NORFOLK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

ALLOTMENTS

Ref LH/2		Local Habitat Action Plan 2
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Definition

The Allotments Act 1922 (Section 22) defines 'allotment gardens' as 'an allotment not exceeding forty poles in extent which is mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetables and fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family'.

A more general definition would be '*An allotment is a plot of land which can be rented by an individual for growing fruit and vegetables, for personal and family use'.* (Greater London Authority 2008).

1. CURRENT STATUS

National Status

Allotments form some of the best habitat mosaics and wildlife corridors, often linking up with parks, tracks, hedgerows, churchyards and rivers. The contiguous nature of allotment plots is a key factor in their importance as habitats.
They also act as an important habitat and refuge for hedgehogs, amphibians, invertebrates and arable weed species that have become deterred from gardens and parks as a result of over-tidying, fencing and building, and chemical use.

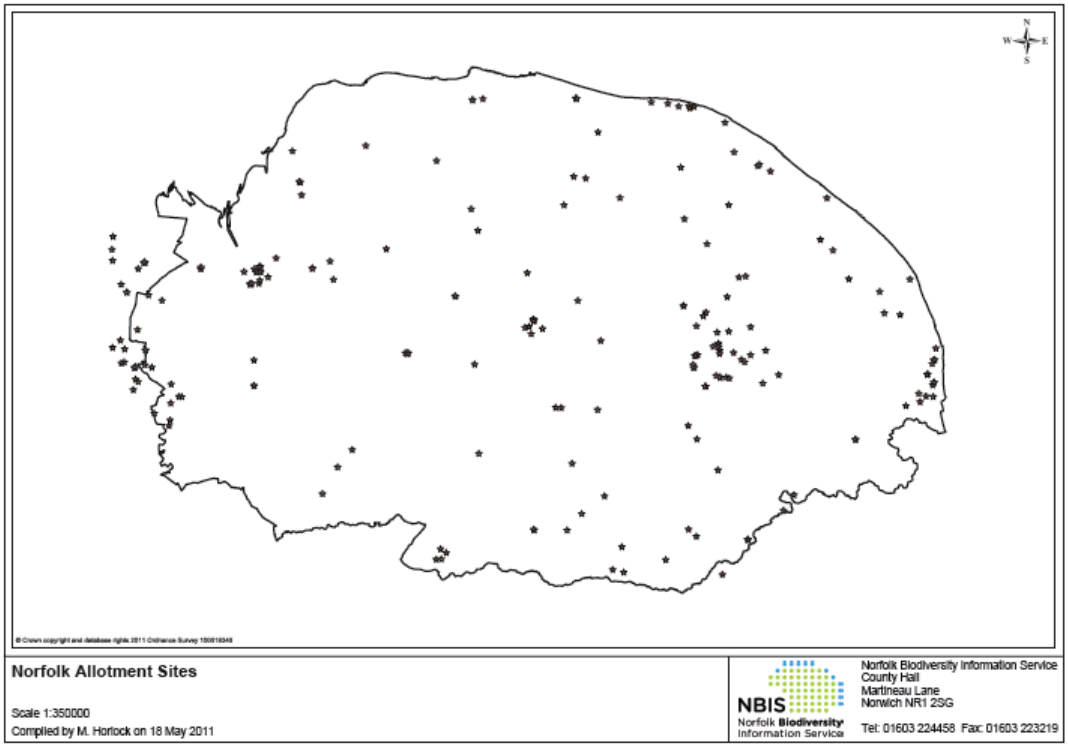
- In 1919, after land was requisitioned for growing food during World War I, there were 1.5 million allotments – the equivalent of one plot for every five families. In 1996, there were 33,000 acres of allotments, representing a major decline from the war years and a decline of 43% between 1970 and 1996 (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Allotments Habitat Action Plan, 2000).
- It has been shown that allotments have, on average, up to 30% higher species diversity than urban parks (National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners). This is due to the wide variety of habitats that can be found, such as empty plots, nectar producing plants, compost heaps, grass areas, sheds and stores, and the boundary hedges and banks. For example, hedgerows, often left to grow tall, offer nesting and foraging habitat for many bird species

and a variety of invertebrates, as do ditches and grassy banks with low maintenance regimes. Hedgehogs and grass snakes may also be associated with tall grass, hedges and compost heaps.

