

## **Responses to English Nature's proposal to add traditional orchards to the national priority habitat list**

During the autumn 2005, English Nature's proposal to add traditional orchards to the national priority habitat list was circulated by Dr Heather Robertson, Lowland Farmland Ecologist, English Nature, to a range of organizations and individuals involved in orchard management, survey and conservation in the UK, for their initial comments on the proposal. In the following compilation of responses, very detailed comments have been summarized, but the original comments are available in full on request.

### **1. Dr Keith Alexander, Ancient Tree Forum, 15/11/05, letter**

I have been tasked by the Board of Directors of the Ancient Tree Forum to offer you and EN our full support for the proposal that Traditional Orchards should become a Priority Habitat within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

I think our interest will be obvious since traditional orchards include large concentrations of ancient fruit trees and occur widely across the UK. They are recognised by the ATF as having great importance nationally both for their cultural and wildlife interests, and have a special role to play in contributing habitat continuity at landscape scale for a large variety of rare and endangered species. The ATF summer meeting this year actually included a visit to a traditional orchard in Monmouthshire.

The ATF recognises that traditional orchards present a unique combination of conservation management issues and that these are best dealt with in the coherent manner that should be possible as a specific Priority Habitat. While there are some similarities with the conservation management issues being covered by the Wood Pasture and Parkland HAP, we are sure that the way forward lies within the agriculture sector rather than forestry. We hope that the UK Biodiversity authorities will recognise that a Traditional Orchards HAP is vital to the conservation of their special interests, and that a HAP will now be developed nationally. The ATF would very much like to be involved in any steering group, etc, that arises.

### **2. Matt Shardlow, Conservation Director, Buglife, 2/11/05, letter**

Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust is the nature conservation charity that aims to prevent invertebrate extinctions and maintain sustainable populations of invertebrates in the UK. Buglife has 22 member organisations from around the UK and is itself part of 'Wildlife and Countryside Link' and the 'Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime'.

Thank you very much for sending us your proposal regarding the addition of Traditional Orchards to the BAP Priority list of habitats. The critical importance of Orchards in maintaining our invertebrate heritage has become much more apparent in recent years as a result of your and others efforts. We have been impressed with the work that has gone into this proposal and hope that it will result in more conservation action for Orchards.

Buglife has been intimately involved in the BAP process and are represented on PSHRWG and other relevant bodies. This letter therefore represents our initial view on the proposal

and we reserve the right to develop our formal position in light of discussions and the presentation of additional evidence.

The document ‘Guidance for Stage 1 of Species and Habitats Review – Terrestrial and Freshwater Habitats’ (PSHRWG 2005) sets out three criteria against which to assess habitat priority, we provide our current view under each criteria.

***1. Habitats for which the UK has international obligations***

*No case made – does not qualify.*

***2. Natural and semi-natural habitats at risk, such as those with a high rate of decline in extent and/or quality, especially over the last 20 years, or which are rare***

*Habitat not rare enough for this to be a qualifying factor – does not qualify.*

*Data presented represent a high rate of decline in area over the last 20 years – qualifies.*

*Trends in a number of associated species indicates a decline in quality – qualifies.*

***3. Habitats important for assemblages of key species***

*While traditional orchards represent a significant refuge for biodiversity this is true of most habitats, the paper does not put the importance of this assemblage into context with other existing and candidate Priority habitats – position reserved.*

While not selection criteria themselves, we note the following strong suggestions from the guidance.

A. Habitat definitions should be clear, mutually exclusive, and where possible defined in terms of existing habitat classifications (e.g. NVC and Phase 1).

B. Priority types should be mappable and should have measurable quantitative or qualitative attributes for monitoring purposes.

The current paper lacks absolute clarity on the proposed definition of Traditional Orchard. We would recommend ensuring that you have to hand a clear and simple definition that can be used to define and map Traditional Orchards. We would suggest that such a definition should not be based on detailed ecological information, but on easily monitored management practices. Excluding only the most intensive of orchards would ensure that within the Priority Habitat definition there are high quality orchards that we can protect and enhance, but also orchards that have been subject to some intensive management and we can now look to restore and improve.

In summary, high quality orchards are a neglected resource that are extremely important for invertebrates we are supportive of increasing the priority given to the conservation of this habitats and will continue to work with other members of the Traditional Orchards Project Working Party to secure an improvement in their status. It would appear on first analysis that the habitat does meet the criteria set for BAP priority listing. A bit of work is required to ensure that the most practicable definition of the habitat is clearly proposed.

**3. Tom Brereton, Butterfly Conservation, 24/10/05 and 2/11/0, Extracts from emails**

Everyone is happy to sign up to this. Good luck with it (particularly good to see mention of the tortix associated with mistletoe - a species we put forward for UK BAP listing).

**4. Catherine Weightman, Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Officer, 30/10/05, email**

I have spoken to councillors and planners both groups seem to be keen to do something about Orchards but really it seems too late!

