

CHAPTER 4. WOODLAND

Vision for woodland

A rich mix of woodland rich in wildlife, adding to the beauty of the landscape and providing opportunities for understanding and enjoyment. Native woodland to be extended onto new sites and into former ancient woodlands. Individual trees and landscape features to be conserved and new features to be created in keeping with the character of the local landscape. Conifer plantations to be well designed with a diversity of wildlife. Woodlands to be sustainably managed and to continue to produce a variety of products for local use.

Objectives and Indicators

Objectives relate to the Exmoor National Park Management Plan
Indicators may be shared with those from other plans or organisations

LP - Exmoor National Park Local Plan

BVPP – Exmoor National Park Best Value Performance Plan

AC – Audit Commission

CA – Countryside Agency indicators used in their ‘State of the Countryside Reports’

RWP – The Government’s Rural White Paper ‘Our Countryside’

NPA – ‘Headline’ indicators developed by the National Park Authorities’ Data Working Group

RO – Indicators developed for the South West’s Regional Observatory

Objective 4/1

Exmoor's woodlands to be managed in line with National Park purposes

Indicators:

Area and percentage of woodland managed in line with NPA conservation objectives; area of rhododendron

Objective 4/2

To extend the area of new native woodland within the National Park in line with national targets and to restore former ancient woodland.

Indicators:

Area of non-native woodland on ancient woodland sites; area of new native woodland; area of ancient semi-natural woodland

Objective 4/3

To conserve individual trees, orchards and woodlands features where they are characteristic of the Exmoor landscape or important for wildlife.

Indicators:

Area of orchards; number of recorded veteran tree sites in favourable management

Objective 4/4

To ensure that conifer plantations are well designed, rich in wildlife and sited to allow restoration of semi-natural habitats.

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Indicators:

Population of nightjars; area of plantations over 5ha managed under Forestry Commission approved plans; area of private forest redesigned

HOW WELL WOODED IS EXMOOR?

Current situation:

A small percentage of Exmoor is wooded

Trends:



The amount of woodland is increasing

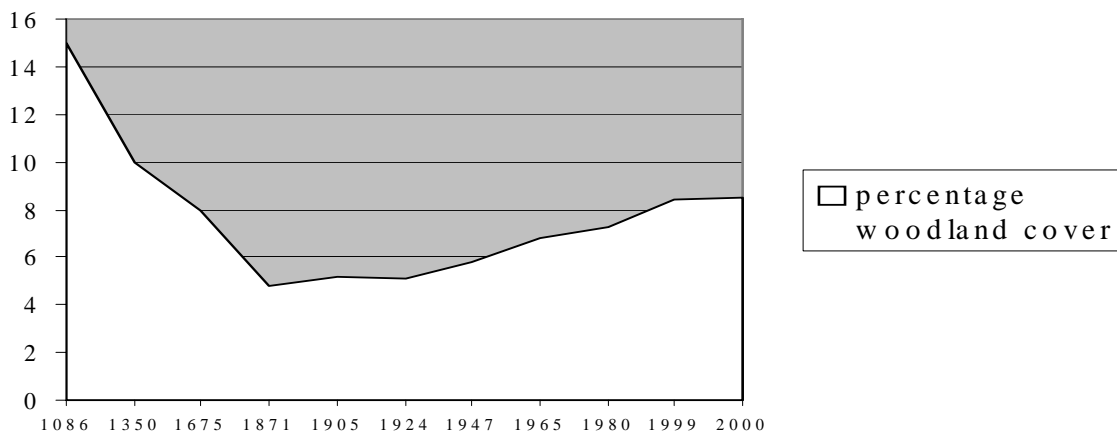
Exmoor is relatively well wooded but there is much scope for improvement

Exmoor has a high proportion of woodland cover compared to other parts of England.

- There are about 8,454 ha of woodland on Exmoor, representing 12.2% of the area of the National Park. The National Parks as a whole have 12.6% woodland cover (4.9% broadleaved and 7.7% conifer plantation). About 10% of the UK is wooded and 8.5% of England. However, England is one of the least wooded countries in Europe, where the average is 46% woodland cover. Sources: National Park Authority annual woodland returns; Forestry Commission annual statistical reports

England, including Exmoor, has been continually deforested since prehistoric times and only since the 20th century has the decline been halted. In the UK woodland has more than doubled in the same time because of extensive planting in Scotland. Tree cover, however, still has to almost double before it reaches the level of Domesday times.

percentage woodland cover in England



- In 1887 only about 4,850ha or 7% of Exmoor was woodland. This largely changed after the First World War with the development of the Forestry Commission and commercial conifer plantations. By the 1960s 10% of Exmoor was wooded. This follows the trend in England, where tree cover has risen from 5.1% to 8.5% in the last 75 years. Source: map studies

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The South West is the best region in Britain for growing trees, and the amount of new woodland established is increasing at a rate of about 1,000 ha (4 %) a year. The Region has a higher than average woodland cover (9 % compared to 8.5 % for England) and accounts for about a fifth of England's resource. Somerset, however, has only 7% cover. Most new and established woodland in the Region is broadleaved (80 % of new woods and 69 % of existing cover). About a fifth of the South West's woods and forests are ancient or semi-natural. A small proportion (3 %) of the remainder is felled and replanted every year.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE EXMOOR'S WOODLANDS?

