

The Ghost
Orchid Declaration

Saving ^{the}
UK's **wild**
flowers
today



With **no**
sightings
for **23** years,
Ghost
Orchids **are**
the
of **latest**
the
UK's native
wild plants
to **have** become
extinct

Ghost orchid's pinkish-white flowers, said to be banana-scented, once glimmered in dark beech woodland in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. First recorded in 1854, ghost orchid is a truly wild flower: it cannot be grown from seed, or nurtured in a botanical garden. Our beech woods are no longer able to provide the conditions for it to flourish and ghost orchids have lost their battle for survival.

This Plantlife publication looks at how we can ensure that the UK does not lose any other wild plants in the 21st century.

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We are Plantlife

The UK's wild plants have been marginalised and taken for granted for too long. Wild plants clean our air and water, provide food and shelter for our insects, birds and animals and will be critical in the fight against climate change.

Plantlife is the organisation that is speaking up for the nation's wild plants. We work hard to protect wild plants on the ground and to build understanding of the vital role they play in everyone's lives.





CLARENCE HOUSE

It is not often that I find myself writing a foreword to a publication with such a heavy heart. Once again, we have allowed another native species to disappear – appallingly, it is nearly certain that the Ghost Orchid is no more. While this loss is in itself a tragedy, it also demonstrates the extent of the threat to our native flora.

As Patron of Plantlife, it is almost inconceivable to me that neither we, nor our children, will see the pale face of the Ghost Orchid glimmering on the forest floor of our beech woodlands. Yet if we mourn its passing simply as a sad, but inevitable fact of life on this crowded island, we will have missed the dreadful significance this has for future generations...

The link between biodiversity and human health, for instance, was made very clear to me recently by Dr. Eric Chivian, the Nobel Peace Prize-winner from Harvard Medical School and one of the leading scientists looking at biodiversity. He has demonstrated conclusively that there is a direct relationship between the health of humans and the levels of biodiversity in the world – whether it is the destruction of the world’s rainforests, which provide the vital rainfall on which global agriculture depends, or the loss of natural organisms that has a direct effect on the spread of infectious diseases.

We must rediscover an understanding of the essential role of wild plants in sustaining the wellbeing of life on this planet, both physical and spiritual. Every now and then we need to look up from our computer terminals and laptops and recognize that we cannot survive in a virtual world alone, but that we are utterly dependent on the natural world and the vast complex ecosystems that sustain us on Earth. Without the infinite richness and diversity of Nature, of which we are an integral part and not just a dispassionate, objective observer, the point of life itself becomes spiritually meaningless. It is perhaps worth remembering this when the list of extinctions grows even longer and we find ourselves dangerously isolated as a species...

So, we cannot allow our exquisite wild plants and flowers to become invisible to us. All too frequently, we can feel overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges facing the natural environment. This is why I particularly welcome the practical approach taken by Plantlife in this publication; seeking to engage all of us, collectively and as individuals, in the battle to protect and conserve our wild flowers and plants. There is no time to lose and I hope and pray that the loss of the Ghost Orchid will be the wake-up call that we so urgently need.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles', with a long horizontal line underneath.

One in five wild flowers in Great Britain today is at risk of extinction

Our flora is the least protected, invested in and acknowledged part of our wildlife. The UK's fragmented landscape means that the places where wild plants still grow in diverse profusion are in danger of becoming museum pieces, each isolated in small glass cases on a charity's nature reserve, on the margin of a farmer's field or on a government protected site. These fragments cannot function as healthy populations in a surrounding landscape of intensive production or development.

The decline of wild plants is about more than just the countryside losing its colour: when it comes to environmental issues, wild plants and fungi are central. They make up the habitats and landscapes we recognize and love. So, a coastal dune habitat is made up of bird's-foot trefoil, restharrow, creeping willow and bee orchids, providing food and shelter for common blue butterflies, silver-Y moths, honey bees, common lizards and skylarks. Heathland is made up of bilberry, heather, devil's-bit scabious, butterfly orchids and marsh gentian, supporting marsh fritillary butterflies, yellow underwing moths, adders, voles, nightjar and short-eared owls.

Plants are the fundamental building blocks of all ecosystems - if plants and fungi are doing well, everything else has a much better chance of surviving, including you and me. Plantlife believes that if we get their conservation right, then all wildlife will flourish.