Orchards are disappearing in Cambs and Peterborough at an alarming rate - lots of pony paddocks then built upon. We are trying to raise the plight of Orchards but any help from national publicity or anything else that may raise the profile of the biodiversity value of Orchards would help.

**5. Val Perrin, Cambridgeshire Orchard Group, 30/10/05, email**

Thanks again very much for sending through your proposal for including traditional orchards as a new priority habitat. This certainly covers the richness of the biodiversity aspects very well and would make this habitat extremely worthy of serious consideration in terms of conservation and hopefully some statutory protection in future.

**6. Katie Lowe, Operations Manager, Cheshire Landscape Trust, 3/11/05, email**

As a bit of background - we coordinate the Orchards LBAP in Cheshire and have done since it was first added to the list of priority habitats in Cheshire 2 years ago. We also coordinate the Cheshire Orchard Project – a group of 13 organisations in the county including local authorities, the Women's Institute, Tatton Park, Norton Priory Museum and various NGOs.

Our work on orchards includes providing free fruit trees to schools and community groups throughout the county - to date we have provided fruit trees for nearly 200 community orchards. We run annual workshops on planting and maintaining orchards, including pruning courses. We have produced a book entitled 'Orchards of Cheshire' and are currently putting together an Orchard Information Pack. In partnership with Norton Priory Museum and TLG Orchards we run annual Apple Day, Blossom Day and Quince Day events. We have also held 2 national orchard conferences.

We would certainly welcome orchards being added to the list of national priority habitats. Your proposal included mention of a vast range of species associated with orchards and proved what a valuable habitat traditional orchards can be. However, the proposal would benefit by including other ways in which orchards are valuable habitats. They are significant landscape features and often make a particular area distinctive, e.g. the damson orchards of Westmoreland or the cider orchards of the Welsh Marches down to Somerset. There are currently about 6000 known varieties of apple and each is distinct to a particular area. We have 33 known varieties of Cheshire apples and are planting these out across the county to preserve them. Apples such as the Minshull Crab or Withington Welter are locally distinctive and rare in Cheshire and orchards containing them are particularly valuable.

You mention in your proposal that the BAP will be for Traditional Orchards but commercial orchards, which use chemicals and fertilisers and often have dwarf trees, will be omitted. In our experience we have found that there is often a lot of cross over between these 2 with many small-scale orchards using some chemicals to control particularly aggressive weeds but don't spray the trees or fruit. The boundaries between what will be covered in the BAP and what isn't would have to be spelt out.

In conclusion, we would support the inclusion of Traditional Orchards as a national priority habitat.

**7. Angela King and Sue Clifford, Directors, Common Ground, 3/11/05, letter**

Common Ground fully supports English Nature's move to add traditional orchards to the national priority habitat list as part of the 2005 BAP review. As you know, Common Ground has been arguing that traditional orchards are important for wild life since 1988. Our campaign to have old orchards included in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and our joint conference with English Nature's Three Counties Team in Ledbury in 1999 on Orchards and Wild Life gives evidence to this.

In 1995 we asked people to take part in Orchard Observances - in which people noted in diary form the wild life they saw in their own orchards during the year. It is good to see your scientific assessment taking things much further. It certainly confirms traditional orchards as being rare in extent and rich habitats worthy of much greater protection.

The variety and richness of traditional orchards are important aspects of local distinctiveness, vital to certain counties and valued at the local level in village, suburb and town. Their value to people, as well as wild life, is mirrored in the success of our Community Orchards and Apple Day work.

We give our full (and impatient) endorsement and support. Please let us know if there is anything we can do.

**8. Andrew Wood, Director, Countryside Agency, 28/10/05, letter**

Thank you for sending the proposal to add traditional orchards to the priority BAP list. This is something we very much support, as traditional orchards are a key feature in many of our distinctive landscapes and anything to conserve and revive them in these areas is hugely important to us. In addition, we support the proposal because of the recreational enjoyment orchards can provide and the multiple benefits to biodiversity, economy, and culture.

Furthermore, the action plan which may follow from their inclusion in the list should take into account the strong contribution they make to landscape character (in particular the Joint Character Areas such as North Kent Plane, Severn Avon Vales, Herefordshire Lowlands, and Lower Weald & Pevensy) and the importance of their continuing to deliver the products they produce - fruit, nuts, cider, perry, etc and the accessibility for gatherings.

For example, there is quite a revival of traditional orchards and their edible products around Much Marcle and of course the national Apple Day celebrations - this type of activity can help to encourage people to reinstate, value, and manage traditional orchards, with an economic and social value making them less vulnerable to competing land use demands.

**9. Hilary Miller, Senior Land Use Policy Officer, Countryside Council for Wales, 18/10/05, emails and letter a) Note on importance of traditional orchards in Wales, April 2004 b) Extracts from CCW position statement on traditional orchards, approved by Council 16 April 1997.**

**a) *Traditional Orchards in Wales.***

The focus for traditional orchards in Wales is south-east Wales, particularly Monmouthshire, and the Gwent Levels and also in eastern Wales (Powys and the Wrexham area). Elsewhere, orchards are associated with larger farms and estates and are especially found along the major river valleys.