- The addition of manure and composts to the soil encourages earthworms. Disturbed ground from freshly dug soil makes worms, grubs and insects more accessible to a variety of predators.

- Debris, such as stored timber, rubble and old carpets, provides shelter for small mammals and invertebrates. As well as assisting a healthy population of the individual species, it also provides a food source for amphibians, reptiles and birds.

Norfolk Status & Distribution.



- There are approximately 283ha of allotment habitat in Norfolk (based on desk top study 2011), including 43 ha of allotments within the Norwich city boundary, 12 ha of allotments in South Norfolk, 135 ha in Breckland and 10.5 ha in Broadland. No data is available for North Norfolk or West Norfolk.

- Allotment sites are evenly spread throughout Norfolk with noticeable clusters in the larger urban areas and in the west of the county on the peat soils.

- To estimate the total area and distribution of allotments in Norfolk, ordnance survey data was cross referenced with current satellite images and aerial photographs to see which sites still exist. These sites were plotted as polygons on the GIS map and the areas of land recorded in hectares (ha).

- Some interesting results were found with many rural allotments being lost to development, neglect, or renting to local smallholders to manage as one field. In large urban areas the allotment sites have remained much the same as they were during the last OS survey, and in several market towns, new sites have been established, presumably due to additional areas of housing and the growing demand for allotments.

- Rural allotments owned by Parish Councils appear to be the most at risk, as the land is often a major asset for the village, and its sale can fund other facilities such as play equipment, a wildlife area or village hall. It may also be the case that the rural allotments are in less demand as houses generally have larger gardens and people can grow more produce at home.

- In large urban areas such as Norwich, Dereham, King's Lynn and Thetford, there is high demand for allotments and long waiting lists. Sites are usually protected in planning by local development plans or policies, but are by no means safe from future development or additional pressures from new housing, including fly tipping from neighbouring properties, invasive plants, and cats.

- There is very little scope for new sites within built-up areas, as available land is likely to be previously developed land or of too high a property value to become allotments.

- Market towns would be good areas to target for creating new allotment sites, as the demand is evident and there is often land at the edge of the built-up area that may be owned or could be purchased by the Town Council or a community group wanting to run the site.

- There is an interesting belt of allotment sites along the west boundary of the county. These are community sites that are owned or leased by individuals to produce crops on a commercial scale, including orchards. These sites were recorded as allotments on the current OS map, but they are not all community allotments and no longer have the habitat features that we associate with allotments, eg. Wooden sheds, compost heaps, water, rubble piles.

- There are huge gaps in the data we have for the distribution of allotments. It would be useful to contact each parish and ask if they have allotments and their size in hectares (ha).

- There are many reasons why a village would not have allotments or manage them for biodiversity, including possibly lack of demand, land, money, or practical support.

- These are all issues that this plan can give guidance on, with the aim of improving the distribution and management of allotments for biodiversity through practical guidance and sign-posting to other groups who can help directly.

2. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE HABITAT

Conversion to built environment

- Direct loss of both domestic gardens and allotments can occur through: housing development as residential density increases, the lack of provision of garden spaces in new developments, and the loss of front gardens to concrete for off-road parking. According to a recent poll by MORI, 30% of front gardens in the east of England have been paved over to create parking spaces (RHS, 2006). Modern developments tend to favour larger houses with more parking space and smaller, low maintenance gardens.

- With both Norwich and Thetford being named as growth points, there will be a significant increase in development in Norfolk over the next 20-30 years, much of which will need to be situated on greenfield sites. It is therefore important, now more than ever, that domestic gardens, urban parks and allotments be managed sympathetically to wildlife and biodiversity, in order to try and ameliorate the effects of this development as much as possible.

Insensitive design and management

- Design and approach to management have a profound effect on the wildlife associated with allotments and gardens. An open space that consists largely of lawn and hard surfacing, or is constantly replenished with summer bedding, will support far fewer species than one which incorporates wild areas, bird feeders, water and plants chosen for their wildlife value.

Inappropriate planting

- Significant damage can be caused by introducing or dumping garden plants, especially non-native species such as japanese knotweed, himalayan balsam, buddleia, and Spanish bluebell, which can hybridize with the native bluebell.