Conservation of wild plants in the UK is currently tackled in two main ways: species conservation and landscape-scale conservation. Both are delivered by NGO partnerships, volunteers, the UK's protected site network and agri-environment scheme payments. In light of the continued decline of wild plants, this report focuses on three issues needing attention and offers some practical solutions to securing plant conservation for the future. We seek your support in rising to this challenge and taking action in parliament, ministries, agencies, through partnership and volunteer action.

I perhaps owe having
become a painter to flowers.

Claude Monet



Why plants matter

There are three classes which need sanctuary more than others – birds, wild flowers and Prime Ministers.

Stanley Baldwin

The facts of life:
it's not just about the birds and the bees...

wild plants
=insects
=birds and animals

Wild plants are no longer perceived as wildlife to be cherished in their own right but instead are relegated to being the scenic background to our more 'charismatic' species.

We talk about 'the natural environment' and 'habitat' but seem to forget that these refer to one thing and one thing only: wild plants. Exquisite, wildly varied and often surprising, plants and fungi are the essential fabric of our countryside upon which all other wildlife depends.



The good news

In addition to the crucial role of providing food and shelter for wildlife, plants and fungi also:

- Capture astonishing amounts of carbon
- Regulate water flow and prevent flooding
- Provide clean water
- Provide clean air
- Protect shorelines
- Provide us with food
- Provide us with materials for shelter
- Provide us with medicines and remedies to heal us
- Improve the quality and fertility of the soil
- Look lovely and raise our spirits
- Inspire some of our greatest art, literature and music

All for free!

The bad news

Every county in the UK is losing, on average, one species of wild plant every two years.

County	Number of species lost	Extinction rate: species per year	Recording period
Northamptonshire	93	1.4	1930-1995
Lincolnshire	77	0.9	1900-1985
Gloucestershire	78	0.9	1900-1986
Middlesex	76	0.8	1900-1988
Durham	68	0.8	1900-1988
Cambridgeshire	66	0.7	1900-1990
Leicestershire	59	0.7	1900-1988
Surrey	51	0.7	1900-1976
Essex	68	0.6	1862-1974
Suffolk	50	0.6	1900-1982

An estimated 85% of the world's vascular plants are mycorrhizal: their roots having a beneficial partnership with at least one fungus

The three key issues and their challenges



Key issue 1 **Investment in plants**

Wild plants are not proportionally represented by conservation resources: they are the poor relations of the wildlife world.

Key issue 2 **Protection for plants**

The UK's protected site network is unable to conserve plants and fungi adequately.

Key issue 3 **Working landscapes**

Today's farmland and woodland landscapes are hostile to wild plants.



Wild plants are the poor relations of the wildlife world

They are not proportionally represented by conservation resources.

Of the 1,150 priority species in the Government's UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), almost 50% are plants and fungi. Yet despite this, there is currently a fundamental imbalance in the resources and capacity available to enable their effective conservation in the UK.

But don't plants benefit from other species conservation work?

As the fundamental building blocks of all habitats, wild plants and fungi should be an essential element of every conservation project, but they are not benefiting currently from conservation work designed for other species as much as they should. The Breckland Forest SSSI, for example, is an 18,000 hectare site in Suffolk and Norfolk that is of international importance for its populations of woodlark and nightjar. It is also one of the UK's 150 Important Plant Areas, long known for its botanical richness and endemic plant species. Despite rare plant species, such as maiden pink and purple milk-vetch, being mentioned in the citation for the SSSI, habitat management to date has largely focused on improving bird interests, thereby missing a huge opportunity to conserve and enhance an exceptional flora.

We need to ensure that, in future, all publicly funded wildlife conservation projects take into account the needs of native plants.