CCW commissioned consultants to undertake a study of traditional orchards in 1993. This involved sample surveys of three areas and showed the following declines in orchard area from a baseline of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey County Series (2<sup>nd</sup> Series) maps:

Gwent	86% loss
Clwyd	92% loss
West Glamorgan	90% loss

In addition to outright loss, the condition of the remaining orchards was generally poor.

A recent entomological survey (Whitehead, 2002) in Monmouthshire (Gwent) looking at a small number of sites for the presence of an uncommon beetle associated with old orchards recorded further loss and damage from neglect and development pressures. The survey confirmed the biodiversity importance of these orchards and their vulnerability.

Traditional orchards are widely accepted as being of biodiversity value and also contributing to landscape and cultural values. They contain a significant resource of old varieties of apples and other fruit, some of which are local. Over the past decade or so groups such as the Marcher Apple Network have been identifying, documenting and conserving these varieties and promoting the protection of orchards. However, decline in condition and area is continuing with agriculture (removal of trees, lack of management and overgrazing leading to damage and loss of trees) a major threat.

*References:*

Orchards in Wales. TACP (1994). Unpublished report for CCW  
Preliminary survey for the Noble Chafer *Aleurostictus nobilis* (Coleoptera, Scarabaeidae) in the orchards of Gwent. Whitehead, J & P. (2002) Unpublished report for CCW.

**b) *Position statement extracts***

*Justification:* CCW's involvement is based on the landscape, wildlife and amenity importance of traditional orchards.

*Aims:* To maintain traditional orchards as a typical landscape feature and wildlife habitat and to promote them as a focus for community action.

The priority is the conservation of existing orchards, though the creation of new orchards of standard trees will also be beneficial where old and/or local fruit varieties are grown and non-intensive management techniques are employed to maximise wildlife potential.

**Adrian Fowles, invertebrate ecologist, CCW, 19/09/05, email**

I'd welcome any increased attention placed on traditional orchards. I guess the debate is always whether or not they should be seen as a sub-community of wood pasture.

**Liz Howe, Biodiversity Coordinator, CCW, 4/11/05, email**

I agree with Adrian (Fowles)- a HAP for orchards is a good idea for the species they support, but I feel that the conservation of crops/breeds is more relevant through means other than BAP. The support of the rare breeds trusts and societies and the National plant collections/seedbanks seems an easier route. Of course there will be incidental conservation of fruit tree types through orchard conservation and presumably we would want to see the orchards stocked with the 'old' varieties- a potential outlet for the national collections!

**10. Sue Goodfellow, Head of Ecology and Wildlife Conservation, Dartmoor National Park Authority, 25/10/05, email**

We would definitely support the inclusion of traditional orchards as a BAP priority habitat for the reasons you outline. Orchards have great biodiversity, cultural and landscape value and have declined significantly in the last 50 years. For instance, many Dartmoor villages and farmsteads were surrounded by orchards on the 1950s OS maps but not many have survived to the present day and those that have are often in poor condition with aged unproductive trees.

The Dartmoor National Park Management Plan included a 5 year priority to 'support the restoration of neglected orchards and ensure a new generation of individual trees and groups of trees'. The Dartmoor ESA has funded some work but uptake has been variable. We hope that the new HLS will continue to offer financial support, but we would be delighted to see the biodiversity value of orchards recognised by inclusion in the UK BAP. We can then carry this through to our Dartmoor BAP at the review stage, identifying local targets and partnership actions.

So in conclusion, we fully endorse your proposal and look forward to seeing a final Traditional Orchard HAP included in the UK BAP after the next review.

**11. Peter Chamberlain, Ecologist, Devon County Council, 31/10/05, email**

I've looked through this (proposal) very quickly and have noted below are few, initial observations.

1. By way of background, DCC has been contacted by Common Ground on several occasions in the past asking why we haven't produced an Action Plan for orchards as part of the Devon BAP. Up until now, we have taken the view that we shouldn't do this because, up until now, orchards have not been identified as a priority habitat in either the UK or Devon BAP. In responding in this way, we indicated that we weren't dismissing the biodiversity value of orchards, but didn't feel able at that time to produce a local Action Plan. Clearly, if the national position changes, we really will have to review our position at the local level, particularly in the light of the density of traditional orchards in Devon.

