

1. Introduction

1.1 Biodiversity and Why it Matters

'Biodiversity is all living things, from the tiny garden ant to the giant redwood tree. You will find biodiversity everywhere, in window boxes and wild woods, roadsides and rainforests, snow fields and shore' (*The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report 1995*).



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Exploring the natural world

Biodiversity includes the whole variety of life on earth. It is important to us because it provides so many of the essentials of our lives – our oxygen, food, water, clothing, medicines and much loved landscapes.

Biodiversity is also a key test of sustainability. If it is disappearing, then we are not making sustainable decisions. People from both urban and rural areas have the right to expect a countryside rich in wildlife as much as they have the right to expect access to other services such as health and education. This is particularly true in National Parks.

Dartmoor's biodiversity should therefore be seen as a tremendous asset rather than a constraint. It helps to give the National Park its distinctive character, supports farming, forestry, tourism and other economic enterprises and provides the whole nation with a wonderful environment for spiritual refreshment and healthy exercise.

However, the world is losing biodiversity at an alarming rate as a result of human activity. This is happening in our own backyard, not just in some distant rainforest. In the UK we have lost over 100 species since 1900 and even on Dartmoor, 12 species are known to have become extinct in the last 100 years, with 10 species being lost since the National Park was declared in 1951 (see *The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile*). The good news is that we can do something about it. By 'thinking globally, acting locally' we can both protect Dartmoor's biodiversity and contribute to national and international targets for species and habitat conservation.



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High brown fritillary

1.2 The Biodiversity Framework

1.2.1 The international framework

In response to concerns about loss of biodiversity expressed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, there has been much activity in 'biodiversity planning' across the globe. Over 150 governments, including the UK, signed a pledge (the *Convention on Biological Diversity*) to take immediate action to arrest the global loss of biodiversity. Many countries now have national Biodiversity Action Plans and are beginning the process of implementation. In 1992, the European Union also adopted the Habitats Directive with direct implications for biodiversity on Dartmoor. Around 30% of the area of the National Park is now a candidate Special Area of Conservation. This will form part of a network of protected areas across the European Union – the Natura 2000 sites, and reflects the international importance of the National Park for biodiversity. Action for wildlife on Dartmoor will therefore contribute directly to European and global biodiversity targets.

1.2.2 The national framework

In the UK, *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan* was produced in 1994 with an overall goal 'to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms'. The UK Biodiversity Steering Group was set up to prepare a detailed plan of action to achieve these objectives. In 1995, it produced the *Biodiversity: UK Steering Group Report. Volume 1: Meeting the Rio Challenge* and *Volume 2: Action Plans*. Subsequently, new action plans have been added for the remaining priority species and habitats – *UK Biodiversity Steering Group: Tranche 2 Action Plans Vols.*

I-VI and guidance notes have been produced for local biodiversity action plans (*Guidance for Local Biodiversity Action Plans: Guidance Notes 1 – 6*). These propose a standard methodology and format for the production of local biodiversity action plans.

All these documents have been used in drawing up the Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan.

1.2.3 The regional and local framework

In order to kick-start the biodiversity planning process in the south west of England, a partnership of conservation organisations (including the Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities) produced in 1997 the first ever regional audit of biodiversity (*The Biodiversity of the South-West: An Audit of the South-West Biological Resource*). This listed over 700 species of conservation concern within south west England, some of them on Dartmoor. This was followed by *Action for Biodiversity in the South-West: A Series of Habitat and Action Plans to Guide Delivery*. This document concentrated on 31 geographically widespread habitats and species in the region. Some Dartmoor species and habitats were included e.g. marsh fritillary and species rich hedges but others were not covered, even if they are of national significance e.g. blanket bog and high brown fritillary, as they have a more local distribution. It was envisaged that these would be included in local biodiversity action plans.

The process was taken a stage further in 1998 by the publication of *The Nature of Devon: A Biodiversity Action Plan*. This was also produced through a partnership consortium including the Dartmoor National Park

Authority. It contains action plans for 17 of Devon's key wildlife habitats and geological features, and 20 of its species, notable either for their threatened status or their popular appeal. Again, the species and habitats included are those which occur in a geographically widespread area, this time the county of Devon. Some Dartmoor habitats and species are included but not all and not necessarily those most important internationally.

