

## Introduction

The Yorkshire and Humber region stretches from the North Sea in the east to the high moors of the Pennines in the west and encompasses landscapes from the heart of rural Yorkshire to the centre of urban Yorkshire. With all of this variety, it enjoys one of the finest arrays of wildlife habitats found in any English region. Its special species and habitats form an essential part of the biodiversity resource of the UK as a whole. This report presents, for the first time, a comprehensive review of the most valuable elements of this region's resource.

### Who Should Read this Report?

Anyone with an interest in the biodiversity of Yorkshire and the Humber will find this report useful. It is designed to be of most value to organisations or individuals involved in strategic planning who either wish to take account of biodiversity in their plans, policies or programmes or who wish to make a specific contribution to biodiversity action in the region. Whilst this is a technical document, it is aimed at a non-specialist audience so specialised terms are explained within the text or in the glossary. A non-technical summary document is also available from member organisations of the Yorkshire and Humber Biodiversity Forum.

### The Regional Biodiversity Audit

In order to plan carefully the conservation of biodiversity (see the definition below) a sound knowledge of the existing resource is essential. This audit provides the available information on those species and habitats which occur within the Yorkshire and Humber Region that are nationally or internationally important.

This report relates national criteria and UK biodiversity work to Yorkshire and the Humber. It indicates the importance of the region's contribution to the total national resources of the UK's priority habitats and species and provides information on their distributions, relating to both the boundaries of the local planning authority areas (Map 1) and English Nature's Natural Areas (Map 2).

This document is not a plan. It contains no actions or targets. Though there may be merit in some actions and targets being conceived at the regional level, the majority of action on the ground will take place at a local level. Such actions will be detailed within local biodiversity action plans, currently being devised and implemented around the region. This report in no way seeks to duplicate or provide an alternative to that work. It will complement it by placing it in a regional perspective and by placing the region in a national perspective.

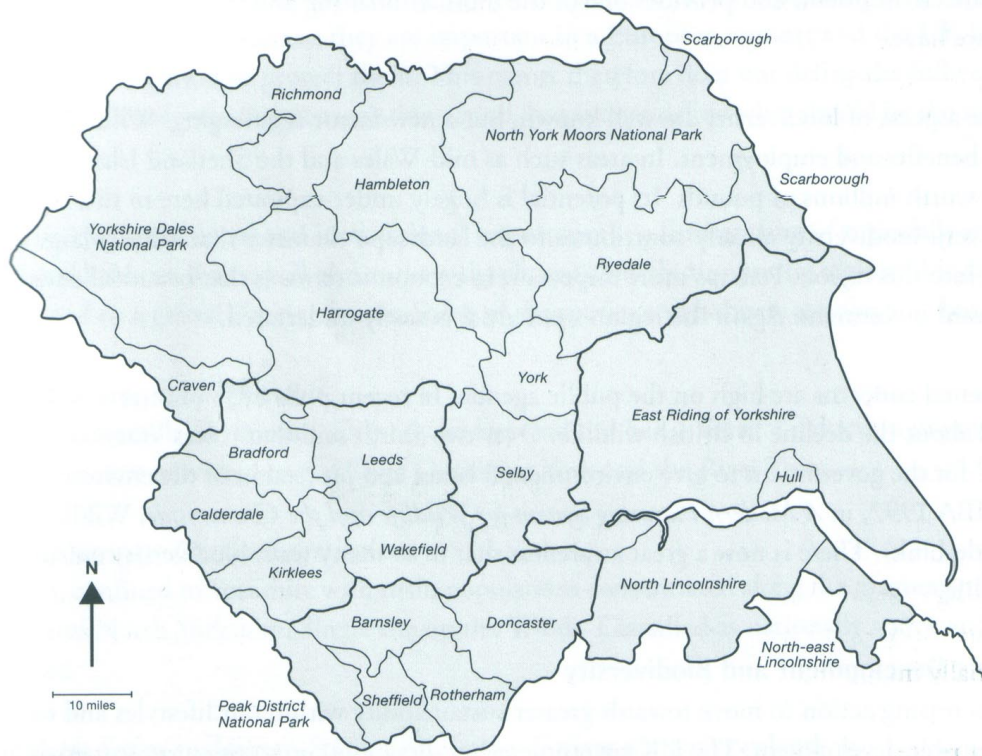
This audit aims to:

