

TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

Scattered traditional orchards and groups of fruit trees help to sustain wildlife links through the landscape of Cumbria. They can also have significant cultural and community value.

UK Priority Habitats covered by this statement:

Traditional orchards

Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan habitats covered by this statement:

None

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Orchard © Stephen Hewitt

Description

Traditional orchards are generally small and managed in a low intensity manner with widely spaced trees over pasture or meadow. Many of these orchards host fruit trees of considerable age. Little information is available on the composition of these orchards, but in the south of the county damsons are widely grown, whilst elsewhere apples are thought to predominate.

The low intensity of the management of these orchards means that they are often hotspots of biodiversity in the countryside. Old fruit trees can support a wide range of uncommon invertebrates and can be important for epiphytic lichens. Orchards can also host important fungal groupings, both of decaying wood and grassland fungi such as waxcaps.

In addition to wildlife, traditional orchards contain many old varieties of fruit trees and have a high genetic diversity. In Cumbria there are known to be at least 200 local varieties of apple.

Distribution and Extent

Traditional orchards are found throughout the county, but are largely absent from the central Lake District and parts of the west coast. The main concentration is in the south of the county, particularly in the Lyth and Winster valleys which are noted for their damson orchards.

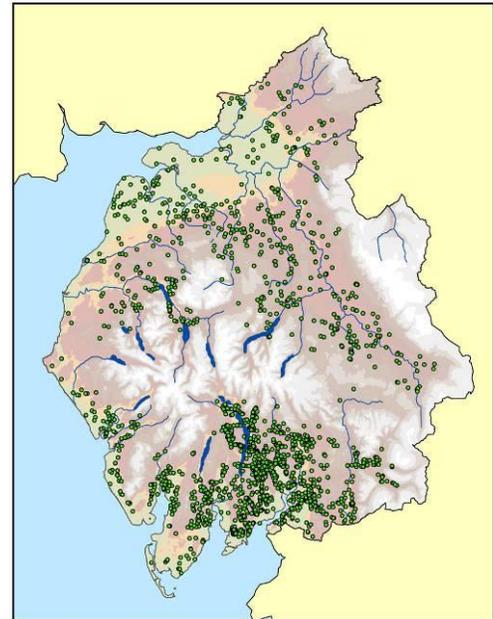
Conservation Issues

Urban development, the need for more profitable crops, and imports of cheap fruit from abroad have all caused the loss of many small orchards. These losses have meant more intensive production in orchards that remain, reducing the value of orchards as diverse wildlife habitats.

Incorporation of orchards into gardens leads to a degradation of the orchard habitat, even if the trees themselves are retained.

Planning Considerations

- Any development that may impact upon traditional orchards would require an assessment of the likely effects on the habitat and, as necessary, appropriate protection and mitigation measures.
- This priority habitat is easily overlooked in planning decisions as small orchards can be dismissed as a “few old apple trees in a corner of the garden”. They are particularly vulnerable to housing developments, especially those which involve the development of clusters of houses around farms or barns or indeed any house in the countryside. Existing fruit trees can be protected by condition.
- The biodiversity of orchards can be damaged not only direct impacts, but also by indirect impacts such as the use of the orchard for storing machinery and materials during construction work.
- There are no orchards within the SSSI system.



*Distribution of traditional orchards in Cumbria
(provided for illustrative purposes only)*

Enhancement Opportunities

- New orchard planting with appropriate, and where possible traditional varieties, should be encouraged.

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:

Wall butterfly

Linnet

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Yellowhammer

Hedge Accentor (dunnock)

Tree Sparrow

Bullfinch

Barn Owl

Song Thrush

Brandt's Bat

Daubenton's Bat

Whiskered Bat

Natterer's Bat

Noctule bat

Common Pipistrelle

Soprano Pipistrelle

Brown Long-eared Bat

Hedgehog

Further information

[Countryside Stewardship Scheme](#)

[Bat Conservation Trust](#)

[Sustain/Leader+ National Orchards Project](#)

[LEADER+ Cumbria fells & dales](#)

[Westmorland Damson Association](#)

[National Orchard Forum](#)

Contacts

- **Natural England Cumbria Team**, 0300 060 3900 Email: cumbria@naturalengland.org.uk
- **Cumbria Wildlife Trust**, 01539 816300 Email: mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
- **Cumbria Fells and Dales LAG**, Cumbria County Council, Unit 5a Lakeland Business Park, Lamplugh Road, Cockermouth, Cumbria CA13 0QT 01900 706028 , fellsanddales@cumbria.gov.uk

Current Action in Cumbria

- Sustain is working on the national orchard project with Leader+ (a European Union funded programme of rural development) to conserve and bring into sustainable management traditional orchards in the Cumbria Fells and Dales Leader+ funded area and elsewhere in the UK. Cumbrian projects include the Damson Development Project and Orchard Link, 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 traditional orchard options.