1.2.4 The need for a Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan

If all these plans already exist, why produce yet another one for Dartmoor? The reasons are threefold:

- to complete the national, regional and county jigsaw and provide action plans to conserve important Dartmoor habitats and species that have not been included in the above plans. These include globally threatened habitats and species such as blanket bog, upland oakwood, blue ground beetle and flax-leaved St John's wort. There are national action plans for these but nothing at a regional or local level, which would detail what must be done on the ground.
- to include species and habitats that are important locally for Dartmoor's biodiversity such as mosses, ferns and lichens, scarce dragonflies, and blanket bogs which are not included in other regional or local plans either because they do not occur elsewhere or are not a conservation priority elsewhere.
- to interpret all the above action plans in a Dartmoor context emphasising practical delivery; spelling out what we are actually going to do, who will do it, where and when.

Thus, the Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan is part of a nationally co-ordinated framework, whilst being locally relevant. It incorporates actions from all pertinent national, regional and local plans and adds locally important species and habitats. It provides a Dartmoor focus and a comprehensive work programme for the people and organisations who live and work within the National Park. The links between different biodiversity action plans will be maintained and strengthened as action plans develop at both a local and national level, particularly through co-ordinated monitoring of targets.

Whilst most of us do not have biodiversity as a core activity or interest, the Plan should allow us to identify ways in which biodiversity relates to other spheres, priorities and objectives - and hence the ways in which we can all contribute to the conservation of Dartmoor's wildlife.

Table 1 shows which Dartmoor key habitats and species are covered at a national, regional, and county level.

1.2.5 Agenda 21

Agenda 21 also originates in the Rio Earth Summit and is a wide-ranging programme of action needed by local authorities and local communities throughout the world to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development in the 21st century. Developing a programme for biodiversity conservation at the local level is recommended as one of the core functions of Local Agenda 21.

The production and implementation of the Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan forms a key response by the Dartmoor National Park Authority and local communities to the Local Agenda 21 process. Detailed actions are included in Section 4.1.4 (p 46) Partnerships - Community Action.

Table 1. Key Dartmoor habitats and species and related biodiversity action plans

Biodiversity Action Plans				
	Dartmoor BAP	Devon BAP	South West BAP	UK BAP
Key Habitats				
Moorland				
• Upland heath	●		●	● P
• Lowland heath	●	●	●	● P
• Grass moor	●			
• Blanket bog	●			● P
• Raised mire	●			● P
• Valley mire	●			
Woodland				
• Upland oakwood	●			● P
• Parkland	●	●	●	● P
• Wet woodlands	●	●		● P
• Plantation	●			
Freshwater				
• Torrent rivers	●			
• Streams	●	●	●	●
• Reservoirs	●			
• Ponds	●		●	●
Rhôs pasture	●	●		● P
Haymeadows and species rich grasslands	●	●	●	● P
Field boundaries				
• Hedges	●	●		● P
• Walls	●			●
• Isolated/veteran trees	●			
Rocks				
• Rocky outcrops	●			
• Quarries	●	●		
• Caves	●	●		
• Mines	●	●		
• Buildings	●			

(cont.)

Table 1. Key Dartmoor habitats and species and related biodiversity action plans (cont.)

Biodiversity Action Plans				
	Dartmoor BAP	Devon BAP	South West BAP	UK BAP
Key Species				
Golden hair lichen + other lichen, moss and fern spp.	●	●		● P
Deptford Pink	●			● P
Flax-leaved St John's-wort	●			●
Heather	●			
Greater Butterfly Orchid	●			
Bog Orchid	●			
Irish Ladies Tresses	●			● P
Vigur's Eyebright	●			● P
Wild Daffodil	●			
Blue Ground Beetle	●			● P
Bog Hoverfly	●			● P
High Brown Fritillary	●			● P
Large Blue Butterfly	●			● P
Marsh Fritillary	●	●	●	● P
Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth	●			● P
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	●	●		● P
Southern Damselfly	●	●		● P
Salmon	●	●		●
Buzzard	●			
Cirl Bunting	●	●		● P
Curlew	●	●		
Golden Plover	●			
Dunlin	●			
Ring Ouzel	●			
Red Grouse	●			
Skylark	●			● P
Woodlark	●			● P
Greater Horseshoe Bat + other bat species	●	●		● P
Dormouse	●	●		● P
Otter	●	●		●



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Flower-rich meadow on a Dartmoor farm