Current situation:

A small proportion of Exmoor's woodland is ancient semi-natural woodland but it is important for wildlife

Trends:

? *There is little evidence as to how the value of Exmoor's woodlands for wildlife is changing although it appears that some species of woodland birds and some woodland lichens are in decline*

Much of Exmoor's present woodland is not of trees native to Exmoor

Exmoor's natural tree cover would be broadleaved woodland. However, much of the 20th century planting was coniferous plantation. Such plantation supports its own wildlife but not the diversity of wildlife supported by native broadleaved woodland.

- *58% of Exmoor's woodland is broadleaved, including 2% broadleaved plantation. 36% is commercial conifer plantations and 6% mixed woodland. The broadleaved woodland is a lower proportion than the national average - 66% in England. Sources: National Park Authority annual woodland returns; Forestry Commission annual statistical reports*

Woodland in Exmoor National Park 2001

Type	Area: hectares	% of National Park
Broadleaves and yew	4915	7.1
Mixed	500	0.7
Conifer	3000	4.3
Scrub	900	1.3
TOTAL	9315	13.4

Exmoor's remaining areas of semi-natural woodland are important locally, nationally and internationally

About 1% of the land area of Britain is covered with ancient semi-natural woodland. Exmoor has a higher than average percentage of this habitat. In England such woodland forms 18.7% of the total, whereas on Exmoor it is nearly 26%. These are usually the most important areas for wildlife. Woodland systems on Exmoor also tend to be large when compared to the rest of the country, which is also good for wildlife. Exmoor has a significant proportion of the UK and world total of the remaining Western Oakwoods. These declined nationally by 30-40% over the last 60 years of the 20th century. In addition, Exmoor has about 900 ha of scrub. As transitional areas on the edge of woodland they are relatively diverse in wildlife and a valuable habitat.

- *2201 ha of Exmoor are ancient semi-natural woodlands, making Exmoor one of the richest National Parks*

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for this habitat (3.2% of the total area compared with an average of 2.8% for National Parks as a whole).

About 1280 ha or about 38% of ancient semi-natural woodland on Exmoor were cleared in the 20th century, 1201 ha or 94% of which were felled to make way for conifer plantations. This reflects the trend in Britain as a whole, where about 7% of these woodlands have been cleared and 39% replanted with conifers since the 1930s. In England now about 20% of remaining ancient semi-natural woodland is protected as SSSI and there are roughly equal proportions of ancient and other semi-natural woodland.

- *Between the early part of the 20th century and 1985 over 4% of ancient woodland in Devon and Somerset was cleared and over 40% replanted with non-native species including conifers* **Source: NCC, Provisional Inventory of Ancient Woodland**
- *Exmoor lost 58% of its ancient woodland between 1840 and 1979, including 11% between 164 and 1979.* **Source: STNC, Exmoor Woodland Survey**

Type	Area: hectares	% of National Park	% of total woodland
Ancient semi-natural woodland	2201	3	26
Replanted ancient woodland sites	1201	2	14
TOTAL	3402	5	40

ARE EXMOOR'S WOODLANDS BEING CONSERVED?

Current situation:

A small proportion of Exmoor's woodland is being managed in line with National Park purposes

Trends:



The management of broadleaved woodland is improving

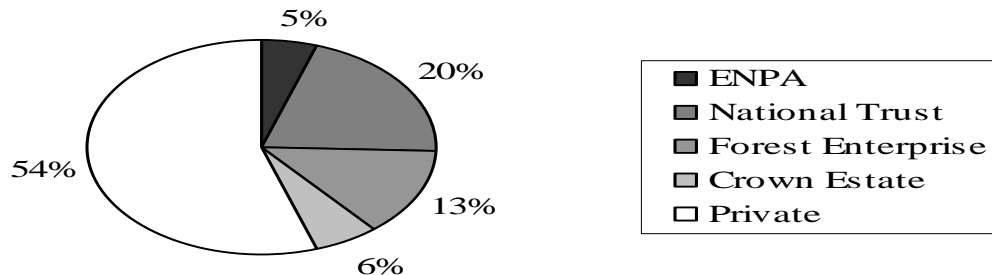
In many of Exmoor's most important woodlands there has been little management since the 19th century. Many large estates have been broken up and woodland transferred to the ownership of individual farms, reducing the scale and continuity of management. Many woodlands were stripped of their best timber during the two world wars and have since been neglected. Some of the neglect is benign but many woodlands are threatened by overgrazing, rearing of game birds, disturbance and atmospheric deposition. There is evidence of decreased acid deposition and increased deposition of nitrates, which is leading to an increase of species more typical of semi-improved grasslands in lowland areas. or invasion by non-native species such as Rhododendron and sycamore.