2. Whilst it is apparent from your document that a strong case can be made for the inclusion of traditional orchards, I'm slightly nervous about how the habitat type might be defined in such a way as to focus upon those sites that really do exhibit these wildlife interests. Whilst we have a fantastic legacy of traditional orchards in Devon, only a small proportion of these are easily recognisable as traditional orchards, often with just a tiny number of old trees

remaining. Quite often the original boundaries of the traditional orchard will have been removed and the orchard floor habitat will have been managed as part of a wider unit of agriculturally improved pasture. The attention focussed on traditional orchards in recent years means that a good number of these have been subject to restoration and re-planting. However, in most examples that I have seen, there is precious little sign of the traditional orchards on the sites subject to re-planting with traditional varieties, even though the sites have been selected on the basis of historic maps etc (i.e. many sites that people refer to as traditional orchards are, in reality, attempts to re-create these). Unless there is a very clear way in which to define 'traditional orchards', this Action Plan might be interpreted as covering virtually all orchards.

3. In effect, this Action Plan might end up going the same way as the previous Action Plan for species-rich hedges i.e. covering the whole resource, not just a selective part of it. Whilst this may be justified, the less 'selective' BAP priority habitats become, the greater the risk that the 'currency might be devalued'.

4. Having said that, I think it likely that there will be broad support from many local authorities for the identification of orchards as a BAP priority. Traditional orchards are already a priority from a landscape (and historic environment) perspective and are already given considerable attention from a countryside management point of view (e.g. through AONB services) and through agri-environment schemes. So, their selection should be easily accepted. However, whether it will actually spur much additional effort through LAs is more of a question, given the strong existing conservation focus upon them.

**12. Martin Skipper, Chairman, East of England Apples & Orchards Project, 3/11/05, email**

The East of England Apples & Orchards Project fully supports your proposal for a Traditional Orchards BAP and we hope it is successful. But there are a number of points which we wish to make.

#### *Terminology*

We believe the term 'traditional orchards' means something completely different in the eastern counties to the widely-spaced standard tree orchards grazed by sheep and occasionally pigs, which are the predominant orchard type in western English counties. Here in the east, more densely planted half-standard trees, and more recently spindle-style tree orchards, have been/are the norm for small holders and commercial growers. The half standard orchards were once generally underplanted with soft fruits and cut flowers and the livestock element in the east has tended to be geese and chickens. Throughout the eastern counties we have noted quite distinct 'local' approaches to orchard management. It would be useful in any BAP to acknowledge that future preservation methods take these into account. Quite different planting and management regimes than we suspect, than those found in the west.

The proposed BAP must recognise/mention that there is an east-west UK difference in what is meant by a 'traditional orchard'. Failure to do so may exclude acres of old and ecologically important orchards in the eastern region from any future planned government funding for their retention/conservation.

### *Landscape value*

In addition what we term 'traditional orchards' in the Cambridgeshire Fens are an important landscape feature, both visually and historically, in a region where there is little or no native woodland/coniferous planting or hedges of any type. As a result they represent a valuable wildlife habitat. For example they provide cover for large mammals such as hares and overwintering birds such a woodcock. Their loss has an immediate impact on the local landscape and on local biodiversity.

### *Fruit cultivars*

An important difference between traditional orchards and commercial orchards that has not been mentioned is that traditional orchards tend to be made up of a mix of species AND cultivars, whereas blocks in commercial orchards are usually single species and often single varieties with just a few pollinators.

Fruit growers have always observed that some fruit cultivars host a wider range of invertebrates and/or fungi than others. Also, recent bryophyte survey work done in our region suggests that epiphytic mosses may be more likely to occur on some cultivars than on others. Fruit cultivars are therefore an important aspect of orchard biodiversity and should be mentioned in the BAP.

### *Current threats to orchards in the East*

Ongoing survey work in Norfolk and Cambridge suggests that orchards are still being lost, probably at a greater rate than mentioned in the EN figures for Cambridgeshire.

Traditional orchards are often small parcels of land situated within villages and on village edges. At present, orchards have no protection at all under the planning system. This makes them particularly susceptible to residential development. We have noted that biological surveys by specialists in orchard ecology are rarely, if ever, requested by developers/planning officers when the habitat is threatened. Local Authorities need a proper database/record of their old orchards and ensure they are be taken into account with reference to Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9). Also, the recent rise in horse ownership poses a severe threat to the habitat. A felling license is not required to grub an orchard and no permission for change of use is necessary to convert an orchard into a pony paddock. Many orchards that have been lost in the past 5 years in Cambridgeshire have been converted to paddocks. (It is likely that the current Norfolk survey will show a similar trend).

### **13. Mark Iley, Biodiversity Project Officer, Essex Biodiversity Project, 4/11/05, email**

I would support the English Nature proposal to add traditional orchards to the list of national priority habitats. I would welcome any initiative which coordinates work nationally or regionally.

Old orchards are an Essex BAP habitat and consequently I have undertaken the following project work:

- The survey and fruit collection for ID by a volunteer team following a training session. habitat management - restoration of two neglected sites by contractors -

aiming to extend the life and productivity of the trees without compromising the wildlife interest

- Grafting old varieties onto rootstocks in a nursery area and extending an old orchard by planting these new trees. This will be fenced and sheep grazed.
- Creation of five school orchards with pupils by Essex Wildlife Trust school liaison staff

I would offer the following comments from my own experience in Essex:

Old orchards interest and engage people in a way that some other habitats (and species) do not - I would identify them as a 'charismatic' habitat. This is important in engaging volunteer and community help as we often are and raising funds from external organisations.