Of the 1,150 priority species on the UK Government's Biodiversity Action Plan, almost half are plants and fungi



UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

Species group	No. of BAP Species
Herptiles	10
Freshwater fish	14
Mammals	18
Birds	59
Marine species	88
Invertebrates	411
Plants and fungi	549

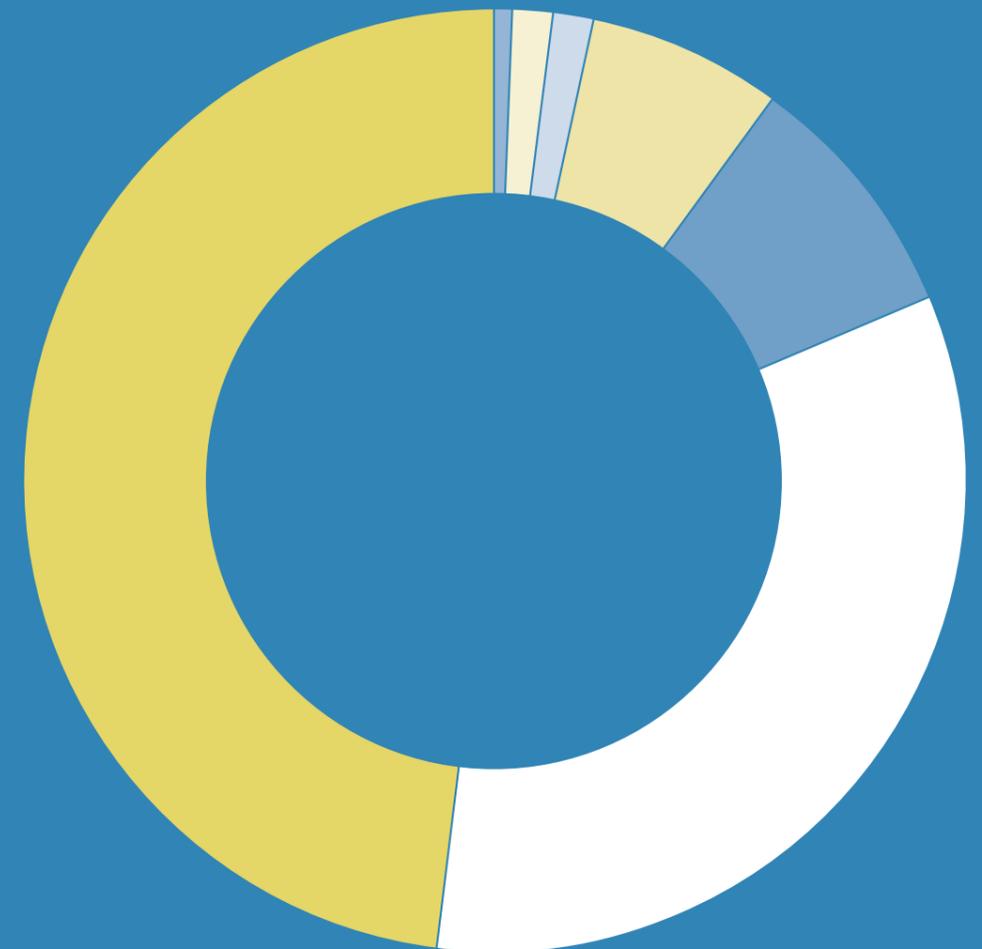
Plants and fungi dominate the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). However, there is currently a fundamental imbalance in the resources and capacity available to enable their effective conservation in the UK.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee research contracts value 2007-2009

Species group	value	% of total
Total £4,040,210		
Marine,data,policy	£2,036,015	50.4%
Birds	£1,546,429	38.3%
Mammals	£196,572	4.9%
Bats	£180,194	4.5%
Butterflies	£81,000	2%
Plants and fungi	£0	0%

Proportion of priority species in the UK BAP

- Herptiles
- Freshwater fish
- Mammals
- Birds
- Marine
- Invertebrates
- **Plants and fungi**



Do you know a single boy or girl interested in our flora, in our heart-stoppingly lovely gentians and pasque flowers, our sainfoin and our melilot, our grass of Parnassus and our dog rose? It's as if they've just disappeared off the radar, not just for children, but for the whole population. You know what I think? You don't know what you're missing.

Michael McCarthy, Environment Editor, *Independent*

Where have all the botanists gone?

In addition to the funding imbalance, plant conservation in the UK is, at the moment, severely limited by a lack of expertise, both within government agencies and NGOs. In 2007/8, 18,405 students were accepted to read biology in British universities, while just 195 for botany. There is a specific, critical trend of experts retiring from government posts and not being replaced, as noted by the House of Lords in 2008.

