

## **SOMERSET HEDGEROW AND HEDGEROW TREE HABITAT ACTION PLAN**



### **Action plan name**

Somerset Hedgerow and Hedgerow Tree Habitat Action Plan

### **Background and vision**

Hedges are a valuable and ancient feature of the British landscape. The earliest references to hedges in Britain date back to A.D. 547 and other forms of field boundary such as banks date back to the Bronze Age. This longevity has allowed them to build up a rich assemblage of associated species and become a very important biodiversity resource.

With the reduction in the amount of woodland in Britain, hedges have gained an increasing importance as they are a valuable linear habitat, mimicking woodland edge conditions and combining elements of woodland, scrub and grassland habitats. Hedgerows are often associated with features such as banks, ditches, trees or verges, which further enhance their value as habitats and corridors for wildlife.

In addition to their value as linear woodlands, hedges are important habitats in their own right and are the most significant wildlife habitat over large stretches of lowland UK, providing refuge for a great many woodland and farmland plants and animals.

Hedges occur in urban as well as rural areas and can also act as a link between habitats, thereby reducing the damage caused by the isolation of habitats in an increasingly developed landscape. However hedges are important not just for biodiversity reasons, but for economic, historical and aesthetic reasons too.

The economic benefits of hedges are primarily to the farmer such as stock control and defining field boundaries. They also provide shelter for farm animals and crops, and biological control e.g. aphid predators like ladybirds and ground beetles, whilst providing a source of firewood and timber. More widely hedges also attract restoration and planting grants available through environmental stewardship schemes. This creates a source of rural employment and, by making the countryside more attractive, supports the rural tourism industry.

However, hedges are under threat due mainly to neglect and changes in both farm and domestic garden management. The former has been in part caused by loss of labour on farms, increased mechanisation, larger scale farm machinery and increased costs of hedge management. The latter by an emphasis on easy to maintain gardens. Hedgerow legislation introduced in 1997 has reduced hedgerow removal to a fraction of that prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Plan species and habitats**

- Bat
- Gardens and Urban Greenspace
- Traditional Orchards

### **Associated species and habitats**

- Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)
- White-letter Hairstreak (*Satyrrium w-album*)
- Devon Whitebeam (*Sorbus devoniensis*)
- Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*)
- Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*)
- Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)
- Small Eggar Moth (*Eriogaster lanestris*),
- Devon Carpet Moth (*Lampropteryx otregiata*)
- Brown Hairstreak Butterfly (*Thecla betulae*)
- Wild Service-tree (*Sorbus torminalis*)
- Small-leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*)
- Bastard Balm (*Melittis melissophyllum*)
- Barn Owl

- A range of rare and scarce Lichens

### **Habitat status**

Recent estimates put the total amount of hedges in the UK as approximately 450,000km. The current net loss of hedges is estimated to be about 5% per year. This is primarily due to neglect and not hedge removal as in previous decades. The figure for Somerset is not known. Hedges are an important habitat for all the above UK BAP species and many other non-BAP species of conservation concern.

- Hedges are a UK Priority habitat within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Hedges are protected to a certain extent by the Environment Act 1995 and the Hedgerow Regulations, which were introduced in 1997 Article 10 of the EC Habitats Directive. This requires member states to encourage the management of hedges (and other linear features) in their land use planning and development policies and, in particular, with a view to improving the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network. This is reflected in The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations, 1994, which recognises that such linear features are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.
- PPS9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, 2006) recognises that networks of natural habitats are a valuable resource for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species. Local authorities should aim to maintain them by avoiding or repairing fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats through policies in plans.

### **Specific impacts/threats**

- **Removal of hedges** – either for agricultural or development purposes such as widening of access as well as road widening.
- **Neglect** – reflecting loss of traditional skills or the belief that management is not necessary or, more likely, loss of labour from farms and cost of hedge restoration. Lack of protection of hedges from stock grazing is another cause of hedge loss in some areas.
- **Inappropriate management** – too frequent, too heavy, or ill-timed cutting prevents hedges from producing fruits and reduces their value as breeding sites for invertebrates, birds and small mammals, as well as damaging the hedge itself.

- **Lack of information** – general lack of information on the status and condition of hedges in Somerset.
- **Availability of skills and knowledge** – limited skills and knowledge of how to manage hedges to maximise their wildlife benefits.

### **Proposed partners**

Blackdown Hills Hedge Association (BHHA)  
 Country Land and Business Association (CLA)  
 Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)  
 Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)  
 Mendip District Council (MDC)  
 Mendip AONB  
 National Trust (NT)  
 Natural England (NE)  
 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)  
 Sedgemoor District Council (SDC)  
 Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT)  
 South Somerset District Council (SSDC)  
 Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC)  
 West Somerset Council (WSC)  
 Landowners and hedge managers  
 Somerset Bat Group (SBG)  
 Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)  
 Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA)

### **Confirmed partners**

Somerset County Council (SCC)  
 Somerset Hedge Group (SHG)

### **Current action**

- Provision of grants by organisation including SCC and Natural England.
- Provision of information on hedge management by partners.
- Support of hedgerow tree schemes by tree wardens.
- Management of hedges by farmers and landowners.
- Hedgerow Regulations work by the district councils.

