

English Nature Research Report 595

A provisional Inventory of parkland and wood-pasture in the East Midlands

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Introduction

Wood-pastures and parklands are frequently of national historic, cultural and landscape significance. A large number are also nationally and internationally important for their wildlife. These sites, typically characterised by a population of widely-spaced, old trees amongst agriculturally unimproved vegetation, are largely derived from royal forests, emparkments, wooded commons and uncultivated pasture dating back at least to the 12th and 13th Centuries. Very little survey work for wildlife purposes has been undertaken within parklands as many have been modified or improved. This is despite the rich cultural history of old forest landscapes and the well known occurrence of parkland in the region. In addition, a number of parklands and wood-pastures are already known to be nationally important for nature conservation and have been notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

This report is a review of current information on the nature conservation importance of parklands and wood-pastures in the East Midland counties of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Rutland. A desktop study has been undertaken during which an inventory of parklands and wood-pasture for each of the six counties of the East Midlands has been compiled. The aim was to collate baseline parkland information where available, including such characteristics as site location and ecological interest, with a view to producing an inventory of sites likely to be of significance for nature conservation.

What was done

Existing information on parklands and wood-pasture in the region was gathered from a wide variety of sources involving a range of statutory bodies, local record centres, local specialists, nature conservation and landscape heritage organisations. A database was designed to collate the information. Approximate boundaries for Inventory sites were then digitally mapped at 1:50,000 scale using MapInfo 7.

Results and conclusions

Exactly 314 parkland and wood-pasture sites, covering a large, combined area of 32,294 hectares, have been identified within the East Midlands Region. Although this covers only 2% of the land area of the East Midlands, this represents a significantly large resource of potential interest for nature conservation in a region where the vast majority of wildlife-rich sites are now small in area. The Inventory shows that parklands remain widespread in the region, occurring in all counties.

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Examples of active and derelict wood-pastures are particularly rare, being restricted to a few sites in Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire and Yardley Chase in Northamptonshire. Some 13 sites are at least in part SSSI. Only 32 sites, limited to Derbyshire and Leicestershire, contain non-statutory County Wildlife Sites, in particular the woodlands and water-bodies within the Parklands. Some 30% of the total number of parklands is listed on the English Heritage Parks and Gardens Register. Many of the parklands are characterised by a range of features of conservation interest. For instance those with veteran trees recorded support important assemblages of invertebrates, fungi and bark lichens. 47 parklands/wood-pasture sites (15% of the regional resource) are currently known to support ancient, or veteran, trees. The Inventory has identified how little information there currently is on the wildlife of parkland and wood-pasture in the region, with 84% of sites requiring survey work or additional data collation.

Table 1: summary of the provisional Regional Inventory

County	No. of Inventory	Area of Inventory sites (hectares)	% of sites known to contain old trees	% of sites lacking wildlife information
Derbyshire	52	4117	17%	79%
Leicestershire	38	3883	16%	79%
Lincolnshire	55	4634	4%	91%
Northamptonshire	66	5733	10%	82%
Nottinghamshire	97	12969	9%	88%
Rutland	6	958	16%	83%
TOTAL	314	32,294	15%	84%

English Nature's viewpoint

This Inventory, although provisional, adds to our knowledge of the parkland and wood-pasture resource in England. It demonstrates the clear need to carry out more detailed survey and evaluation to confirm the current state of the parkland or wood-pasture resource, including the presence or absence of veteran trees. It is recommended that further work to validate and improve the information within this Inventory is now developed through county-based partnerships. This would not only contribute towards the delivery of national and regional biodiversity targets but would also facilitate the selection of high quality parkland and wood-pastures as County Wildlife Sites. Given the large extent of the regional parkland resource and the potential wildlife interest, it is suggested that important sites would be suitable candidates for future agri-environment funding.

Further information

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

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