In looking at old orchards in Essex I have been interested in two strands –i) the wildlife value of the sites - in an intensively managed and in part urbanised landscape what survives in these undisturbed, neglected orchard fragments or sympathetically managed large garden sites? ii) the biodiversity of the old fruit varieties - this may stray into the horticultural realm but I felt captured peoples (and my) imagination and was an important factor to the partner organisations we are working with.

Although our survey is crude, coverage limited and this is the first year of groundtruthing one of the things that has interested me is the survival of orchard fragments in urban areas. Pre war there were numerous small nurseries and farm orchards supplying fruit to London and other conurbations. Many of these orchards were developed for housing or sold off in plots. Although much was lost I think many trees survived and remain scattered across gardens and as roadside trees. In rural areas old small orchards remain attached to farmhouses, pubs etc. This very difficult to pick up from recent maps and aerial photos.

Please contact me if you feel I can help further.

**14. Francesca Griffith, Conservation Manager, Herefordshire Nature Trust, 20/11/05, letter**

The Trust very strongly supports your proposal. Traditional orchards have had a Habitat Action Plan in both the original Herefordshire BAP 2000, and in the current BAP review (going to press 2005). This reflects the importance in the county of the traditional orchard for biodiversity and also for landscape and cultural reasons. A number of invertebrate species confined to old orchards also have SAPs in the Herefordshire BAP, and we have had great success finding, in particular, the noble chafer on a number of new sites through systematic survey work.

In addition, the county based Orchard Topic Group, led by Sustain a county NGO, were instrumental in getting traditional orchards recognised in the new CAP reform single farm payments and agri-environment schemes. Again demonstrating the importance of the habitat in the county.

Please keep me informed of developments, and if there is anything I can do to help with local information please let me know.

**15. Katie Eastaugh, Herefordshire Sustain Project** a) overall expression of support, 19/11/05, email b) Extracts and summary from detailed comments, 15/11/05, email

a) The Orchard Topic Group of Herefordshire Sustain Project fully support your application for HAP status. Let me know if there is anything we may be able to say or write to support your aims.

b) The main point the group wanted to make was area of orchard. We think you may have seriously underestimated how little orchard actually remains. This is based on the detailed knowledge of members of the group going back a few decades. Our data clearly relates to Herefordshire, but we feel that it reflects the national picture and that nationally there would be a maximum of 5,000hectares of standard dual purpose orchard left.

*Definition:* Traditional standard or dual purpose orchards can be managed in the same way as bush orchards if grown as a commercial crop. Herefordshire has some very old bush orchards, which to the untrained eye look like traditional dual purpose orchards. We (the Orchard Topic group) successfully argued with DEFRA that these should be included in the new single farm payments as from a biodiversity perspective they were as important as the traditional standard dual purpose orchards. CSL conducted the research with local growers, FWAG and others. These orchards are for instance grazed.

A comparison between commercial orchards and intensively managed farmland may show commercial orchards in a very different light to the one in which they are currently regarded (wildlife interests may include mistletoe, species associated with boundary windbreaks and provision of connectivity for traditional orchards). The Orchard Topic Group LEADER+ funded research project due to start in January 2006 hopes to establish what their contribution may be.

**16. Tim Hill, Hertfordshire Wildlife Trust, 17/11/05, email**

We are very interested in such an initiative with Tewin Orchard as one of our reserves.

**17. Richard Moyse, Senior Conservation Officer, Kent Wildlife Trust, 7/11/05, email**

On the basis of what you've sent me, and knowing, for example, the store set on traditional apple orchards by lichenologists in Kent, I would be very happy to support a HAP for traditional orchards and look forward to seeing the next stages in the process. It's certainly likely to be more of a cause celebre than some other habitats, and may find strong links with tourism and with the landscaping of new development in Kent.

**18. Meg Game, ecologist and organizer of the Kentish Cobnuts Association 20/10/05, 1/11/05, compilation of emails**

I've looked through your Priority Habitat proposal, and it seems excellent to me. Nut plats are good primarily for woodland (plant) species (lots of ancient woodland indicators), and in that respect differ from traditional apple and pear orchards I think. I've just produced a map

of about 60 cobnut plats in Kent for the Medway Valley Partnership, based largely on personal knowledge, and hope to update it from our members.

**19. John Smith, Mosaic Mapping, 2/11/05, email**

Both personally and as a Director of the ATF (Ancient Tree Forum) I welcome this move. I believe you are ENs' Lowland Farmland Ecologist and feel that your recognition of this issue is very appropriate. (Perhaps progress of the Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland HAP would be more inspired were it in your teams remit).