- determine the contribution Yorkshire and the Humber makes to the nation's threatened biodiversity
- form an intermediate step between national and local biodiversity plans, identifying those aspects of the UK work that are particularly relevant to the region
- help organisations acting at the regional level, such as the statutory agencies like the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, the Regional Assembly and Yorkshire Forward take account of biodiversity in their own planning and where appropriate to plan biodiversity work effectively
- raise awareness of biodiversity and promote its incorporation into regional planning
- promote co-operation between groups taking action to assist biodiversity by placing local biodiversity action plans in a regional context whereby they can be used to complement each other
- inform the revised Regional Planning Guidance on biodiversity issues

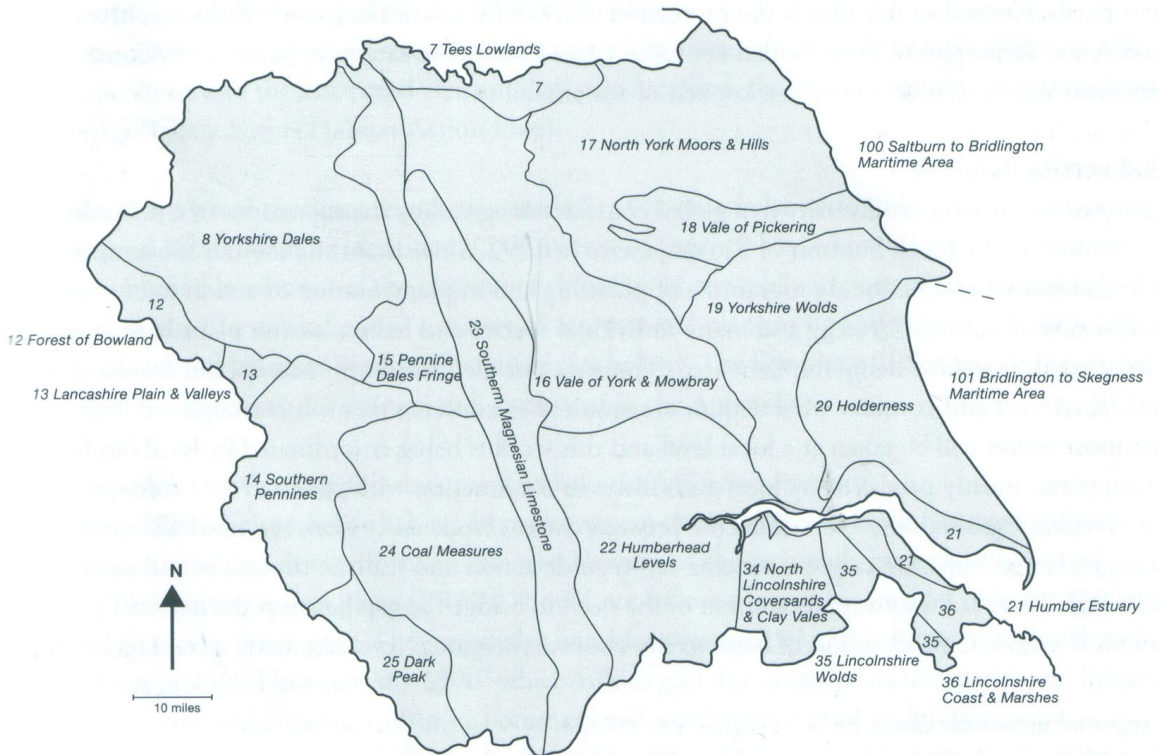
### What is Biodiversity and Why Should We Be Interested in it?

Biodiversity simply means the variety of life. It is an all-encompassing term that includes plants, animals and fungi, from the smallest microbe to the largest mammal. It is vital to conserve biodiversity,

Map 1: The local planning authorities of Yorkshire and the Humber



Map 2: The Natural Areas of Yorkshire and the Humber



even the most humble of species, because it is other species that produce the oxygen we breathe, recycle our rubbish, clean our water, provide food and clothing, and produce life-saving drugs. In addition to these basic life support functions, wildlife provides spiritual support in the form of a beautiful and intricate environment and provides one of the most stimulating and important educational resources we have.

All of these aspects of biodiversity are well known, but a new factor is emerging. Wildlife provides economic benefits and employment. In areas such as mid-Wales and the Shetland Islands, wildlife tourism is worth millions of pounds. Its potential is hugely under-exploited here in this region. In a less direct way, biodiversity already contributes to the landscape character that attracts large numbers of tourists into this region. Perhaps more important in economic terms is that beautiful environments attract inward investment. Again the region's potential is vastly underrated.