GB Red List of expertise

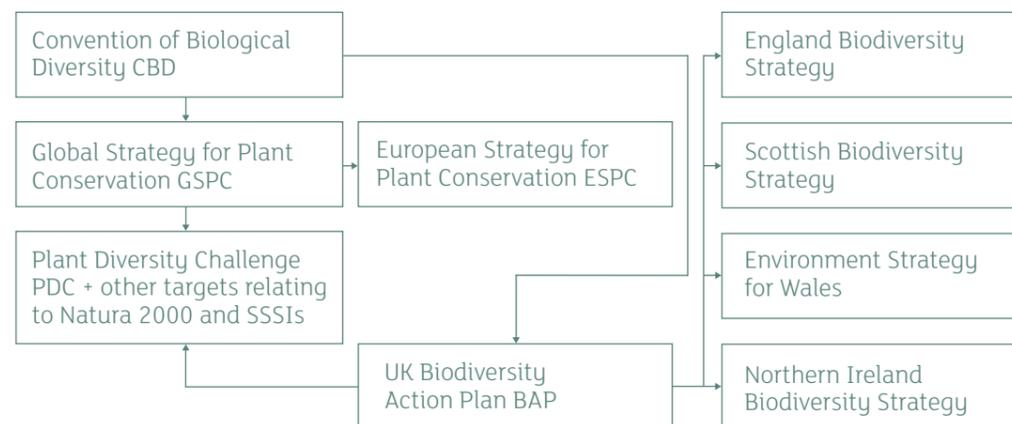
- Mycologists Critically Endangered**
- Bryologists Endangered**
- Lichenologists Endangered**
- Botanists Vulnerable**
- Lepidopterists Least Concern**
- Ornithologists Least Concern**

Decline in Government agency expertise

(Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales & Scottish National Heritage)

Year	Total number of plant & fungi experts
1989 - 1999	12.5
1999 - 2009	7.3
2009 - 2019?	2

Strategies and structures to conserve biodiversity in the UK



What do we want Government to do about this?

Address the resource imbalance: all land management and biodiversity funding to be plant-proofed (i.e. to automatically take into account the needs of wild plants and fungi alongside the primary focus of the project). This could have an immediate and dramatic effect on the level of resources applied to conserving the priority species of plants and fungi that comprise almost 50% of the UK Government's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

Increase expert support: We ask that the Government support country agencies to secure the expertise in vascular plants, bryophytes, lichens and fungi, required to meet this challenge. An effective agency lead is, for each of these groups, vital for championing plant conservation within government.

Renew its commitment to Plant Diversity Challenge: Plant Diversity Challenge is the UK's response to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, the only single species strategy that is a formal part of the UN Convention on Biodiversity. The UK Government is a party to the Convention and responsible for ensuring the delivery of the UK strategy. We ask Westminster, Holyrood and Cardiff to commit to secure the development and delivery of these strategies beyond 2010.

What is Plantlife doing about this?

We will continue to raise awareness of the importance of plant diversity and the fundamental significance of plants to the well-being of other wildlife and ecosystems.

We will continue to provide information and advice to assist others in plant-proofing their conservation activities.

We will continue to work with government agencies and conservation partners to put in place long-term planning and resources to retain taxonomic expertise to support wider training initiatives in NGOs and in the education sector.

What do we want politicians to do about this?

Argue the need for government spending plans to better reflect that half of the government's priority species are wild plants and fungi.

Encourage local community and conservation projects to take better account of the needs of wild plants and fungi.

Help ensure that all biodiversity grants and agri-environment schemes are plant-proofed.

What can the public do about this?

Garden for wildlife: introduce native plants into your garden to learn about them and enjoy the benefits they bring to other wildlife. Look at Plantlife's *Grow Wild* section at www.plantlife.org.uk

Enjoy native plants and growing 'wild flower' seed mixes in your garden but be cautious about restocking native plants in the wild. Given the chance and the right conditions, many will reappear naturally from buried seed banks.

Ask your elected representatives (politicians and councillors) and any conservation organisations you are a member of to ensure that local projects are plant-proofed.

Volunteer for Plantlife at www.plantlife.org.uk



The UK's network of legally protected sites - Areas/Sites of Special Scientific Interest (A/SSSI) - was established to give species and habitats a safe environment in which to thrive. They are the key statutory mechanism for protecting wildlife across the UK and, as such, help to deliver and fulfil the UK's obligations under domestic legislation and EU Directives.