I am involved with orchards in that I am digitising for PTES boundaries of those surveyed for Noble Chafer. I am aware of your dataset for orchards in Glos, Herefordshire and Worcs based on OS Mastermap. I am referring to Mastermap data as well as UKP air imagery (and surveyors notes) to draw boundaries. I would like to point out (as you probably suspect) that there are significant differences between these datasets in the recording of orchards. All permutations are encountered (including a stretch of road within an orchard polygon in Mastermap), but if there is an overall effect I suspect that orchards are under-recorded. Of course, many of these are bush orchards, and therefore of less value. However, many instances crop up of surveyors noting veteran and ancient fruit trees representing relict orchards that are classified as gardens, pasture (Natural Surface in OS-speak) scrub etc. These are likely to be potentially important, especially for saproxylic species. So this will skew the importance of these miss-classified areas. The question of how small an orchard can be is important therefore. Whilst not suggesting that this starts to impinge on the question of can a single tree count, might there be room (if there isn't already) for a class of orchards such as domestic or fruit garden? This would allow the odd small groups of old trees in gardens to be included. These are also likely to be important for varietal reasons, as they will be from more varied stock, as well as being potential reservoirs of relict populations of the less mobile associates.

Anyway, wishing you success.

**20. Lucy Cordrey, Nature Conservation Technician, The National Trust, 1/11/05, email**

Many thanks for sending through the above proposal with annexes for a traditional orchards HAP. After discussing this with colleagues we would support this proposal. From the report the wildlife they support looks very impressive and their importance as network habitats in the wider landscape as well as their cultural significance and genetic biodiversity are of particular interest to the Trust. If this does get approved by JNCC then myself and Simon Barker (NT Nature Conservation Adviser, West Midlands) are likely to be the NT representatives and feel the Trust has great potential to positively contribute to traditional orchard conservation.

**21. Laura Hurt, Conservation Project Officer, People's Trust for Endangered Species, 27/10/05, letter**

I am writing on behalf of the Noble Chafer BAP focus group, to express our support for the proposal to include Traditional Orchards as a priority species in the revised BAP.

The loss of such an important habitat across England has most likely been the main factor in the decline and range contraction of the Noble Chafer beetle.

Inclusion of traditional orchards in the UK BAP will make it a priority habitat for inclusion in agri-environment schemes, thereby encouraging landowners to conserve and enrich the habitat. It can only be a positive thing for Noble Chafer and other orchard dwelling species such as lichens, wildflowers and saproxylic insects, and will complement a number of Species Action Plans.

**22. Paul Read, independent orchard expert, 2/11/05, Extracts from email**

*Cover note:* I write from the point of view of a specialist consultant that is increasingly concerned about loss of old orchard habitat, and feel that some crucial issues still need to be addressed, in spite of the excellent wide coverage of your review.

*Summary of detailed comments:*

1. Traditional orchards are fruit bearing trees usually set in grassland: the trees and their crop are integral components of the habitat. However there is no mention of the trees themselves, either as individuals, species or cultivars, or of their management in these proposals.
2. Traditional orchards have no legal protection except when covered by “group” TPO or as a “conservation area”. They are almost always close to villages and houses and therefore subject considerable development pressure. Reports on orchards prepared for developers by consultants are often one-sided; some approach dishonesty.
3. Traditional orchards are not difficult or expensive to restore, extend and maintain, and newly planted orchards can develop a high diversity more quickly than almost any other newly “created” habitat.
4. Orchard groups exist throughout the UK; their membership have skills in management and cultivar identification and are almost always enthusiastic conservationists, but their principle direction is searching for and preserving old, rare and “lost” cultivars. They are an untapped valuable source of specialist information which could be directed into orchard habitat management, maintenance and creation.

**23. Martin Twiss, Scottish Natural Heritage, 5/10/05, email**

I was very interested to see this proposal, not least in the light of our continuing concerns over the future viability of the orchards in the mid Clyde valley.

These orchards, which are of the traditional type as defined in the HAP proposal, play an important role in the natural and cultural heritage of the mid Clyde valley and are a key component in the distinctive landscape character of the area. As you will be aware this section of the Clyde valley is well wooded, with a wealth of woodland designations (SSSIs, SAC and a woodland NNR) and this area will form the ecological spring-board for a wider Forest Habitat Network. Whilst these woodlands are predominantly ash-elm gorge woodlands, we consider the traditional orchards to be an important element of this wider

woodland mosaic. We would therefore be very interested in any developments of this type which might add weight to our efforts to safeguard these orchards.

We welcome the proposed HAP, which contains much essential and helpful information about traditional orchards. In respect of the HAP I would offer the following observations:

1. Whilst the threats to traditional orchards and the reasons for their decline will vary geographically, there may be some merit in the HAP making brief reference to these issues (perhaps development pressures, housing in the south of England / absence or presence of local niche markets in some areas / dominance of supermarkets / diminishing fruit diversity - gene pools / fragmented tenure of orchard ownership / loss of cultivation management skills, etc.). This latter issue of changing orchard ownership and the possible loss of cultivation skills and knowledge may be a factor of relevance in the Clyde Valley?

