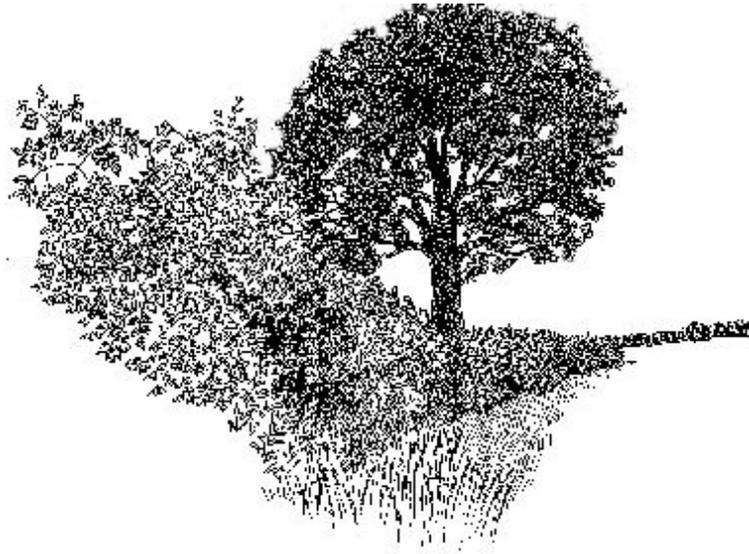


Ancient and/or Species-rich Hedgerows

Hedges are boundary lines of trees and/or shrubs, sometimes associated with banks, ditches, and grass verges. They are an important reservoir of biodiversity in the farmed landscape as well as being of, cultural historical and landscape importance. Hedges act as wildlife corridors, linking habitats of high biodiversity value such as woodland and wetland, thus enabling bats, small mammals and insects to move around under cover from predators.



1 Definition

Ancient hedgerows, which support a greater diversity of plants and animals than subsequent hedges, may be defined as those, which were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed mainly between 1720 and 1840. By the time of the Parliamentary enclosures, most of the East Anglian Plain was already enclosed and well hedged, but large numbers of common pastures and greens were enclosed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Large areas of Breckland and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths were enclosed at this time. These hedges were after-planted as single species, (usually Hawthorn).

Species-rich hedgerows contain five or more native woody species on average in a thirty-metre length. Hedges, which contain fewer woody species but a rich basal flora, may also be considered as ancient. The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 define 'important' hedgerows as those with seven woody species, or six woody species in a 30m length plus other defined features.

Key National Biodiversity Action Plan species in Suffolk which use hedges (including associated features such as grassy verges) are Brown Hare, Skylark, Grey Partridge, Song Thrush, Linnet, Turtle Dove, Corn Bunting, Tree Sparrow, Bullfinch, and Pipistrelle Bat.

Other fauna using hedges include small mammals, such as Dormice in the south of the county, hibernating reptiles and amphibians, and invertebrates such as White-letter Hairstreak butterfly in Elm hedges.

2 Current Status

2.1 Suffolk

The number or length of ancient and/or species-rich hedgerow in Suffolk is unknown but total hedgerow length, regardless of whether it is ancient or species-rich, is estimated to be in the region of 12,500-15,000km. These figures have been extrapolated from three hedge surveys in small parts of Suffolk.

Stanton Branch of the National Farmers Union recorded 599.8km of farm hedges in 1985, and in 1993 ADAS surveyed 15km² of the Suffolk River Valleys ESA and found 62km of hedges. This can be extrapolated to give an estimate of 12,589 for the whole county.

Parker (2000) undertook a hedge survey using selected 1km grid squares across the county and estimated 13,800 km. He also provides some data on rates of new creation (Suffolk Naturalists Society 2000).

The national action plan surmises that 42% of all hedges are ancient and/or species-rich. Applied to Suffolk, this provides the following estimates of ancient and/or species-rich hedgerow length for the county.

Length of hedgerows in Suffolk	Estimated ancient/species-rich proportion	Min/max estimates of ancient/species-rich hedgerow in Suffolk
10,000km	40%	4000km
20,000km	45%	9000km

With better data it is hoped that % of ancient hedges can be broken down by Natural Area; it is known that the Claylands have a greater proportion of ancient hedges than the Brecks and the Suffolk Sandlings but no figures are available at present.

2.2 Natural Areas

All (East Anglian Chalk, The Claylands, The fens, The Brecklands, East Anglian Plain, Suffolk Sandings.)

3 Current factors affecting Ancient and/or species rich hedgerows in Suffolk

Inappropriate management:

- Ancient and/or species-rich hedges are still occasionally removed by farmers, to facilitate arable operations, although the Local Planning Authority should give consent.
- Under-management and neglect of hedges leads to a reduction in their nature conservation interest and structural coherence (and occasionally leads to complete disappearance).
- Too frequent flailing of hedges is causing a reduction in their nature conservation interest.
- Few hedges have grass strips separating them from arable land, so ploughing can damage shrub and tree roots.
 - Fertiliser and pesticide drift degrades plant and invertebrate populations, especially where the crop extends to the hedge base.

