

# HEDGEROWS

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**Almost all hedgerows are now priority habitat. This recognises their intrinsic biodiversity value, and their value as movement and feeding corridors for wildlife. It is easy to modify management to enhance the biodiversity value.**

## **UK Priority Habitats covered by this statement:**

Hedgerows

## **Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats covered by this statement:**

Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows

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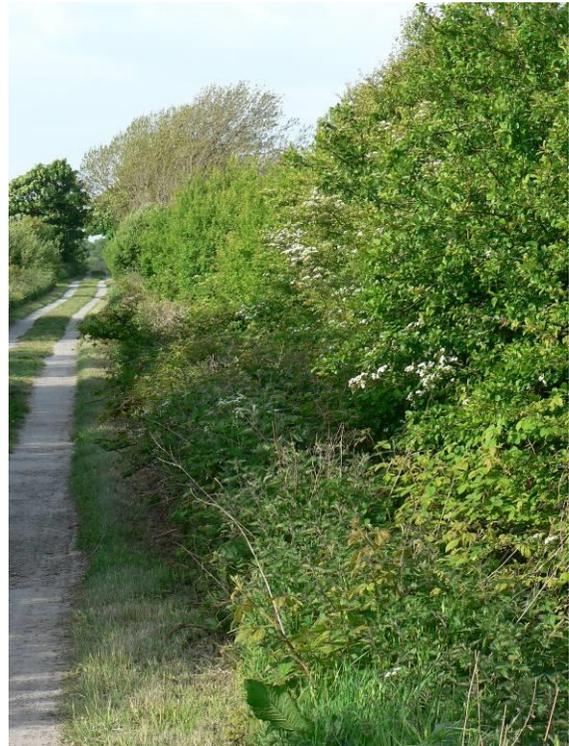
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## **Description**

The UKBAP definition of a hedgerow is any boundary line of trees or shrubs over 20m long and less than 5 m wide, and where any gaps between the trees or shrubs species are less than 20 m wide. Any bank, wall, ditch or tree within 2 m of the centre of the hedgerow is considered to be part of the hedgerow habitat, as is the herbaceous vegetation within 2 m of the centre of the hedgerow. The UK BAP definition in 2007 covers all hedgerows consisting predominantly (80% or more cover) of at least one woody UK native species. The current Cumbria BAP definition is based on the previous UKBAP definition and is restricted to ancient hedgerows in existence before the Enclosure Acts and hedgerows which contain four or more woody species or have a rich basal flora of herbaceous plants.

Most of Cumbria's hedgerows are predominantly Hawthorn, but a variety of other tree and shrub species may be present, including Dog-rose, Blackthorn, Elder, Hazel, Ash and Holly. The more diverse hedges frequently include a variety of typical woodland and woodland edge plants, such as Honeysuckle, Dog's Mercury, Red Campion, Wood Anemone, violets, Primrose and Bluebell.

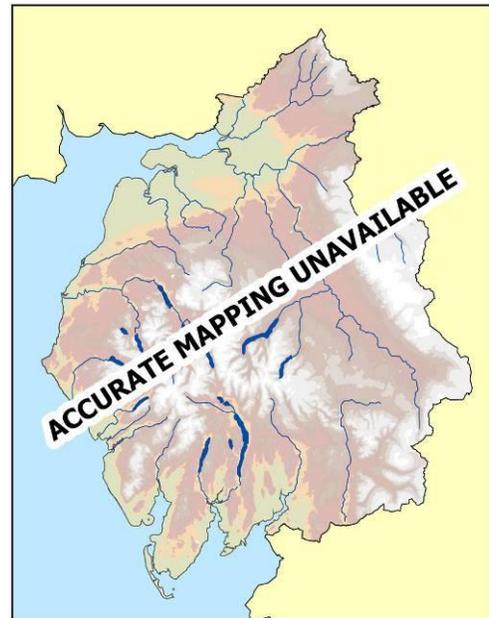
Hedgerows are important for invertebrates, including butterflies and moths, and farmland birds such as Grey Partridge, Tree Sparrow and Song Thrush. They are particularly important as foraging areas for Barn Owls. Bats hunt for insects along hedgerows and use them as commuting routes; they also roost in holes in old hedgerow trees.