Considerable public funding goes into protecting and conserving this network of sites. Since 2000, for example, spending in England alone has amounted to £395 million. However, the Government's own assessment shows that protected sites are currently unable to conserve plants and fungi adequately. UK Government figures on the notified plant and fungi features of protected sites show that less than half are in favourable condition. Flowering plants are at the bottom of the A/SSSI league table, well below the average percentage of species in favourable condition (70%).

UK A/SSSIs league table

Williams, J.M. ed 2006. Common Standards Monitoring for Designated Sites: First Six Year Report. Peterborough, JNCC

Species group and % of features in favourable condition on A/SSSIs

Reptiles	100
Fish	92
Dragonflies/damselflies	82
Non-breeding birds	79
Assemblages breeding birds	73
Mammals	72
Other invertebrates	72
Breeding birds	71
Butterflies	67
Non-flowering plants/fungi	55
Amphibians	52
Flowering plants/ferns	52

The UK's protected site network is failing wild plants

So why aren't protected sites working for wild plants and fungi?

There is currently no requirement for protected sites to protect BAP priority species that occur on them. Across the UK's Areas/Sites of Special Scientific Interest (A/SSSI) network plants and fungi suffer from poor understanding, management and monitoring.

Poor management means that some SSSIs have lost the plants for which they were specifically designated. Undergrazing of LLyn Cwm Bychan SSSI, in Gwynedd, for example, means that the marsh clubmoss for which the site was scheduled has not been seen there for a decade.

Poor understanding means that some SSSIs inadequately cover the plants they are notified for. Following notification, new populations or habitats just outside the boundary are often found to be of SSSI quality, but it can be difficult to then modify boundaries and protect these plants. A startling example is Longleat Woods where 64% of the internationally important woodland and lichen interest in the area is not covered by the SSSI, which was designated for lichens.

Poor monitoring means that in England, there are SSSIs where the plant feature is in decline but the overall condition of the site is assessed as favourable. Whilst the Government claims to be on track to report success against the Public Service Agreement for 95% of SSSIs to be in favourable condition by 2010, the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have criticised the way in which progress towards this target is measured (by area). This allows vital features to decline whilst overall condition is reported as favourable. By contrast, in Scotland, condition of designated sites is measured by the proportion of natural features in favourable condition rather than the proportion of area. This provides a better measure of the health of the SSSI for the features for which it was originally designated.

We believe that at no other point in history have plants been so important to people.

Prof. Stephen Hopper, Director, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

The UK's Important Plant Areas

The Important Plant Areas project, co-ordinated by Plantlife, identifies internationally important areas for wild plants across the globe.

In 2007, Plantlife published a list of the UK's Important Plant Areas. In partnership with botanical societies, land managing organisations, research institutes and government conservation agencies, Plantlife has, to date, identified 150 Important Plant Areas across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, using internationally agreed criteria. Initial analysis suggests that the management and monitoring of these sites is currently well below par for protecting the special plant features within these.

Identifying Important Plant Areas is a key step in the UK's response to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation endorsed by the UK Government in 2002. If we ensured that all A/SSSIs that overlap with Important Plant Areas were managed with these important wild plants in mind, this would maximise the conservation impact of A/SSSIs and provide the foundations for a truly sustainable site network.

Location, location, location

The places where the UK's legally protected animals (including birds and invertebrates) live are protected by law.

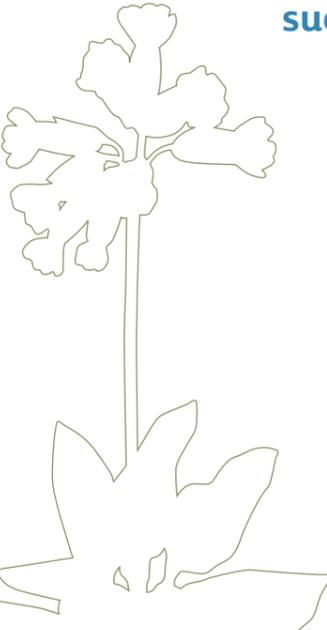
It is illegal, for example to:

Damage, destroy or disturb **watervole** breeding and resting places

Convert your loft if it is home to **bats**

Fill in a pond if it's home to **great-crested newts**

There is no equivalent for the sites of protected plants, such as Cheddar pink or rock cinquefoil



All the research tells us that really large numbers of people do notice and care about such diverse things as the virtual disappearance of the corncrake, a shortage of skylarks and being unable to remember when they last saw a wild orchid.