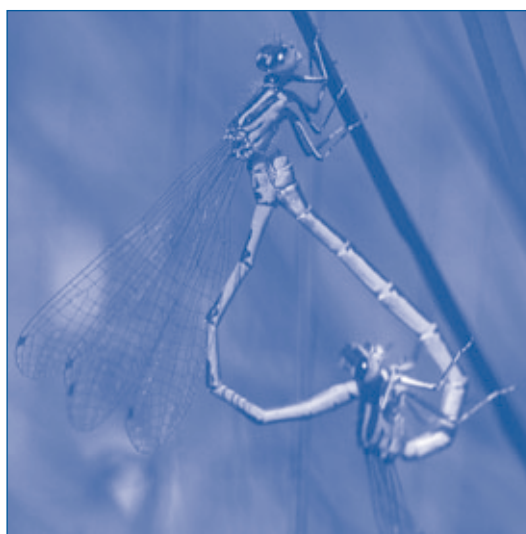
P = National priority species or habitats as defined and listed in the UK Steering Group report and subsequent UK action plans – that is, *species* which are globally threatened and/or are rapidly declining in the UK i.e. by more than 50% in the last 50 years; and *habitats* for which the UK has international obligations that are important for priority species, that are functionally critical (e.g. for feeding or nesting), and/or are rare or at risk.

1.3 Relationships with other Dartmoor Plans

1.3.1 Dartmoor National Park Management Plan

Dartmoor was declared a National Park in 1951 under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949*, for the purposes of preserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area and for promoting its enjoyment by the public. The *Environment Act 1995* redefined the statutory purposes of National Parks which are now 'to conserve the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public'. It included also a requirement that National Park Authorities should seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities in pursuing these purposes. The Act further stated that any 'relevant authority' (defined as public bodies, statutory undertakers, etc.) should have regard to the two main purposes in exercising their functions and that if there was a conflict between them, greater weight should be attached to conservation. National Park Authorities are required to produce a National Park Management Plan to show how all this would be done and review it at not more than five year intervals.

The Dartmoor National Park Management Plan is thus intended to guide both the National Park Authority itself in carrying out all its functions, and all other bodies and individuals who have an interest in the management of Dartmoor. It does this by setting out common aims and objectives, the means to achieve these objectives and five-year priorities. It also includes indicators and targets. It is therefore similar in structure to a local biodiversity action plan. However, although biodiversity is a crucial part of the Dartmoor



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Paired southern damselflies

National Park Authority's business, it is by no means the only part, and the level of detail required to make a biodiversity action plan effective would very soon weigh down any reader of the management plan.

For this reason, the *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan* sets overarching aims and objectives for biodiversity but refers to the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan* for the detail. Selected biodiversity indicators and targets are included along with other key indicators of sustainability within the Management Plan. Both plans have been drawn up in parallel, which has allowed mutual cross-referencing and reinforcement, and both plans will be reviewed simultaneously at five year intervals (see section 4.4, p 52) allowing this dovetailing to continue.

1.3.2 Dartmoor National Park Local Plan

The *Dartmoor Local Plan* is prepared by the Dartmoor National Park Authority under the provisions of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*, as amended by the *Planning and Compensation Act 1991*, and covers the whole of the National Park. It includes

the Minerals Local Plan and the Waste Local Plan for the National Park.

The prime purpose of the Dartmoor Local Plan is to provide detailed planning policies for the determination of planning applications, within a framework provided by Regional Planning Guidance and the Devon Structure Plan. Policies to protect Dartmoor's nature conservation interests in relation to planning issues are therefore included in the Local Plan and there are strong links with the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*.

It is anticipated that the Local Plan will be adopted in 2002. It will refer to the objectives of this Biodiversity Action Plan and contain policies which will assist in achieving the relevant actions highlighted in Section 3.2.2 (p 29) (*Key Wildlife Actions – Statutory and Strategic Plans*).

1.3.3 Dartmoor National Park Authority Best Value Performance Plan

In March 2000, the Dartmoor National Park Authority produced its first annual Best Value Performance Plan in response to the *Local Government Act 1999*.



Otters

This outlines how the Authority will secure continuous improvement in the way in which it exercises its functions, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Conservation of the natural environment is a prime function of the National Park Authority and so objectives for conserving biodiversity, including the implementation of the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*, are incorporated within the Best Value Plan for both 1999/2000 and 2000/2001, along with appropriate indicators and financial details. These will be updated annually and will be informed by the annual reviews of this Biodiversity Action Plan.

