1d Lowland wood pastures and parkland

These consist of large open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland or woodland floras. They are characterised by their vegetation structure rather than their plant communities. Included are medieval forests, wooded pastures, parks and commons, Victorian parks that contain much older trees, under-managed wood-pastures with veteran trees in secondary woodland or scrub, and parkland subsequently converted to other use where surviving veteran trees have conservation interest. Upland oakwoods are included elsewhere and parkland with no veteran trees is not of interest here.

Sessile oak

The combination of ancient trees amongst other habitats provides conditions for a distinctive saproxylic (wood-eating) fauna and epiphytic (tree-dwelling) flora including a number of priority species, as well as for birds and bats. Some British sites have European as well as national importance.

Status

The best estimate of its UK coverage is 10 - 20 000 ha 'currently in a working condition'[2]. It is most common in southern Britain but Duncombe Park (78 ha) is a nationally important site that was once a medieval deer park[1]. This is found in the North York Moors National Park and the North York Moors and Hills Natural Area. In addition there are other lowland parklands scattered around the region which may include veteran trees, but these have not been surveyed. Phase 1 parkland data is available but this will include many areas that do not relate to this priority habitat, therefore no further data have been provided.

Threats

The lack of a wide range of ages amongst trees can create breaks in the availability of dead wood, essential for supporting a number of important species; neglect of tree management may lead to trees breaking early or being felled for safety reasons; trees are often felled where there is a perceived safety problem at public amenity sites but clear danger signs and the provision of fencing may suffice to prevent a problem; disease and natural stresses from storms and drought can kill trees; soil compaction and erosion around the roots can result from trampling or car parking; changes in ground water levels due to development, drainage, abstraction or some other factor can kill trees. Good sites are rare so isolation can hinder dispersal of species between sites. Changes of land use or management, such as conversion to arable, pasture improvement, or inappropriate grazing levels can threaten natural communities, and pollution can affect the soil and air and therefore the species that live on or in the ground and on bark.

Map 6a: Lowland wood pastures and parkland – location of a site of national significance

Map 6b: Lowland wood pastures and parkland – location of a site of national significance