



NORTH
EAST
BIODIVERSITY
FORUM

Making a difference to life: Biodiversity and you



Simple steps
to improve the
living world.

Biodiversity

The richness and variety of the living world.

For more information visit www.nebiodiversity.org.uk

Bio...what?

Biodiversity is short for biological diversity. It is the term used to describe the variety of life on earth – the whole range of plants, animals and fungi, the variation among them and the places that they live in. It includes everything from back gardens to marine life to the Amazonian rainforest.



So what?

Biodiversity is vital to the lives we all live and provides many of the 'life support' functions we take for granted:

- Without it we starve – all our food ultimately derives from biodiversity
- We need it to breathe – it is biodiversity that regulates the Earth's atmosphere and provides us with oxygen
- We need it for health – biodiversity is an important source of medicinal drugs and provides the open spaces where we get exercise and relaxation
- We need it for the economy – biodiversity provides the raw materials on which our economy is based and acts as a draw for tourists and inward investment; there is also increasing evidence that an attractive natural environment increases house prices in an area.
- We need it for nearly everything that matters – it gives inspiration and aesthetic pleasure, is essential for pollination, pest-control, control of flood water, pollution control and protection against natural hazards, brewing of alcohol, agriculture, clean water... the list goes on.

Importantly, many species are dependent on each other, so if one suffers, so do many others.



Biodiversity in Decline

There have been many notable conservation successes in recent years, for example the return of otters to many of our rivers and increases in the amount of native broad-leaved woodland, but biodiversity still remains under threat both globally and in the North East of England.

- The abundance of species has declined globally by 40% between 1970 and 2000.
- Since 2000, 36 million hectares of primary forest have been lost world-wide each year.
- The extent of lowland meadows in the UK has declined by 97% since the 1930s and over 80% of those remaining are thought to be in a poor condition
- Within the North East, species such as the great yellow bumblebee have become extinct while others, such as water vole and red squirrel remain in serious decline and might still yet be lost.



You can make a difference

A common reaction to bad news about the environment is to feel helpless and to believe that there is nothing you personally can do about it.

However the current rates of biodiversity loss are not inevitable and everyone can do their bit to halt it. While single-handedly you may not be able to stop global warming or save the rainforest you can still make a difference. Small steps can add up especially if enough people join in.

Life is in your hands and here are some of the ways you can help to protect it for future generations:

Use consumer power

As a consumer you have a great deal of power in your pockets. How you chose to spend your money can have a major impact of how companies and businesses view the natural environment. Individual choices can impact on business finances – there are many examples of how the threat of withdrawing custom has changed company policy. Increasingly businesses are experiencing the competitive advantage of being seen to have a better environmental or ethical record than their competitors and more fund managers are now looking at the environmental credentials of the companies in whose shares they invest. Even small choices about everyday purchases, such as coffee, tea, breakfast cereals, and bread say something, so make your purchase count. Look for environmentally labeled products and positively favour companies and products that you feel benefit the environment; avoid those that don't.



Start in your own backyard

You can start to make a difference for nature right on your own doorstep. There are more than 15 million gardens in the UK and together they cover an area greater than all our nature reserves put together. Some species, such as the song thrush and many bumblebee species are now more common in gardens than in the wider countryside. Recent research by the University of Sheffield has shown just how very important for wildlife gardens really are and gardening with wildlife in mind is a perfect example of how many small actions by individuals can combine to make a big impact.

Wildlife gardening doesn't have to be hard work, doesn't need specialist tools and plants, and doesn't have to look untidy or require big gardens. There are many simple things you can do that will increase the biodiversity of your own backyard. You don't even need a formal garden: there are plenty of things you can do with allotments, containers, balconies, and window-boxes. For more information go to www.wildaboutgardens.org



Join up

Becoming a member of an environmental or wildlife organisation is one of the most important ways in which you can help to conserve biodiversity. Becoming a member will help to provide funding and resources to these organisations so that they can continue to actively campaign and work to save biodiversity. Perhaps more importantly, the greater the number of members that such organisations have, the greater their voice will be with Government and decision makers.

There are many different organisations working to protect the biodiversity of the North East. Some organisations are small community groups working on a specific local site while others, such as local Wildlife Trusts, are concerned with the full range of wildlife within a county. Some organisations – such as the RSPB or the Marine Conservation Society – have a particular habitat or species focus, while others – such as Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace – are national organisations with a wide environmental campaigning remit. There are organisations that meet all interests and pockets.



Become active

Show your support by doing some voluntary work with a local group or environmental organisation. This might involve direct practical work that benefits wildlife – such as tree planting or pond management – or you can help out organisations in other ways, such as fund-raising or giving a hand in the office. You can volunteer as often or as little as you like – you could even persuade your employer to make your next team building day an environmentally-based practical task.

Most environmental organisations, such as local Wildlife Trusts, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the National Trust will have volunteering opportunities but also look out for 'Friends of' groups at your local park or green space. The Government's Sustainable Development website has a facility for you to look for volunteering opportunities in your local area. Go to <http://sdvr.sustainable-development.gov.uk/>

Make your voice heard

The power of complaint is one of the most powerful tools you can use to change attitudes and actions towards the environment. All public bodies now have a legal duty with regard to the conservation of biodiversity and many businesses also have their own internal environmental policies that they adhere to. If you think an organisation is damaging the environment or not taking their biodiversity responsibilities seriously then let them know. If you keep quiet how will things ever change?

Most organisations will have a complaints procedure of some kind. Visit the DirectGov website www.directgov.gov.uk to find out more about how to complain to Government or public bodies.



Did you know? Under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 all public authorities have a legal duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their functions. Conserving biodiversity is not just a matter of preserving what is already there but also seeking opportunities for wildlife enhancements. Public authorities include local councils, parish councils, Government Agencies and utility companies.

Report what you see

Conserving wildlife requires us to know what is there in the first place. This applies to the common and widespread not just the rare. Many once common species such as the water vole and the hedgehog are now in decline – at first many people didn't notice or take action because they assumed the species were still found everywhere. The lesson is that all records are valuable.

If you see some wildlife then let someone know. Logon to the Exploring Your Environment website 'wikitoid' at www.eyeproject.org.uk and record your wildlife sightings online. Also look out for public surveys organised by local Wildlife Trusts and local Biodiversity partnerships, or contribute to national surveys such as the Woodland Trust's Phenology Network at www.naturescalendar.org.uk or Ancient Tree Forum at www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk



Don't be a waster

Two of the biggest threats to biodiversity today are global warming and unsustainable use of natural resources. It should come as no surprise then that adopting a more environmentally friendly lifestyle will have benefits for the living world. Saving energy, recycling and reducing your consumption and the amount that you waste will all have an impact. There are many simple measures that you can take. For more information on adopting an environmental life style visit the Greener Living website www.direct.gov.uk/en/Environmentandgreenerliving/

And if nothing else just do one thing

As they say: a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. There are many small individual actions that you can take to help life on Earth. As the BBC's Breathing Places campaign says just 'do one thing'. Visit their website at www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces/doonething/







NORTH
EAST
BIODIVERSITY
FORUM

Citygate
Gallowgate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 4WH
www.nebiodiversity.org.uk

north east
england