2. It seems clear that the distribution of orchards is largely driven by cultural factors (given that they're present across a diverse range of soil types, slope gradients, aspects, etc.) - are there any common (environmental) attributes to orchard sites, e.g. an avoidance of frost pockets, proximity to markets, etc. Could the HAP perhaps explore this distribution pattern in more detail?

3. Associations with / succession to, other habitats ; what NVC habitats are most closely associated with traditional orchards? If orchards decline through neglect (as opposed to development pressure), to what extent do they then develop into semi-natural woodlands?

4. How, if at all, will the management of traditional orchards be affected by the changes to agricultural support (CAP reform, Single Farm Payment, etc.)?

5. To what extent do orchards differ from other habitats (e.g. Atlantic Oakwoods) in the sense that they can be 're-created' in a 'relatively' short space of time (playing devil's advocate here), notwithstanding the loss of fruit diversity. Clearly, they are more akin to wood pastures or parkland, but have orchards developed over a sufficiently long period of time to have generated a specific (or several specific) associations of flora and fauna which are dependant upon the survival of the orchard for their own well-being?

However, I would repeat that we are very pleased to see this HAP proposal and hopefully it will prove to be a valuable tool in the efforts to safeguard the orchard resource of the Clyde Valley and elsewhere.

**24. Dr Malcolm Storey, independent mycologist, 15/10/05, letter**

I was the consultant charged with mycological survey during the recent Traditional Orchards project and was pleasantly surprised at the range of habitats and diversity of fungi that I encountered. I am pleased that this very threatened habitat is now being considered for a Habitat Action Plan and wish you success in attempting to raise its profile.

**25. Daniel Keech, Sustainable Food Chains, Sustain, 24/10/05, letter**

*Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming* advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working

and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent over 100 national organisations working at international, national, regional and local level ([www.sustainweb.org/member\\_details.asp](http://www.sustainweb.org/member_details.asp)).

Sustain is a registered charity (1018643) and a company limited by guarantee (2673194). Our membership meets biannually and, at the AGM, elects a governing council of trustees (see [www.sustainweb.org/about\\_council.asp](http://www.sustainweb.org/about_council.asp)). Co-ordinating staff report to the Council quarterly. Each project is guided by a working party chaired by a Trustee.

A newly formed working party for our Traditional Orchards project oversees a partnership project between Sustain, English Nature and Leader+ to conserve traditional orchards through active management to achieve a number of benefits, including environmental, social and economic.

Following consultation with members, I am writing to offer the support of Sustain's Traditional Orchards Project Working Party for your case to include traditional orchards as a new habitat action plan in the coming revision of the Biodiversity Action Plan.

For too long, despite local and anecdotal evidence from the UK, and scientific evidence from EU partners including Germany and France, traditional orchards have been overlooked as valuable habitats. Your new work is therefore very welcome. The diversity of the structure and elemental species within orchards can add to their ecological value at a local level, within a mixed agricultural landscape. In towns and cities, such as Worcester, Lincoln, Exeter and Rainham, moribund and redundant commercial orchards have long been successfully managed for birds, bats and especially for deadwood invertebrates, to the delight of local residents.

Members of our working party agree that the inclusion of traditional orchards in the revised BAP will help deepen ecological interest in orchard conservation and data collection, and provide more systematic and locally sensitive support for the inclusion of traditional orchards in agri-environment payments, as well as underscoring the value of the ecological and cultural patina represented by what are essentially micro-biospheres.

Several of the working party members are actively involved in local projects to protect orchards and re-weave their management into local economic practice. The continuation (or revitalisation) of opportunities to realise a return from a mixture of orchard-based activities will pave the way for a sustainable future for traditional orchards. However, policy supports such as a traditional orchard HAP will be an essential forerunner in achieving this vision.

**26. Jon Stokes, Tree Council, 30/11/05, email**

I am pleased to say that the Tree Council is very supportive of the idea of setting up a BAP on Orchards. We will be very happy to help with meetings either in the creation of the group or once it has become established.

**27. Gail Vines, independent orchard expert, 25/10/05, email**

Thank you for letting me know of your plan to propose traditional orchards as a new habitat in the BAP scheme; I think it's an excellent idea, and wish you ever success.

**28. Paul Whitehead, independent entomologist and orchard expert, 28/10/05, email**

It's very encouraging to read about this (proposal), and of course I'm absolutely delighted that some of my work may have proved useful in the process.

**29. Rosemary Winnall, Wyre Forest Study Group, 30/10/05, Extracts from email**

Thank you letting me see your excellent proposal. It is good to know that our work in Wyre has been of use.

**30. Nick Collinson, Conservation Policy Adviser, Woodland Trust, 7/11/05 and 17/11/05, emails**

The important point to remember is that we all wish to see Traditional Orchards better recognised and inclusion within the BAP process, whether as a subset of the WP&P HAP or as a separate HAP will certainly help (17/11/05).