1.3.4 LEAPs for Dartmoor rivers

Eight major Devon rivers rise on the blanket bogs of Dartmoor and the Environment Agency has completed Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) for all these river catchments. The LEAPs identify and prioritise local environmental issues related to Environment Agency functions and detail the action necessary to resolve them. They include biodiversity issues, particularly those relating to water and wetland habitats and species, and air and water pollution.

Most of the Dartmoor LEAPs were drawn up in the late 1990s following the publication of *The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile*, which identified key Dartmoor habitats and species. They have all incorporated key objectives from the *Nature of Dartmoor* and include costed actions to conserve key Dartmoor species and habitats where appropriate. The annual review of LEAPs will allow continued close co-ordination with the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*.

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1.4 Drawing up the Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan

1.4.1 The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile

The first part of any local biodiversity action plan must be a review of the wildlife resource of the area, which identifies national and local priorities for habitats and species. This was duly carried out on Dartmoor in 1997 by English Nature and the Dartmoor National Park Authority and published as *The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile*. The area covered is the Dartmoor Natural Area (very slightly greater than the National Park in the south and east) and the document also forms an English Nature Natural Area Profile. As well as providing an audit, the Profile sets key conservation objectives for Dartmoor habitats and geological features and identifies 28 key species. This illustrated publication has proved very popular. It is on sale in National Park Authority Information Centres and through natural history book services, and is also available in local libraries and educational establishments.

Effectively, *The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile* is the first part of the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*. It has been revised and updated in 2001 to incorporate new information and to emphasise its relationship to the *Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*. It will be retained as a matching but separate document as it has a particular appeal and market.

1.4.2 The Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group

In 1998 a partnership of organisations and individuals based on the former Dartmoor Wildlife Forum, and led by the Dartmoor National Park Authority and English Nature, formed the Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group (see Table 2).

Its aim was to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for the Dartmoor National Park, which would achieve the objectives set out in the Biodiversity Profile. The Group has done this by contributing to and overseeing a series of action plan workshops, encouraging open discussion on the content and presentation of the Action Plan and, most importantly, achieving a broad consensus on the targets and actions necessary to protect and enhance Dartmoor's wildlife. The Steering Group will continue to have a vital monitoring and co-ordinating role as part of the newly created Dartmoor Biodiversity Partnership (see Section 4.1.2, p 44).

Table 2. Membership of the Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group

- Country Landowners' Association
- Devon Wildlife Trust
- Dartmoor National Park Authority
- Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society
- Devon County Council
- Duchy of Cornwall
- English Nature
- Environment Agency
- Farming and Rural Conservation Agency
- Forest Authority
- Forestry Commission
- Forest Enterprise
- Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
- National Farmers' Union
- National Trust
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

1.4.3 The habitat and species action plans

Drawing up the individual habitat and species action plans has been a genuine collaborative effort. A wide range of organisations and individuals have contributed and the authorship has been shared amongst members of the Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group.

For each major habitat, a convenor (usually the author) invited representatives of all the main groups of people who could have a major impact on that habitat (including farmers, foresters, landowners and recreational users as well as relevant members of the Steering Group) to a half or one-day workshop. Here the objectives set out in *The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile* were revisited, targets were agreed for each objective and the actions necessary to reach each of these targets were debated and agreed. Each author then collated this information into a draft action plan which was circulated to workshop participants before finalising.

The species action plans were mostly drawn up by individual specialists within organisations but in consultation with other specialists and relevant agencies.

All the action plans were edited by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, and endorsed by the Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group.

The authors and participants in action plan workshops are listed in Table 3 on page 24.

1.4.4 The final document

Following this process, the remainder of the Action Plan (including 'Key Wildlife Actions' and 'Making it Happen') was written by the Dartmoor National Park Authority

in full consultation with the Steering Group. A consultation draft was sent by the Authority on behalf of the Steering Group to all key partners and contributors to the workshops, and to the many societies and organisations who care about and/or impact on Dartmoor's wildlife. A summary was sent to all parish councils within the National Park and a full document was available on request.

Altogether around 200 organisations and individuals were consulted. Comments on the consultation draft were incorporated wherever possible. Final production (including design and illustration) was undertaken by the Dartmoor National Park Authority and jointly funded by the Dartmoor National Park Authority and English Nature.

The lengthy and sometimes involved process of working together has borne fruit in a final set of actions based on a real consensus of what we can do together to make a difference for Dartmoor's wildlife in the 21st century.