HRH The Prince of Wales 1995

What do we want Government to do about this?

Improve understanding – complete an audit of rare, threatened, priority and other important plant and fungus populations on all A/SSSIs by the end of 2010 and ensure conservation or management objectives are set for all species. Each UK country to re-notify sites to take account of changes in knowledge and the natural environment.

Improve management – introduce long-term management plans for protected sites: CCW's Upland Framework, a 100-year vision of management of all upland SSSIs in Wales is a good model. Management plans should include measures to increase species resilience and landscape connectivity, so giving plants a better chance to meet the challenge of climate change.

Improve monitoring – the second UK-wide monitoring of A/SSSIs must be completed by the end of 2010. In order to achieve this target, governments must use all available data sources and maximise survey effort to establish the true plant and fungi interest on protected sites.

Create an offence of reckless destruction of the place where a protected plant or fungus grows. Plantlife recommends a change to Section 13 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) to cover plant habitat protection through legislation in England, Wales and Scotland.

What is Plantlife doing about this?

We will continue to provide advice on the conservation of plants and fungi and their management needs.

We will monitor government progress on the conservation of plants on protected sites and make our findings public.

Plantlife, as joint lead partner for Target 5 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, will **implement the UK Important Plant Areas programme**.

What do we want politicians to do about this?

Seek Government support for Defra and Natural England to respond to the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office reports on SSSIs in England.

Go to the Plantlife website to find out more about internationally Important Plant Areas in your constituency www.plantlife.org.uk

Lobby for the rare and threatened plants and fungi in your constituency to be properly cared for by local government and the statutory agencies, including through the local sites network.

What can the public do about this?

Discover more about your local Important Plant Area by logging onto www.plantlife.org.uk

Write to your member of parliament and local councillors about improving conditions for plants on your local protected sites.



The vast majority of our lowland and upland landscape is either farmed or forested. Grasslands, heathlands, moorlands, arable fields and woodlands are the backbone of our countryside and where most of our wildlife finds a home. Balancing the needs of productivity and wildlife is challenging and all too often wildlife comes second.

Target 6 of Plant Diversity Challenge calls for 30% of all productive land to be managed sympathetically for plants. The appropriate management of Britain's farmed and forested landscapes is key to getting all our wildlife back into a recovering state.

Today's farmland and woodland landscapes are hostile to wild plants

An underlying cause of the loss of species from our productive landscapes is the loss of a diversity of management. Too much of our land is managed in the same way, resulting in monochrome landscapes with too few local specialities, rather like what is happening on our high streets.

Downy hemp-nettle, a farmland flower, was last seen in Britain on a farm near Bangor, Gwynedd, in 1975. A local farmer's daughter, who remembered the flower, recalled how each farm had fields of oats, barley and potatoes, as well as pasture for livestock. Mourning the loss of the beautiful hemp-nettle, she added, "Of course, there were red squirrels and corncrake around here in those days too." Today the whole farm, like all the others in the area, is a blanket of improved permanent pasture, and the hemp-nettle, red squirrels and corncrake are long gone.

Farmland

Productive farmland is usually made up of a mosaic of different habitats, all of which are managed for an end product: crops, livestock, dairy, game or timber. The pressure on wild flowers and plants that live in these habitats is enormous. The majority of UK flora that is threatened with extinction is found in productive landscapes. Over a third of upland flora and a quarter of arable plants are threatened with extinction in the UK.

Agri-environment schemes are currently the main mechanism to protect and restore wildlife in the countryside. These ask farmers to undertake specific, wildlife-friendly management on their farms in return for payments to recover losses in productivity.

Managing land for wildlife does not have to mean a considerable loss in income. A balance can be found between commercial operations and managing for wildlife, with conservation management providing an additional income. Cultivated fallow, which allows farmland flowers to flourish on conservation headlands at Lower Smite Farm in Worcestershire, provides returns that are financially comparable to conventional wheat crops.

