



COUNTY WILDLIFE SITES



What are County Wildlife Sites?

County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) are areas of land important for their wildlife and they can be found on public and private land.

CWS recognition is non-statutory, but is recognition of a site's high value for biodiversity. The Wildlife Trust, Local Authorities and other organisations are working to protect and enhance such sites in co-operation with land owners and land managers.

CWSs are found on public and private land, varying in size and shape from small meadows, green lanes, ponds and hedges through to much larger areas of ancient woodlands, species rich grassland, heathland and commons.

Why are County Wildlife Sites Important?

Outside of statutorily protected areas (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local and National Nature Reserves), CWSs are the most important areas for wildlife in Bedfordshire.

CWSs can support both locally and nationally threatened wildlife species and habitats. In Bedfordshire, CWSs account for less than 7% of the county's area.

Many sites support habitats and species that are priorities for conservation under the UK and Bedfordshire Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP) which sets out strategies for the conservation of our most vulnerable species and habitats such as water voles, sky larks, traditional orchards and lowland meadows.

CWSs are intended to represent local character and distinctiveness and provide comprehensive coverage of sites, rather than be a representative sample as SSSIs are and thus have a vital role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets. They complement other site networks by providing essential wildlife refuges, stepping stones, corridors and buffers linking and protecting other designated sites (e.g. SSSI). The importance of ecological networks for conservation is now widely recognised, better enabling wildlife to survive on reserves and in the wider countryside. Linked habitats are also likely to be important in allowing wildlife to adapt to the effects of climate change.



Bedfordshire County Wildlife Site System – how does it work?

The CWS system is managed by the Local Site (LS) Partnership which maintains an overview of the CWS system, meeting twice a year to network, share information, plan and monitor CWS activities. Whilst the LS Partnership sets the strategic direction of CWS work and maintains an overview of the system, the majority of the practical work is carried out by the CWS Panel which forms a sub-group of the LS Partnership and act on their behalf.

The CWS Panel is made up of Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust, Bedfordshire Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre, Luton Borough Council, Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire, Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Natural History Society, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, RSPB, Environment Agency and Natural England.

The aim of the partnership is to work together to maintain and restore the wildlife interest in Bedfordshire and provide the best help, advice and services to owners and managers of wildlife sites.

The CWS system involves:

- Surveying and re-surveying CWS
- Recognising new CWSs and modifying information held on existing sites when changes occur.

At CWS panel meetings, new CWSs are selected by assessing their wildlife importance in a county context against carefully constructed selection guidelines and new sites are recognised if they meet these guidelines. To view the selection guidelines see http://www.bedscape.org.uk/BRMC/newsite/index.php?c=sites_cws

Supplying information on the wildlife interest of CWSs to landowners and other organisations whose work may affect CWSs.

The importance of CWSs is recognised by local authorities in Bedfordshire and they have all developed policies that give CWSs some protection in line with national planning policy. If a CWS is likely to be affected by development the views of some of the CWS partners is normally sought as part of the consultation process.

Working with Landowners and Managers of CWS

The high wildlife value of many CWSs has developed through land management practices that have allowed wildlife to thrive e.g. traditional and historical management such as rotational coppicing of woodland, hay cutting or grazing of grasslands. Ensuring the continuation of such appropriate management is vital to maintain the wildlife value of a site. Establishing and maintaining good working relationships with landowners and managers is therefore essential.

The CWS partnership appreciates the difficulties that achieving the conservation management of CWSs can present and is therefore happy to offer advice on maintaining and enhancing the special value of these sites as well as providing information on potential sources of funding.

How are landowners affected?

If intensification of land use is being considered it may be necessary to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment under the 2006 Regulations. For more information on the Regulations call the Natural England free phone EIA helpline on 0800 028 2140.

It is important to be aware that the recognition of a site as a CWS does NOT confer any new rights of access either to the general public or conservation organisations.

Ordinary agricultural operations remain unaffected and identification of a CWS does NOT give anyone other than the landowner or manager control over land management.

For further information on Bedfordshire County Wildlife Sites

Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust

Laura Downton (Wildlife Sites Officer)

Telephone 01234 364213; E-mail laura.downton@wildlifebcn.org

John Comont (Conservation Manager)

Telephone: 01234 364213; E-mail john.comont@wildlifebcn.org

Bedfordshire Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

Keith Balmer (Secretary of CWS Panel and Biodiversity Network Officer)

Telephone 01234 355435; E-mail keith.balmer@wildlifebcn.org

Luton Borough Council

Trevor Tween (Chair of CWS Panel and Environmental Manager)

Telephone: 01582 547095 E-mail tweet@luton.gov.uk

Pictures

Pregnant mare grazing wildflower pasture

Hare

Yellowhammer

Ancient woodland CWS

Yellowwort

Lowland chalk grassland CWS

Black hairstreak butterfly

A pond CWS

Pasqueflower

Cladonia (lichen)

Great spotted woodpecker

Churchyard CWS

Grizzled skipper

Otter

(Pictures credited to the Wildlife Trust apart from Grizzled skipper credited to Keith Balmer)



**Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire**

Bedfordshire & Luton
**Biodiversity
Recording &
Monitoring
Centre**