- The reduction in numbers of livestock enterprises has led to a loss of agricultural function for many hedges.
- The number of hedgerow trees (often veteran trees, a feature of Suffolk landscapes) is declining; losses are not being replaced fast enough.
- Many private nature reserve owners are planting new species-rich hedges.

4 Current Action

4.1 Legal Status

The Hedgerows Regulations (Section 97 of the Environment Act 1995) were introduced to protect this characteristic element of the countryside. The Regulations prevent the removal of most countryside hedgerows without first submitting a hedgerow removal notice to the local planning authority.

Article 10 of the 1992 Habitats Directive encourages the management of linear features such as hedgerows to aid the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000(Section 74) places a duty on Local Authorities to have regard to the purposes of conserving biological diversity. This includes habitats such as Ancient and or Species-rich hedges.

An individual hedge can be subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) although this is not common. It is more common for individual hedgerow trees to be protected by a TPO.

Indirectly a hedgerow may be protected where it forms a habitat for a legally protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 or the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994.

4.2 Management, research and guidance

- Defra's Countryside Stewardship (CS) pays for an agreed programme of hedge management and/or planting. The new Entry Level Scheme (ELS) may to improve prospects for hedge management in the county, although it may not include planting.
- Since 1991 approximately 400km of hedgerows have been planted and restored. During the lifespan of the Suffolk BAP (1998-2003) the figure equates to approximately 2200 km of the above total through Defra's Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- The Suffolk River Valley ESA pays for hedge management but only a tiny proportion of hedges in the ESA have been entered into the scheme. It is a condition of receiving ESA payments that hedges on agreement land are retained. The Breckland and Broads ESAs also support hedge restoration.
- Suffolk County Council offer a 40% Landscape Conservation grant (up to £500) for hedge planting, although resources are limited. Over 13km of new hedge were planted in 2002/03 under this scheme.
- The Suffolk Hedgerow Survey has been completed by around 15 parishes, but data quality is variable and remains paper based. Other parishes are currently taking part.

5 Action Plan Objectives and Targets

Comprehensive survey work to establish the status of the habitat is still urgently required. Although the Lifescapes project (Suffolk Coasts and Heaths) has assessed some of the species-rich hedgerow resource, the area has never been an important one for this habitat.

The Suffolk Hedgerow Survey has been undertaken by some parishes but data quality is variable and remains paper based.

The objectives for this HAP are as follows:

- 1 *Obtain an up to date picture of the status and extent of ancient and/or species rich hedgerows in the county.*
- 2 *Ensure that most existing field boundaries are hedged, by encouraging planting along currently un-hedged boundaries (where this would have been a typical landscape feature), retaining hedgerow trees and the planting up of gaps.*
- 3 *Planting schemes should take account of the historical and cultural context, that is, local traditions and structures of boundary features.*

6 Ancient & Species-rich hedgerows: Proposed local action with lead agencies

Action	Date	Partners
POLICY AND LEGISLATION		
Encourage uptake of Agri-environment schemes, which provide for grass field margins alongside ancient and /or species-rich hedgerows. As well as favourable hedge management.	2007	FWAG , Defra/ RDS, , SWT
Ensure that the conservation status and associated biodiversity species of all hedges affected by development proposals is assessed.	2007	SCDC, WDC, BDC, FHDC,SEBC, MSDC, SCC
SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT		
Promote the favourable management of ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows throughout the Suffolk Countryside. Particularly replanting and gap-filling where seedbank is thought to have been retained.	2007	FWAG , EN, LAs, SWT, Defra/RDS
Encourage the use of set aside strips, (where regulations allow) to protect hedge bases from damage by agricultural operations.	2007	FWAG
Safeguard existing hedgerow trees and encourage the planting of new ones.	On-going	FWAG , SWT, Parish Tree Wardens

RESEARCH AND MONITORING		
Improve data on existing hedges through continuation of Parish Hedgerow Surveys.	2007	SWT
Find funds and proceed to map ancient and semi-natural hedgerow resource using parish survey data, historic maps and GIS.	2005	SBRC
Produce local data on the amount & length of hedge planted under new AES throughout the lifetime of these schemes (where possible to obtain data).	2004 2005 2006 2007	Defra
ADVISORY		
Continue where possible to promote hedge planting to farmers and parish groups, through grant schemes.	2007	FWAG, Defra/RDS, SHG
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY		
Promote to the general public an awareness of the importance of hedgerows as a habitat, how much new hedge is planned and that the era of massive hedge loss is over. Undertake sites visits, farm walks and press coverage.	2007	FWAG, SWT, SHG