Pesticide use

- Excessive use of pesticides has been cited as one of the potential causes of the decline of certain species, especially birds and hedgehogs. Concern over the use of pesticides is based around three issues:

    i) They directly reduce food availability such as insects and snails, which are eaten by song thrushes (another BAP species) and many other animals.

    ii) They are often indiscriminate in their effects, killing beneficial insects such as ladybirds as well as the target pest species.

    iii) Pesticides can sometimes enter the food chain, with negative impacts on biodiversity. For example, ants treated with ant-killer have been known to poison green woodpeckers.

- Organic gardening and biological controls are becoming more popular. However, lack of awareness and the desire for 'quick fix' solutions still pervade the choice of pest-control methods.

Control of plants considered to be 'weeds'

- Excessive use of herbicide and use of non-discriminate herbicides will seriously reduce the biodiversity value of an allotment. Some arable plant species such as shepherd's needle are BAP species due to their decline in numbers.

- Other plants such as bramble, nettle, evening primrose, dock and teasel, all play an important role in the life cycle of invertebrates and birds. It is important to remember that allotments are primarily for food production, and weeds can have a considerable effect on the crop, but non-chemical weed control is possible, pulling, hoeing, covering with carpet before plants seed, and selective spraying or scorching is an option.

Insufficient information and lack of awareness

- There is a lack of up-to-date information about urban wildlife resources and the value of peoples' gardens and allotments as a habitat. Very few studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of wildlife gardening, with the exception of the Biodiversity in Urban Gardens (BUGS) project. This was undertaken by the University of Sheffield between 2004 and 2007, and studied the environmental and biodiversity value of domestic gardens in urban areas across four cities in the UK. This followed on from an original, three-year investigation completed in 2002, which looked solely at the city of Sheffield.

- Public perception is also a problem, with some people regarding urban habitat as less 'worthy' than rural habitat. There has often been a tendency to 'tidy up' gardens and urban parks rather than leaving areas for wildlife. Untended areas with features such as dead wood, leaves and ivy provide good habitat for many

fungi and invertebrates and hibernation sites for hedgehogs, other small mammals and amphibians.

Impacts on other habitats

- Gardeners and allotment-holders are significant consumers of resources. The horticultural industry often sources unsustainable products, such as plants dug up from the wild, peat, tropical hardwoods and natural stone collected from threatened habitats around the world.

  The transport of goods and the use of resources in the manufacture of garden products are issues for gardeners to be aware of in reducing their ecological footprint. Garden centres and growers clearly have a significant role to play in marketing appropriate plants and products.

3. CURRENT ACTION IN NORFOLK

- There has been an incredible rise in interest and demand for allotments nationally in the last ten years, and in Norfolk many new sites, allotment associations; community groups and council projects have been established.

- Events such as Wild About Norfolk, Wild in your garden, composting demonstrations, organic gardening courses and events, apple days and green build days have all been run to celebrate and support the interest in practical ways that people can get involved to manage gardens, allotments and communal space in a way that benefits Norfolk's diverse wildlife.

- Norfolk County Council, in conjunction with the Norfolk Waste Partnership and Garden Organic, has for several years organised events across the county to celebrate Composting Awareness. These events included composting demonstrations and advice. Norfolk now has 170 'Master Composters', who are volunteers trained as local composting experts to help others in their community to get composting.

- The Norfolk Organic Group promotes organic gardening and growing and using sustainable resources. They hold monthly meetings with visits to member's gardens and allotments and attend county shows and local events with information and literature. Members can swap seeds, plants, books and magazines and keep in touch with organic issues. The group also produces a regular newsletter. There are also several other, more localised, organic groups and allotment societies across Norfolk.

- The Sustainable Living Initiative has been very successful at the Bluebell South site in Norwich since 2004 (www.grow-our-own.co.uk). 2012 will see the laying out of a new site in the Marlpit area of Costessey, where people can rent smaller plots of land than on traditional allotments, and where the use of tools, a choice of seeds and plants, manure and compost are all included in the rent.

4. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

National

- There is no national plan for this habitat and therefore no national objectives.

Norfolk

- To raise public awareness of the biodiversity value of allotments and urban parks and their importance as potential wildlife havens.
- Promote the value of allotments as nature conservation areas and communal gardens as well as for food production.
- To seek and promote protection of allotment sites through planning.
- To encourage gardeners and those responsible for allotment sites to manage all allotments sustainably and in a manner appropriate to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- To discourage the use of potentially harmful chemicals in gardens and allotments and promote organic alternatives.
- To encourage habitat creation on marginal land, e.g., ponds, log piles, food sources for over-wintering birds and hibernating habitat for natural pest controllers such as hedgehogs, amphibians and beetles.