Lower Smite Farm Land use financial margins 2008

Profit £/ha (no Single Payment included)

Winter wheat £165/t	416.56
Cultivated fallow £440/ha	380
6m grass £400/ha	370
6m cultivated £400/ha	320
Wild bird seed £450/ha	250
Pollen nectar £450/ha	200
Winter bean £100/t	49.64
Winter wheat £100/t	10.61



In England, less than 3% of Environmental Stewardship agreements have suitable options for farmland flowers

Why don't current agri-environment schemes deliver for farmland flowers?

Farmland flowers require the right management in the right place. Agri-environment schemes should therefore be uniquely placed to restore populations, yet they are largely failing to protect wild plants and flowers.

Some conservation options are not beneficial to farmland flowers.

Sown grass buffer strips can create a dead zone around arable fields, smothering annual arable plants and giving them no opportunity to germinate and flower. The dense sward created also provides little opportunity for wild grassland species to establish, such as scabious and buttercups, which attract wildlife.

Poor uptake of options.

In Wales, for example, just 0.1% of the area under stewardship is managed ideally for farmland flowers and 0.9% of the area is managed ideally for grassland waxcap fungi. In England, less than 3% of Environmental Stewardship agreements have suitable options for farmland flowers.

Many farmers and landowners in England view the complexities of the current Higher Level Stewardship scheme as a barrier to their commitment to a 10-year agreement.

Poor targeting of options where important plants are found.

In Wales, for example, of 121 sites for priority heathland plants just two are receiving the correct management through stewardship schemes. Such poor targeting severely limits the ability of these schemes to protect plants.

Improve the strategic allocation of resources.

Under the Common Agricultural Policy, the subsidies budget (Pillar 1) is currently three-times that for environmental and rural development (Pillar 2). This is at a time when the farming community increasingly recognises its role in managing the land for wildlife and natural resources to enable a sustainable and healthy productive environment. Such imbalances must be addressed in further EU CAP reforms from 2013 with the conservation of wildlife at the heart of policy.

Woodland habitat

British woodlands have suffered a decline in traditional management, which has triggered a parallel decline in woodland wildlife.

Woods are often fenced-in and left untouched, resulting in the proportion of high forest (continuous canopy) within our broadleaved woodland increasing from 51% in 1947 to 97% in 2002. As formerly commonplace activities such as coppicing become largely extinct at landscape level, the traditional mosaic of woodland habitats - coppice, glade and open rides - has been replaced by dark, bramble-ridden woodland which is unable to support a wide diversity of wildlife.

Sowing the seeds...

Wild birdseed crops encourage the sowing of expensive, fertiliser-hungry plants to feed farmland birds over winter. These crops out-compete farmland flowers and can fail to sustain other wildlife, such as bees, in summer. A better, cheaper and more sustainable option is to leave cultivated headlands unsprayed, allowing wild flowers to thrive and provide a haven for bees, butterflies, birds and mammals in the summer, in addition to providing seed for birds over winter.



5% increase since 1990 of area of broadleaved woodland in UK
9%-19% decrease since 1990 of woodland plant richness
34% decrease in wild flowers and plants that indicate ancient woodland
As a result . . .
50% decline in key woodland birds since 1994
74% decline of woodland butterfly populations since 1990



It is green, but is it green?

Getting the grazing right

Overgrazing

Too much grazing results in wild plants being unable to flower and set seed. In Monks Wood in Huntingdonshire, wild deer populations (both native and non-native) are devastating native flora, eating up to 98% of the bluebells and 50% of the primroses. The uplands of Snowdonia in Wales are losing rare mosses and lichens as a result of overgrazing by sheep. In Scotland, threatened flowers, such as alpine sow thistle, have been lost as a result of overgrazing by deer. This vulnerable species is limited to just four ledges in the Cairngorms because any young plants that do establish beyond these inaccessible places do not survive the overgrazing pressure.

Undergrazing

Too little grazing, however, can result in many wild plants being crowded out by stronger species, such as the orchid, Irish lady's tresses being out-competed by more aggressive grasses and rushes. Heathlands in Dorset, once rich in special plants, are now dominated by gorse and heather because they are no longer grazed. By fencing off woodlands and making them into a separate distinct habitat, we have lost most of our grazed wood pasture, such as still exists in the New Forest National Park.

