners	Deadline	Links
WT1: Maintain existing extent of ancient woodland	No ancient woodland reported as lost (ongoing) (FC)	<u>WA1:</u> Woodland Working Group to determine best way to take forward the revision of the AWI	Recommendations produced	Woodland Working Group , WSBRC, and Natural England	2008	
		<u>WA2:</u> Complete the AWI	Resources obtained by end of 2009. Database completed by 2012	NE , WWT, AONBs (CCWWD, NWD, Cotswolds), WCC (County Ecologist), FC, New Forest NPA	2009 and 2012	Similar work possible in New Forest District through New Forest BAP
		<u>WA3:</u> Encourage woodland management projects in the AONBs in order that new approaches can be trialled and act as models to be used across the wider landscape of the county	New woodland management projects are an agenda item at each Woodland Working Group meeting	Woodland WG , AONBs (CCWWD, NWD, Cotswolds)	Ongoing, annual reporting	
		<u>WA4:</u> Use appropriate legal measures to protect ancient woodlands from incremental threats (e.g. prolonged low level felling, pigs being kept in coppice etc.) <i>Note: the threshold for EIA is lower in the AONBs, and therefore EIAs can be used to gain greater compliance</i>	Mechanisms evaluated by group, and legal measures adopted wherever necessary	Woodland WG , LA Arboricultural officers, FC, WWT, AONBs (CCWWD, NWD, Cotswolds), New Forest NPA	Ongoing, annual reporting	New Forest BAP

Objective WO2: Increase the area of woodland managed sustainably						
Target	Target Measure	Action	Action Measure	Partners	Deadline	Links
WT2: Increase the area of woodland managed sustainably	Maintain area of woodland covered in a management scheme at 2007 baseline (NE and FC) <i>Note for third parties: not all sustainably managed woodland will be in a management scheme but we can only measure what is in a scheme</i>	<u>WA5:</u> Promote the involvement of woodland owners in sustainable woodland management	Initiate 10 new contacts with woodland owners per year	GWCF, Forestry Commission , WWT, New Forest NPA	Ongoing, annual reporting	New Forest BAP; Swindon BAP Woodland HAP (W8, W9)
		<u>WA6:</u> Organise a seminar for woodland owners, woodland contractors and land agents	3 seminars over a 5 year rolling basis	WWT (LFW), FC , NE (RG), FWAG, New Forest NPA	2012 and every 5 years thereafter	New Forest BAP
		<u>WA7:</u> Promote the use of agri-environment and FC schemes to achieve management for biodiversity	Area of woodland under AE or FC scheme is maintained at 2007 baseline	NE, FC , Cotswolds AONB	Ongoing, annual reporting	

Target	Target Measure	Action	Action Measure	Partners	Deadline	Links
	2007 AE baseline is 306.99ha	<u>WA8:</u> Raise awareness of deer management practices in the county	At least 1 deer management event per year	FC, DI, Natural England, GWCF, Cotswolds AONB, Woodland WG	Ongoing, annual reporting	Swindon BAP Woodland HAP (W11)
		<u>WA9:</u> Ensure any developing wood fuel projects maximise biodiversity benefits	All wood fuel projects have positive benefit for biodiversity. Include biodiversity objectives	RSPB, FC , AONBs (CCWWD – Cranborne Chase Woodfair, NWD), NE, New Forest NPA	Ongoing, annual reporting	
		<u>WA10:</u> Encourage the use of locally produced wood products <i>Note: see CONFOR website for info</i>	Produce a design guide incorporating existing (including FWAG) suppliers list, and promote entries into existing list of suppliers from Wiltshire	WWT, AONBs (CCWWD and Cranborne Chase Woodfair, NWD, Cotswolds), National Trust, Natural England, FWAG	Deadline: 2009 (design guide production) then annual report on updating	SW BIP Woodlands and Forestry Objective 4; Swindon BAP Woodland HAP (W17)
<u>WT3:</u> SSSIs in favourable or recovering condition	95% of SSSI in favourable or recovering condition by 2010, and maintained at that level thereafter (NE) <i>Note: currently 59% of 3335ha. Note this also includes wood-pasture and parkland</i>	<u>WA11:</u> Target SSSI woodlands to get into either ES or EWGS to implement the remedies required for favourable condition	Increase in the proportion of SSSI woodlands in an appropriate scheme	NE, FC	2010 and maintained each year thereafter	

Objective WO3: Maintain and where possible, increase, the population size and extent of Wiltshire BAP species associated with this habitat in Wiltshire

Target	Target Measure	Action	Action Measure	Partners	Deadline	Links
<u>WT4:</u> To understand the reasons for the decline in the Willow Tit	Robust understanding of the decline achieved (RSPB)	<u>WA12:</u> Implement research programme	Research programme completed by 2010	RSPB, WOS	2010	New Forest BAP and Management Plan draft policies; SW BIP Woodlands and Forestry Objectives 2&3
<u>WT5:</u> Nightjar - maintain breeding range	Maintain at presence in 270 tetrads (RSPB)	<u>WA13:</u> Promote the management of woodlands for Nightjar	One new area of clearfell of at least 1ha per year	RSPB, WOS, Forest Enterprise	Ongoing, annual reporting	SW BIP Woodlands and Forestry, Objectives 2&3
<u>WT6:</u> Dormouse - Establish population	Report produced by 2012 (Wiltshire)	<u>WA14:</u> Update Dormouse records by 2008	Database of Dormouse records update by 2008	Wiltshire Mammal Group, Woodland	2008	WBAP Hedgerows HAP

Target	Target Measure	Action	Action Measure	Partners	Deadline	Links
distribution	Mammal Group)			Working Group, WSBRC		
		<u>WA15:</u> Prioritise survey effort to areas with old Dormice records	Set up boxes or tubes in 75% of areas identified as having dormice (pre-2000) by 2010 and 100% by 2012	Wiltshire Mammal Group , Woodland Working Group, WWT (Land Management and LFW)	2010 and 2012	
		<u>WA16:</u> Set up new Dormouse monitoring sites	Set up 10 monitoring sites by 2010	Wiltshire Mammal Group , WWT (LFW)	2010	
<u>WT7:</u> Dormouse - maintain and enhance population	Maintain populations at known sites (Savernake; Hens Wood; Blackmoor Copse)	<u>WA17:</u> Landowner advice provision	Mammal Group to provide advice to each landowner every year	Wiltshire Mammal Group , FC, WWT, private woodland owners (at specific sites - Hens Wood)	Ongoing, annual reporting	
		<u>WA18:</u> provide nesting boxes in sites identified as positive under action WA16 above	Nesting boxes at all positive sites	Wiltshire Mammal Group	2010	

Individual contacts for each organisation listed in the “Partners” column and involved in delivering the Woodland Habitat Action Plan:

Organisation	Representatives
Cotswolds AONB	Mark Connelly
Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB	David Blake
Deer Initiative	Jamie Cordery
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	Louise Stratton
Forestry Commission	Ian Briscoe
Forest Enterprise	Chris Sorensen
Great Western Community Forest	Jonathan Wilshaw
National Trust	Chris Gingell
Natural England	Roger Griffin
New Forest National Park Authority	Ian Barker
North Wessex Downs AONB	Heather White
RSPB	Nick Adams
Wiltshire County Council	Fiona Elphick (County Ecologist)
Wiltshire Mammal Group	Mark Satinet, Sarah Wood
Wiltshire Ornithological Society	
WSBRC	Purgle Linham
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	Bill Jenman, Paul Darby and Rob Nicholls (Landscapes for Wildlife Project), Land Management