Allotments – Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.1	**Policy and Legislation**			
5.1.1	No national action	Ensure allotments are provided / protected within Green infrastructure Strategies and master development plans.	**All**	
5.1.2		Encourage local government to adopt the Allotment HAP guidance and	**LA's / All**	

		promote its use through the planning process.		
5.1.3		Promote the value of allotments as nature conservation areas and communal gardens as well as for food production.	**All**	
5.1.4		Investigate suitable designations for sites with high biodiversity value; CWS, LNR.	**LA's, NWT**	
5.2	**Site Safeguard and Management**			
5.2.1	No national action	Maintain the area of allotments in Norfolk at existing size (~280ha) and support the development of new sites.	**All**	
5.2.2		Seek to retain or achieve 100% of native hedgerows around allotment sites (where possible).	**District and Parish Councils**	
5.2.3		Provide reduced-cost compost bins and water butts.	**NCC / District Councils**	
5.2.4		Retain 5% marginal land for nature conservation at each site.	**LA's / Allotment owners.**	
5.2.5		Construction of 1 pond (where safe to do so) on each allotment site.	**LA's / Allotment owners.**	
5.2.6		Retain 100% of any felled trees, bark and	**LA's / Allotment**	

		wood chippings on site.	**owners.**	
		Identify and remove 100% of invasive non native species (in line with Norfolk Non Native Species Initiative).	**NNNSI / All**	
5.3	**Advisory**			
5.3.1		Design a web page on the Norfolk Biodiversity website with guidance for allotment holders, developers and landscapers on creating and managing allotments for biodiversity.	**All, NBP, NBIS**	
5.3.2	No national action	Establish 1 demonstration allotment per district.	**BTCV / LA's / Allotment owners/ All.**	
5.3.3		Help organise / publicise 1 wildlife gardening training day each year to illustrate best management techniques for biodiversity.	**All**	
5.3.4		Provide advice on composting via Norfolk's master composters & website. Promote Master Composters.	**NCC (Waste Reduction Team)**	
5.4	**Future Research and Monitoring**			
5.4.1	No national action.	Obtain an accurate measure of allotments in Norfolk.	**NBIS**	

5.4.2		Encourage participation of Norfolk residents in the National Garden Bird Watch Survey.	**All**	
5.4.3		Develop wildlife survey methodology for allotment holders and encourage the submission of records to Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service.		
5.4.4		Ensure all records are sent to NBIS.	**All**	
5.4.5		Undertake surveys and inspections of significant trees. Investigate TPO status for significant trees on allotments.	**Local Authorities**	
5.5	**Communications and Publicity**			
5.5.1	No national action.	Continue to promote wildlife gardening at Biodiversity / wildlife events.	**All**	
5.5.2		Encourage local garden centres to become wildlife gardening champions by displaying information, promoting wildlife friendly plants and discouraging the use of peat-based composts, chemicals and alien invasive plants.	**NBP/ NNNSI**	
5.5.3		Produce posters and leaflets with practical advice which can be displayed at		

		allotment sites and be changed with the seasons.		
5.6 **5.6.1**	**Links with Other Action Plans**	This plan should be considered in conjunction with those for churchyards, the spotted flycatcher, song thrush, great crested newt, pipistrelle bat, hedgehog, mixed native hedgerows.	**All**	

5. MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

(This guidance is a general summary; for more detailed information or advice, please consult the references or contacts below.)

- **Manage hedgerows for wildlife**; allowing hedgerows to become thicker at the base will provide hibernating habitat for frogs and hedgehogs which are natural predators of allotment pests such as slugs, snails. Do not cut hedgerows during the bird nesting period and leave berries on the hedge until they are taken naturally.

- **Create ponds**; where safe to do so. Small ponds can be created to provide spawning sites for frogs, toads and newts. Ponds are important features for birds, mammals and insects. Water is as important to bees as pollen.

- **Keep deadwood and leaves on the site**; all felled trees, pruned branches, fallen leaves etc (unless diseased) can easily be used on allotment sites. Hibernating habitat is often lost from allotments as a result of over-tidying, or council contracts that include taking cut material away.