Grazing is all about using the right animals at the right time and in the right number to produce healthy habitat, be it grassland, moorland, heathland or woodland. When the right balance is achieved, there are benefits for both wildlife and livestock. There is growing evidence that livestock raised on low-input, species-rich pasture is of significantly higher quality than that raised on artificially fertilized monocultures of ryegrass and clover.

What do we want Government to do about this?

Plant-proof agri-environment and woodland grant schemes to ensure that options deliver the needs of all priority plant species. In addition, all options improving plant diversity should be given greater weighting in order to encourage greater uptake.

Improve targeting of agri-environment option uptake so that appropriate options are taken up in sufficient quantity in key areas where priority species occur. Sufficient support and financial incentives need to be offered in these areas to ensure uptake.

Introduce specific measures in agri-environment schemes to improve the diversity of management on farms including the re-introduction of mixed farming on farms dominated by one land use, the re-introduction of active woodland management including coppicing and hedge-laying, and increased diversity of grazing animals and grazing cycles.

Implement the Forestry Commission's target of harvesting 2 million green tonnes of wood per annum, in England, in a sustainable manner.

Place wildlife at the heart of the Common Agricultural Policy through reforms beyond 2013

What is Plantlife doing about this?

We help government to improve Rural Development Payment schemes by providing expertise on the management requirements of priority plant species, as well as identifying and prioritising the areas in which they are found.

We continue to improve the monitoring of priority species on farms to measure the effectiveness of Rural Development Payment schemes in restoring plants populations on farmland.

We are developing experimental projects to manage woodlands as part of landscape-scale woodland/grassland grazing systems. An economically viable version of this ancient management system will reintegrate woodlands into the wider countryside and allow them, once again, to be managed for the sustainable products and livelihoods they can provide.

We continue to support projects delivering appropriate grazing management of working landscapes, including schemes such as the Grazing Animals Project.

What do we want politicians to do about this?

At Westminster and Cardiff, support the Deer Initiative (www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk) to help ensure the delivery of a sustainable, well-managed wild deer population in England and Wales, and support the Grazing Animals Project to improve the sustainable grazing of wildlife sites with livestock.

At Holyrood, introduce a legal obligation on landowners to manage deer through changes to the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. Changes in legislation should focus on restoring semi-natural habitats by delivering sustainably managed deer populations.

What can the public do about this?

If possible, increase the number of items in your weekly shopping basket sourced from local farmers who manage their land appropriately for wildlife.

Investigate opportunities for locally sourced wood fuel and charcoal and lobby politicians and forestry organisations to improve management of local woodland, opening them up to sustainable wood fuel production and coppicing.

People from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things about us. Iris Murdoch

Final word

Plants are the silent majority, the wallflowers at the biodiversity ball. Although Britain prides itself on being a nation of gardeners and has a rich history of amateur botany and botanical folklore, many of us have lost our connection to wild plants. We no longer have an understanding of the flowers that once coloured our countryside and, with this loss of knowledge, comes a loss of value. With this vital connection broken, wild plants, with all their manifold benefits, have become the poor relations of our other wildlife.

For too long we have partitioned off our different habitats and the result has been disastrous for wildlife, isolated in shrinking islands of semi-natural habitat. We need to open up our woodlands as part of landscape-scale grazing systems, so creating a modern, economically viable version of this ancient practice. We should protect our farmland and cornfield flowers as a precious part of our heritage. We should nurture the next generation of wild flower enthusiasts and fungi experts who will continue this work.

It can sometimes seem that losing wildlife, whether it be downy hemp-nettle, red squirrels or corncrakes, is an inevitable side-effect of progress. This need not be so. We need to take up the challenge of doing something that looks beyond single political terms and create long-term management plans that take account of the slower, cyclical processes that occur in natural habitats.

If we maintain impetus and focus on conserving the UK's varied flora with consistent policies and sufficient allocation of resources, then the last lost flower, the ghost orchid, need no longer haunt us.



Have you ever thought what a world without plants would be like?

The short answer is: desolate with no animal life and no human life. Quite simply plants are the essence of our planet. All too often they are ignored. At Plantlife, we do not want plants to be the wallflowers at the biodiversity ball. For 20 years, we have promoted the plant conservation cause, but much more needs to be done. So we ask everyone in the UK to join us in demanding the action needed to put plant conservation at the top of the sustainable development agenda. If together we can achieve this, we secure their future for our future.

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