Environmental concerns are high on the public agenda. In recent polls 87% of interviewees were concerned about the decline in British wildlife. Over two-thirds said that it was 'essential' or 'very important' for the government to give environmental issues and protection of the environment a high priority (RBA 1997, in *A Modern Planning System for Wildlife and the Countryside*, Wildlife and Countryside Link). There is now a great awareness that in so many ways biodiversity enhances our quality of life.

### **Sustainable Development and Biodiversity**

There is increasing action to move towards greater sustainability within our lifestyles and to achieve more sustainable development. The UK government has shown its commitment to sustainability with shifts in policy and public consultation on the best way forward. But what exactly is sustainability? It has been defined by IUCN as improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of the supporting ecosystem. Another definition stresses the need to provide development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Central to this idea is the protection and careful use of the world's finite resources. Biodiversity forms part of those limited resources. Once lost, species can never be replaced. Consequently the conservation of biodiversity is a key test of sustainability.

### **Biodiversity Planning**

The need to conserve biodiversity in a global context was agreed by the signatories of the Biodiversity Convention at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Since that time the UK Government has been committed to a national programme of planning and implementation of action to conserve biodiversity. A national strategy and many individual species and habitat action plans have been published and are now being implemented. These set out the most important species and habitats in the UK context and consider what actions are required to conserve them. It is recognised, however, that most action will be taken at a local level and this work is being co-ordinated by local biodiversity action plans, mostly produced by local authorities in conjunction with statutory and voluntary conservation organisations. A key difference between current biodiversity work and previous conservation strategies is that objective targets are being set to guide action and realistic timescales and costings are identified. There is increasing recognition of the need to bridge the gap between the national planning and local action. Consideration of biodiversity issues at a regional level has many advantages.

A regional approach can:

- establish clear links between national and local biodiversity action plans
- help to ensure a consistent level of biodiversity action across the region
- assist organisations which themselves operate at regional level
- bring in the advantages of economies of scale when dealing with biodiversity issues.

### **National, Regional and Local Biodiversity Importance**

This report does not attempt to catalogue the total biodiversity resource of Yorkshire and the Humber. It concentrates on those habitats and species identified as priorities at a national level. They are UK priorities for conservation action, either because they are scarce, highly threatened and declining rapidly or because they are important in a European context and the UK has an international obligation to protect them. This report therefore does not define the full extent of species and habitats requiring conservation action, but it does define what should be the main focus of that action.

Below the level of national and international importance is a further suite of regionally important species and habitats. These will also make a significant contribution to the regional biodiversity resource and to regional distinctiveness. Some of the species and habitats are obvious. For example:

#### *Tansy beetle *Chrysolina graminis**

A nationally notable (A) species, formerly widespread but has suffered a reduction in range. Strongholds now restricted to the River Ouse near York and the River Trent.

#### *Thistle broomrape *Orobanche reticulata**

In Britain, confined to Yorkshire with main populations concentrated along the magnesian limestone in West and North Yorkshire. Single site on the Wolds. Classified as nationally scarce and near threatened.

#### *Blue sesleria *Sesleria albicans* – Sterner's bedstraw *Galium sternerii* grassland*

Grassland largely restricted to Carboniferous limestone exposures with a sub-montane or montane climate in the northern Pennines. Important for rare and scarce species such as spring sandwort *Minuartia verna*.

#### *Chalk streams of the west and north Yorkshire Wolds*

Britain's most northerly chalk streams, characterised by river water-crowfoot beds. (Because the chalk substrate and the associated characteristics are localised, these water courses are not included in the UK Chalk Rivers Habitat Action Plan).

However, at present there are no agreed comprehensive criteria by which all regionally important species and habitats can be identified. Only a sense of urgency has led to the present document being published in advance of the creation of these lists of regionally important species and habitats.

This work must be carried out as a matter of urgency and plans to do so are being developed by the Yorkshire and Humber Biodiversity Forum (see below). The first phase of that work - the creation of a draft list of criteria for discussion is presented in the Appendix.

It is important when using this document to bear the following in mind:

- the omission of a species or habitat from this report does not mean that it has no significant conservation value. It may form an essential element of the regionally important resource.
- local biodiversity action plans (LBAPs) should not be constrained to consider only the species and habitats in this report. They must also consider sites, species and habitats of regional and local importance. However, any LBAP which fails to give due attention to the species and habitats in this report which occur within its boundary will not have achieved its full potential.
- action for biodiversity should focus on the most scarce and threatened habitats and species and on those habitats which the UK has an international obligation to protect.