- **Let wildflowers seed before mowing grass areas**; managing areas of grass for wildflowers will benefit pollinating insects as well as conserving the plants themselves. Mow grass in late summer when the flowers have seeded and rake up the cuttings. These can be composted or heaped up as hibernating habitat for reptiles, amphibians and small mammals.

- **Leave seed heads on plants over winter**; sunflower, teasel, evening primrose are a valuable food source for birds in winter when other food is scarce.
  Resisting the urge to over tidy in autumn will benefit a wide range of natural predators leading to fewer pests on the crops in spring and summer.

- **Manage marginal land for wildlife**; most allotment sites have odd corners or uneven ground where nobody gardens. These areas could become important habitats for wildlife, and, provided it is designed to not just harbour pests, will benefit allotment holders as well as biodiversity.

- **Have open-fronted or slatted compost bins**; as well as the plastic cone type of compost bin, ‘home-made’ compost heaps allow wildlife into the heap to hibernate, and provide a permanent home to beetles, slow worms and frogs and a food source for hedgehogs and birds.

- **Try alternatives to chemical fertilizers and pesticides**, such as nettle or borage-based plant food and soapy liquid to discourage aphids.

- **Use companion planting** to fool pests, such as planting onions next to carrots to confuse carrot fly, or planting a clump of marigolds to attract pest insects away from the main crops.

6. REFERENCES

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National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. www.nsalg.org.uk

Further Reading

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Gaston, J K *et al*. (2005). Urban domestic gardens: experimental tests of methods for increasing biodiversity. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 14 (2): pp.395-413

Good, R (2000). The value of gardening for wildlife. What contribution does it make to conservation? *British Wildlife* 12 (2): pp.77-84

Porter, V (1999). RSPCA guide to garden wildlife: attracting wildlife to your garden. *Harper Collins*

Ryrie, C (2003). Wildlife gardening. *Cassells.*

Steel, J (2002). Wildlife ponds. *Webbs Barn.*

Websites with Wildlife Gardening Advice

www.wildaboutgardens.org
www.wildlife-gardening.co.uk
www.wildlifegardening.co.uk
www.wildlife-gardening.org.uk
www.bbc.co.uk/gardening
www.spacefornature.co.uk
www.rspb.org.uk/gardens
www.wildlifeextra.com
www.rhs.org.uk
www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk

7. CONTACTS

Norwich City Council
Allotment Officer 01603 212347
Paul Holley 01603 212343

King Lynn & West Norfolk
Sharon.fettes@west-norfolk.gov.uk

Great Yarmouth & Gorleston Allotment Association
Sandk.jarvis@virgin.net

South Norfolk
Allotments managed by Parish Councils

Broadland District Council
Allotments managed by Parish Council

Breckland
Allotments managed by Parish Councils

British Trust for Ornithology
The Nunnery
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 2PU
Tel: 01842-750050
Website: www.bto.org

Natural England
(Norfolk & Suffolk Team)
Dragonfly House
2 Gilders Way
Norwich
NR3 1UB
01603 674920
Website: www.naturalengland.org.uk

Norfolk Wildlife Trust
Bewick House
22 Thorpe Road
Norwich
Tel: 01603-625540
Website: www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

Norwich Fringe Countryside Management Project
The Gate Lodge
The Former Training Workshop
Swanton Road
Norwich
NR2 4LR
Tel: 01603-423303
Email: fringe.ncc@gtnet.gov.uk
Website: www.thefringe.fsnet.co.uk

The Conservation Volunteers (formerly British Trust for Conservation Volunteers)
Royal Oak Court
Horns Lane
Norwich
NR1 3ER
Tel: 01603-767300
Website: www.btcv.org

The RSPB
Eastern England Regional Office
Stalham House
65 Thorpe Road
Norwich
Norfolk NR1 1UD

Tel: 01603-661662
Website: www.rspb.org.uk

Norfolk Organic Gardeners
Email: mail@norfolkorganic.org.uk.
Website: http://www.norfolkorganic.org.uk

Strong Roots, is a therapeutic horticultural project based on Bluebell North
Lucy Scurfield 07746 364668
lucyscurfield@freeuk.com

Sustainable Living Initiative is a non-profit distributing social enterprise, based at Bluebell South Allotments, Norwich.
Mahesh Pant on 01603 455868
or email sustainable@talktalk.net or visit www.grow-our-own.co.uk