### **Target description and target goals**

1. Complete survey of Somerset's hedges.  
**Goal:** At least 50%

2. To halt the net loss of Somerset's hedges and hedgerow trees.  
**Goal:** 100%
3. To promote the value of hedges and their appropriate management to the public and landowners.  
**Goal:** At least 4 publications/Articles/Events
4. To ensure a high compliance with and following-up of infringements of the Hedgerow Regulations.  
**Goal:** 100%
5. To increase the amount of new hedge planting, especially in urban areas (of an appropriate wildlife friendly species mix).  
**Goal:** At least 75 Somerset Landscape Scheme grants offered for hedge planting per year
6. To increase the amount of hedge laying carried out in Somerset.  
**Goal:** At least 50 Somerset Landscape Scheme grants offered for hedge laying

### **Key factors**

- Securing external funding to support hedgerow surveys, planting and management of hedgerow and hedgerow trees and a Somerset hedgelaying competition
- Improve coordination of hedge-related activities by increasing support to Somerset Hedge Group
- There are no options to protect field boundary trees in either Entry Level or Higher Level Stewardship schemes. This is a missed opportunity as many veteran trees occur in hedgerows.

<b>SOMERSET HEDGEROW AND HEDGEROW TREE HABITAT ACTION PLAN</b>					
<b>Management</b>					
<b>Action text</b>	<b>Lead organisation</b>	<b>Action start and end dates</b>	<b>Action goals</b>	<b>Key partners</b>	<b>Funding link to target</b>
Encourage planting of new hedges and hedgerow trees.	SCC	2008-2012	At least 50 SLS grant offers per year	DCs FWAG ENPA	Funding required Target 2
Retain established hedgerow trees and actively promote benefits.	SCC	2008-2012	At least 4 Schemes per year	DCs FWAG ENPA	Funding required Target 2
Encourage hedgelaying in Somerset.	SCC	2008-2012	At least 25 SLS grant offers per year	DCs FWAG ENPA	Funding required Target 6
<b>Policy and legislation</b>					
Ensure compliance with Hedgerow Regulations with support from all organisations.	DCs SHG	2008-2012	100% Compliance	SHG SWT FWAG SCC Landowners and hedge managers	No funding required Target 5 Can be checked against new aerial photos
Ensure the availability of Somerset Landscape Scheme grant aid for hedges	SCC	2008-2012	Could be measured by increase of available funding	SHG SWT FWAG Landowners and hedge managers	No funding required Target 2, 5 and 6
<b>Education and awareness</b>					
Produce a Somerset Hedge Group display and attend public events with it.	SHG SCC	2008-2012	Attend a minimum of 3 public events per year	All	Funding required Target 3
Produce a "Somerset's Hedges" leaflet.	SHG SCC	2008-2012	Production of at least 1,000 leaflets	All	Funding required Target 3

Run a hedgelaying competition.	SHG SCC	2008/2012	At least 1 Competition completed	All	Funding required Target 3
Provide training on hedgerow management and the importance of hedgerow trees.	SHG	2008-2012	At least 2 courses per year	Mendip AONB Lantra BHHA FWAG other training providers	Funding required Target 3
Provide information/training to hedge cutting contractors on wildlife friendly management.	SHG	2008-2012	1 course/published guidance	All	Funding required Target 2 and 3
Set up a meeting of Hedge Group Coordinators across the South West to discuss setting up a network and annual meetings.	SHG	2008-2012	At least 1 Meeting	SW Hedge Group Coordinators	Funding required Target 3
<b>Information and data</b>					
Increase support to the Somerset Hedge Group.	SHG	2008-2012	At least 50% of all Key Partners regularly attending SHG meetings (at least 50% of all meetings)	CLA, CPRE, FWAG, MDC, NT, NE, RSPB, SDC, SCC, SWT, SSDC, TDBC, WSC, ENPA, Landowners and hedge managers	No funding required Target 2 and 3
Undertake two surveys of Somerset's hedges using the new survey format.	SHG	2008 and 2013	At least 50% coverage	SCC FWAG SWT SERC	Funding required Target 1
<b>Communities, health and well-being</b>					
Provide opportunities for public involvement in hedge surveys and hedge management.	SHG	2008-2012	At least 2 events per year (1 in each district)	SCC SWT BHHA ENPA	Funding required Target 1

Promote local hedge strategies and the Somerset Hedge Group with Tree Warden Groups and Footpath Wardens and SCC ROW team	SHG DCs	2008-2012	At least 2 TWG meetings attended (Only in TD and SS)	SWT Tree Wardens Groups BHHA SCC	No funding required Target 2 and 3
<b>Rebuilding biodiversity (Nature Map)</b>					
N/A					
<b>Economy and business</b>					
Provide information on hedge contractors for landowners.	FWAG	2008-2012	At least 1 leaflet or webpage for coverage across the county	SHG ENPA	Funding required Target 3
<b>Climate change</b>					
Promote the use of fuel from hedges as a sustainable energy source.	SHG	2008-2012	At least One project	All	Funding required Target 3
<b>Tourism / access</b>					
Provide guided walks based on hedge theme.	SHG DCs	2008-2012	At least 1 event per year	SCC ENPA	Funding required Target 3
Promote Hedgeweek as a tourism opportunity.	SHG BHHA	2008-2012	At least 4 Promotional events (1 per year)	All Partners	Funding required Target 3