Some of Exmoor's most important woodlands are protected through public ownership. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are managed primarily for conservation purposes. A significant proportion of SSSI woodland is in public ownership and there is a National Nature Reserve which includes Horner Woods and a proposed Tarr Steps Woods NNR.

- *The National Park Authority owns about 5% of the woodland area; the National Trust about 20% and the Crown Estate a further 6%. In England as a whole the Forestry Commission, which is the country's largest landowner, owns about 19% of the woodland, on Exmoor it manages about 13% but a larger proportion of the broadleaved woodland. The remainder, about 54%, is privately owned.* **Source: Exmoor National Park Authority Geographical Information System**

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**Ownership of broadleaved woodland
on Exmoor**



It is difficult to calculate the amount of woodland being managed according to National Park purposes. Land owned by the Forestry Commission for commercial purposes may or may not be included. However, if that under a Forest Design Plan or Forestry Commission agreement is included, the amount of woodland managed according to such purposes is increasing.

- *In 2000 on Exmoor 231 hectares of Forest Enterprise woodlands were under approved Forest Design Plans. In 2001 this had risen to 1135.5 hectares. Source: Forest Enterprise*

Exmoor woodland management, 2000

Management	Area: hectares	% of National Park
1 a) Forest Enterprise woods under an approved current Forest Design Plan	231	0.34
b) Other Forest Enterprise land	933	1.36
2 Other woods under current Forestry Authority agreement	2,700	3.4
3 Woods under other approved management but not receiving Woodland Grant Scheme	527	0.77
Woodland managed by Exmoor National Park Authority	341	0.49
4 Area of woodland managed in accordance with National Park purposes	3,460	5.04

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Woodland managed in line with National Park purposes, 2002

Management	Area: hectares
Exmoor National Park Authority	565
National Trust	1200
English Nature management agreement	153
Badgworthy Land Company	246
League Against Cruel Sports	40
ESA agreements	26
Others in certification	54
Total	2,286

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE AMOUNT OF NATIVE WOODLAND?

Current situation:

About 58% of Exmoor's woodland is broadleaved – less than the national proportion. It is not known what proportion of these is of native species.

Trends:



The amount of ancient semi-natural woodland on Exmoor is stable.



The amount of native woodland on Exmoor is slowly increasing.

There have been no large new plantations of conifers on Exmoor in the last three decades. In England as a whole more broadleaved trees than conifers were being planted until the 1950s. Since then there have been 3-4 times as many conifers planted. However, most conifer planting is now for restocking and for new woodland about eight times as many broadleaves as conifers are being planted. Significant amounts of broadleaved woodland have been planted on Exmoor under the New Native Woodland scheme.

New Native Woodland summary, 2002

Site	Area ha	Financial year
Higher Gretton	5.0	98/99
Lype farm	12.5	99/00
Glenthorne	11.7	00/01
Higher Court Farm	39.3	01/02
Highercombe Farm	6.7	01/02
Great Ash Farm	12.5	02/03
Withycombe Farm	7.2	02/03
Total	94.9	

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In 1993 it was calculated that about 1350 hectares (16%) of woodland in the National Park and possibly far more was suffering from rhododendron invasion. Source: Somerset Environmental Records Centre, Woodlands in Exmoor National Park

Exmoor woodland defined by habitat action plans, 2001 (English Nature estimate)

Type	Area: hectares	% of National Park
Lowland beech	0	0
Lowland mixed broadleaved	500	0.7
Upland mixed ashwood	10	0.01
Upland birchwood	0	0
Upland oak	2210	2.9
Woodland pasture and parkland	100	0.15
Wet woodland	100	0.15
TOTAL	2920	3.9

Actions

Some objectives and actions are from the Exmoor National Park Management Plan

Objective 4/5

To gain a deeper understanding of Exmoor's trees and woodlands through a comprehensive programme of research and survey work derived from the Exmoor Woodland Research Strategy.

Action 4/1

Implement the Woodland Research strategy

Action 4/2

Undertake rhododendron control

Action 4/3

Implement the Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan research on upland oak woods, parklands, wood pastures and veteran trees

NB The information contained in this report is based upon the best information available at the time. Although every effort has been made to confirm its accuracy and ensure that it has been used in the proper context, Exmoor National Park Authority cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information.