Older and more diverse hedgerows are likely to be more valuable as wildlife habitats and provide an essential refuge for many woodland and farmland birds, plants and animals. Hedgerows adjacent to roads, green lanes, tracks and wooded ground tend to be particularly species-rich. Hedgerows can also act as wildlife corridors for many species, including reptiles and amphibians, allowing dispersal and movement between other habitats.

Hedgerows are best sustained by laying on an 8-15 year cycle. Flailing and cutting hedgerows requires careful timing and method to provide a diverse hedgerow habitat and good hedgerow structure. Repeated frequent cutting leads to thinning of the base of the hedge.

### Distribution and Extent

Hedgerows are found throughout Cumbria, from the flat plains of the Solway coast to the tracks and byways of the lower fells. They also occur on a wide range of rock and soil types, giving a great deal of regional variation in hedgerow composition and form. Estimates suggest that the current total hedgerow length in the county is between 16,500 and 22,500km. The percentage of ancient or species-rich hedgerows is not known. There are currently no designated sites for hedgerows in Cumbria, but some SSSIs will include hedgerows as part of the field system.



### Conservation Issues

Agricultural management has the most impact on hedgerows. Field enlargement causes direct loss of hedgerows, whilst 'ranching' (the placing of fencing around a number of fields, which are then run as a single grazing unit) leads to the neglect of internal hedges. High stocking rates, can damage hedgerows and lead to the need to fence fields. Once fenced there is less agricultural necessity to maintain hedgerows.

The use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers right up to the hedgerow base will result in the loss of plant and animal species and reduce the biodiversity interest of the hedgerow.

Poor hedgerow management, including too frequent or badly timed cutting, neglect or cutting instead of hedge laying leads to poor hedgerow structure and reduced biodiversity interest.

### Planning Considerations

- PPS9 states that local authorities should conserve important natural habitat types (priority habitats and habitats of principal importance in England), and identify opportunities to enhance and add to them.
- Any development that may impact upon hedgerow habitat, or its species interests, would require an assessment of the likely effects on the habitat/species and, as necessary, appropriate protection and mitigation measures.

- Hedgerows are protected by the Hedgerows Regulations 1997. Under the Regulations, it is against the law to remove or destroy certain hedgerows without permission from the local planning authority. Permission is required before removing hedges that are at least 20 metres in length, over 30 years old and contain certain species of plant.
- Any development in the countryside is likely to impact upon hedgerows due to their widespread nature, leading to loss of this habitat.
- Hedgerows are ecological links through the landscape and piecemeal loss will lead to fragmentation of linked habitats such as woodlands and grasslands. These links are recognised in the Habitats Directive and Regulations as being important for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange.
- Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows are of greatest importance, as these are far less replicable than more recent and species-poor examples, and measures should be taken to avoid destruction/ decline of these hedgerows.
- There are no SSSIs specifically designated for this habitat.

### Enhancement Opportunities

- Enhanced management of all hedgerows, including poorer hedgerows, within development;
- Planting of new species-rich hedgerows as part of developments using native species.
- Planting of new species-rich hedgerows to link existing woodlands together.

### Key Species

The following Key Species could benefit from enhancement of this habitat, or be negatively impacted upon by inappropriate developments on or near this habitat:

White-letter Hairstreak	Song Thrush	Common Pipistrelle
Linnet	Barn Owl	Daubenton's Bat
Reed Bunting	Yellowhammer	Dormouse
Spotted Flycatcher	Great Crested Newt	Hedgehog
Tree Sparrow	Badger	Natterer's Bat
Grey Partridge	Brandt's Bat	Noctule bat
Bullfinch	Brown Hare	Soprano Pipistrelle
Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)	Brown Long-eared Bat	Whiskered Bat

### Further Information

[Countryside Stewardship Scheme](#)

[Bat Conservation Trust-Buildings, Planning and Development](#)

[National Hedgelaying Society](#)

[UKBAP Priority Habitat Descriptions](#)

[Planning and Development for Protected Sites and Species](#)

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## **Current Action in Cumbria**

- The Countryside Stewardship Scheme run by Natural England provides financial incentives to manage land in a way that is sympathetic to its nature conservation interest with specific hedgerow options.