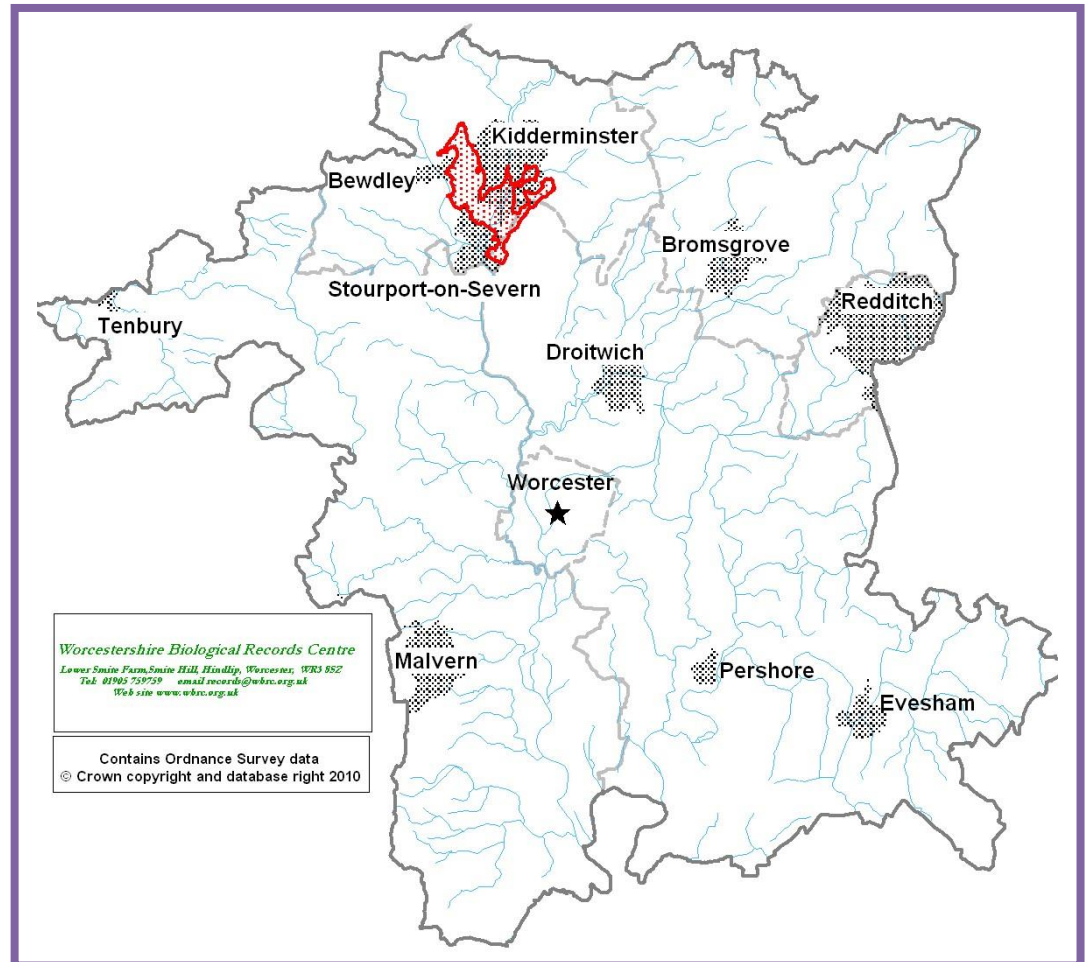


Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths

Updated October,
2016

The Biodiversity Delivery Areas were agreed by the Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership in 2009, revised and endorsed by the Local Nature Partnership in 2016 to indicate, spatially and strategically, where, according to current knowledge and resources, priority areas for the delivery of the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan.



Why are the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths a biodiversity priority?

The geology of north Worcestershire supports a lowland heathland and acid grassland resource that is contiguous with that found on the Birmingham Plateau and northwards into Staffordshire. Outside of several large nature reserves exist scattered, fragmented sites in private ownership. Many of these are under poor or inappropriate management and the botanical interest is significantly degraded; the habitat is especially vulnerable to nitrate input. In places, intensive horse grazing is a major contributing factor: this presents challenges but also an important opportunity to engage with and work in partnership with the horse-owning community. Those sites of highest concern are found on the urban fringes of Kidderminster, Bewdley and Stourport.

Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths: meeting the local criteria for a Biodiversity Delivery Area

<p>Delivering Biodiversity Action Plan targets</p> <p>.. ability to deliver significantly towards achieving the targets and actions for multiple BAP habitats and species</p>	<p>Priority habitats: lowland acid grassland; lowland heathland</p> <p>Priority species: adder; hornet robberfly</p>
<p>Addressing socio-economic factors</p> <p>.. links to delivery of health, tourism, economic, rural regeneration, flood alleviation or other sector agenda</p>	<p>Urban fringe location, often adjacent to areas of deprivation; ease of community access promotes strong links to education, health and recreation agendas; links to delivery of Green Infrastructure objectives; critical need to address issues relating to the anti-social use of certain sites</p>
<p>Practical delivery opportunities</p> <p>.. landowner and community support, projects already in preparation or existence, delivery partnership identified</p>	<p>The largest sites, consisting of a high proportion of the current resource, are in conservation ownership and some of these are under Countryside Stewardship or Higher Level Stewardship agreements; the remaining resource is fragmented with multiple ownership; the Worcestershire Heathlands Partnership meets annually</p>
<p>Availability of resources</p> <p>.. policy or legislative drivers, existing relevant funding streams, commitment of time and resources from partners</p>	<p>Higher Level Stewardship targeting for the Wyre Forest; adjacent urban areas of deprivation provide opportunities for attracting new sources of funding; the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths is situated within the boundary of the Midlands Plateau Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Area</p>

What needs to be achieved within this Biodiversity Delivery Area?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take an ecosystem approach to habitat restoration and management that also links areas across county boundaries. A long-term vision is needed that involves working with partners in Staffordshire and Birmingham and the Black Country. 	<p>Meeting objectives for:</p> <p>Biodiversity ✓</p> <p>Green infrastructure Partnership working ✓</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate adaptation for climate change into project planning to increase the ecological resilience of heathland and acid grassland habitat through buffering and connecting sites 	<p>Climate change adaptation ✓</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop partnerships with organisations outside of the biodiversity sector, in particular those within and representing the horse-owning community and those addressing issues relating to urban deprivation and anti-social behaviour 	<p>Community Partnership working ✓</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue restoration of existing key sites, incorporating the 'flagship' concept to experiment with and demonstrate management techniques and best practice to other landowners and encourage recreation and volunteering 	<p>Biodiversity Community ✓</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding for habitat restoration and management for owners of small acid grassland and heathland sites with those sites ineligible for agri-environment schemes and listed Local Sites a priority 	<p>Biodiversity ✓</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement an engagement and awareness-raising campaign and a programme of advice and training to promote positive habitat management amongst owners of small acid grassland sites, with listed Local Sites a priority 	<p>Biodiversity Economy ✓</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding for a programme of engagement with local communities to address issues associated with the anti-social use of sites and to encourage more positive public use of key sites 	<p>Access & recreation ✓</p> <p>Community Health ✓</p>

Supporting information for the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths Biodiversity Delivery Area.
Statement produced October, 2016 by the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership.

BAP Targets for key habitats within the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths Biodiversity Delivery Area		Target Type	Worcestershire Habitat Targets 2017	West Mids Habitat Targets 2015	Proportion of West Mids target to be delivered in Worcs
Acid grassland	Acid grassland is present on all of the large sites in conservation management in this area. Outside of these, scattered and degraded acid grassland sites are frequent.	Maintain extent	890ha	956ha	93%
		Restore	100ha	63ha	158%
		Create	2ha	41ha	5%
Lowland heathland	Several large nature reserves in this area are managed for the protection and restoration of heathland, which in Worcestershire occurs almost exclusively in the Wyre Forest district.	Maintain extent	213ha	1630ha	13%
		Restore	0ha	0ha	n/a
		Create	13ha	158ha	8%

Contributing projects:

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes project of which the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths is a key focus.

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's Flagship Reserves project where key sites will be used to develop, apply and demonstrate landscape scale conservation methods and promote community involvement and access, and best practice. The Devil's Spittleful is one of 13 reserves in Worcestershire chosen to meet the criteria for this approach, and has been expanded with the acquisition of additional fields from Blackstones Field Farm.