The Trust certainly supports the increased level of protection and action this will afford to traditional orchards, but we do have concerns about the development of a new bespoke HAP. Given the definitions established for Wood Pasture and Parklands WP&P (attached), in that HAP, we feel the traditional orchards should be included within that HAP. Furthermore, with the review of the BAP it seems likely that woodland HAPs will consolidated into one native woodland HAP, as proposed by the EWBG, so it seems rather counterproductive to consolidate one set of woodland HAPs and then diverge another (7/11/05).

**31. Chris Bray, Environmental Policy Manager, Worcestershire County Council, 4/11/05, letter**

I think there will be unanimous agreement in Worcestershire in welcoming the proposal to include traditional orchards as a national priority habitat. As you are aware, this habitat does feature in the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan, traditional orchards being considered particularly pertinent to the character of this County.

The Worcestershire County Landscape Character Assessment identified orchards as being the primary land use in one particular landscape type – the Village farmlands with Orchards – which is prevalent in the Vale of Evesham – but also very relevant at a domestic scale throughout very many other landscape types throughout the County.

Lines of hedgerow fruit trees – notable damsons and damascenes – are also very typical of specific parts of the County.

Worcestershire contains a very wide range of orchard types. Mixed orchards being typical at the domestic scale but apple and stone fruits – plums and gages – are particularly relevant in the Vale, the stone fruits suffering from particular decline as there seems to be difficulty finding viable markets for the produce. Certain areas of the Vale have what appears to be large areas of orchards which are in fact in numerous ownerships – either as strip or small plots – these appear to be particularly vulnerable – many are derelict and become

aggregated into single ownerships, cleared and managed for arable or other land uses. It would be interesting to see if these are classed as 'traditional' – they reflect very old patterns of land ownership and land use and are by no means intensively managed.

The Teme Valley is distinctive for its cherry orchards – again suffering from lack of viable markets, yet containing a fascinating range of old varieties – which could soon be lost. These again are not intensively managed for fruit production but were originally planted for (some) commercial gain. They were, however, never managed in the manner of those in the high intensity fruit production today. The continuation of all these orchards depends upon developing a viable economic basis for them and sadly there appears to be no sign of this happening at present.

There is considerable interest and activity relating to orchards in the County. Worcester City Council, for example, had a specific project focused on conserving orchards within the City (sadly cut last year in a cost cutting exercise) – but there is an orchard survey of the City which is used as a basis for advising and encouraging private owners orchards. The County Council has, for many years, operated a 'Fruit Tree' scheme in conjunction with Pershore College through which scarce old varieties associated with the County were propagated at the College and made available to the public, and, until recently, had grants available for orchard restoration and management.

The interest of grassland flora beneath many of the traditional orchards is particularly pertinent in Worcestershire, although, of course, they provide significant overall interest, particularly with regard to invertebrates and lichens. One interesting aspect we have experienced is defining what is actually covered by the term 'orchard' – there are many instances where former orchards are now reduced to a mere handful of trees – in many cases only one or two trees – and the question arises does the historic boundary as defined on old maps) still remain relevant or is the area now reduced to that currently covered by trees – and do a handful of widely spaced trees still constitute an orchard.

I hope this information is of interest. Please be assured of our support for the proposal and do advise me if we can be of any further assistance.

**32. Colin Raven, Director, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, 8/11/05, letter**

Thank you for sending us details of the Traditional Orchards Proposal for the BAP Review 2005. We would strongly support the inclusion of Orchards as a BAP priority habitat and we recognise their significance with respect to a range of important species as well as their role as a valuable habitat.

You will be aware that Worcestershire, together with the adjacent counties of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, has a long tradition of fruit growing and that traditional orchards represent an important part of the county's biodiversity resource. In addition to their cultural and heritage value Worcestershire's orchards are often possessed of a significant decayed-wood fauna and are turning out to be a vital resource for the Noble Chafer, which appears to be concentrated in Worcestershire and nextdoor counties. They also provide a significant habitat resource for birds such as the lesser-spotted woodpecker, which has experienced a dramatic national population decline in the last 25 years. Stronger recognition of the value of orchards in their own right would not only offer better protection

to these and other species but would be a significant step towards securing the future of these often highly threatened habitats.

A national HAP for orchards would also be of benefit politically, offering a strong driver for work towards local BAP recognition for orchards, which is currently hard to achieve. Local Authorities and others appear to show more appreciation for complex habitats when there is significant national importance attached to them and we would welcome the extra 'weight' an Orchard HAP would provide. Such help would almost certainly prove beneficial for locally important projects and site protection.

### **Other comments**

In addition to the above written responses, verbal support for the proposal has been expressed to Heather Robertson by:

**Richard Weyl, Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland, 19/09/05**

**John Everitt, The Wildlife Trusts, 13/09/05**

**Robin Wynde, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 11/10/05.**