Wyre Forest acid grasslands are a target area for Higher Level Stewardship.

Hartlebury Common, a 90ha SSSI owned and managed by Worcestershire County Council, is being restored under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement.

Wyre Forest District Council own and manage a number of areas of heathland including 43ha at Rifle Range, Vicarage Farm Heath and Habberley Valley with a focus on heathland restoration funded through stewardship.

Supporting information for the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths Biodiversity Delivery Area.
Statement produced October, 2016 by the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership.

Creation and management of acid grassland promoted by Wyre Forest District Council through the development process, including adjacent to the new Stour bridge in Kidderminster, and at through a cycle track development in Hartlebury.

Blackstone Fields project to create 18.9 ha of acid grassland / heathland mosaic adjacent to the Devils Spittleful and Rifleranges reserves, from farmland.

Ongoing substantial tree clearance and reintroduction of sensitive grazing to restore condition of the Devils Spittleful. A total with Blackstone Fields of 22ha of restoration.

The 1250 square kilometres of the Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark was created to celebrate and promote the geological, landscape and associated heritage between Gloucester and Bridgenorth. www.geopark.org.uk

Taking a multi-sector approach: linking biodiversity to other agendas

Access and recreation	The many large sites in conservation ownership in close proximity to urban areas are a currently under-utilised resource. Promoting responsible community access, and especially educational access, is a high priority.
Biodiversity	Within Worcestershire this area must deliver the entirety of our BAP targets for lowland heathland.
Climate change adaptation	The opportunities for improving connectivity of sites with habitat in the neighbouring counties of Staffordshire and Birmingham and the Black Country will improve resilience of the habitat to climate change and have a huge positive impact on enabling species movement.
Community	The large urban population on the doorstep of this area provides a huge opportunity for community engagement and for promoting volunteering on sites in conservation ownership. Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council all offer a range of volunteering opportunities on their sites, including habitat management, walks and talks to raise awareness of the importance of this habitat.
Economy	The economics of management of the small acid grassland sites within this area are unique to this BDA. The prevalence of horse ownership and grazing means landowner engagement and educational initiatives must be very focused.
Green Infrastructure	The area around Kidderminster, Bewdley and Stourport has been assessed in places to be of High GI value where the biodiversity contribution from all forms of development should be focused on protecting and enhancing existing sites.
Health	Activity to promote access to the countryside and volunteering can make a major contribution to the health and well being agenda.
Partnership working	Addressing the serious threat of habitat degradation and loss in this area depends in large part on successful engagement with the horse-owning community. Excellent opportunities exist to form partnerships with the health and well being sector and education sectors to promote outdoor recreation, learning and volunteering.

Integrating habitat and species needs

Key Worcestershire LBAP species whose needs must be integrated into habitat management and conservation within the Wyre Forest Acid Grasslands and Heaths Biodiversity Delivery Area are:

- Adder: populations of adder are now seriously reduced and threatened in Worcestershire due to a legacy of habitat destruction and persecution. Sites in this project area do still support small numbers of this species and the feasibility of carrying out re-introductions is being explored. Conservation of this species is dependent both on habitat restoration to connect fragmented populations and also public education.
- Hornet robberfly: this species is known from only a few sites nationally and it has been recorded in several locations around Kidderminster where numbers are continuing to decline. The fly utilises pasture grazed by herbivores, typically horses, and preys on the other invertebrates associated with animal dung. Good horse pasture management can, unfortunately, be incompatible with the requirements of the fly.

Further sources of information

Earth Heritage Trust www.earthheritagetrust.org

Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan www.worcestershire.gov.uk/biodiversity

Worcestershire Landscape Character Assessment www.worcestershire.gov.uk/landscape

Worcestershire Biological Records Centre www.wbrc.org.uk

Worcestershire Habitat Inventory - see Worcestershire Biological Records Centre

Worcestershire Historic Environment Record www.worcestershire.gov.uk/archaeology

Grow with Wyre project www.forestry.gov.uk/growwithwyre

Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau National Character Area objectives -
www.naturalengland.org.uk