



The Wildlife Trust for
**Birmingham &
Black Country**



Summary of the **Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017 - 2022**



B&BC NIA Ecological Strategy

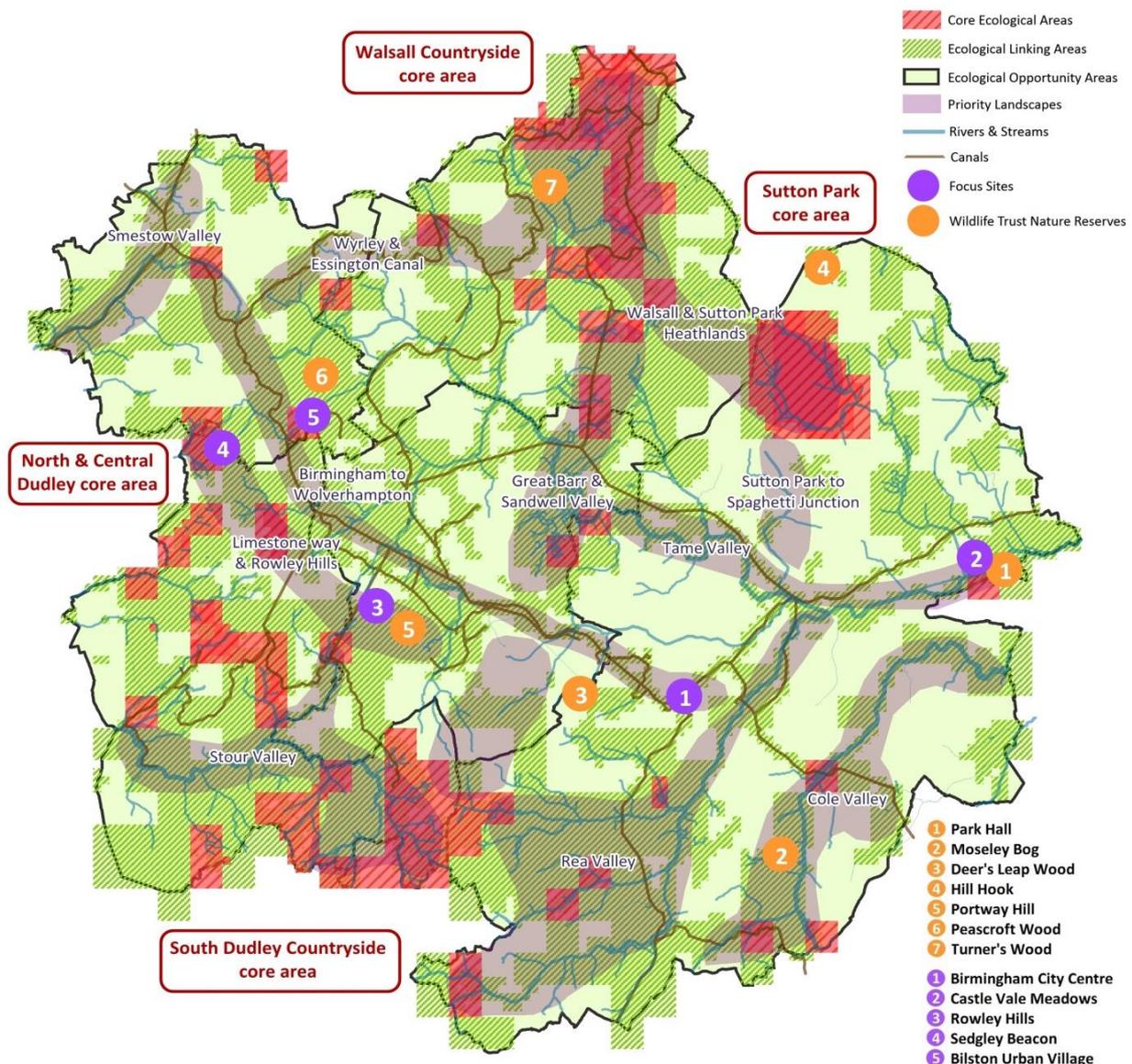
2017 - 2022

Summary of the Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area Ecological Strategy 2017-2022

The need for a landscape-scale approach to nature conservation and the definition of the Birmingham and Black Country ecological network

It is clear that to reverse the decline in wildlife and biodiversity in the UK we need to think differently. Nationally the Wildlife Trusts' collective response has been to move the focus from individual sites and 'biodiversity hotspots' to a more comprehensive landscape-scale approach – an approach that evidence shows is essential for nature's recovery. The Wildlife Trusts' call these networks 'Living Landscapes', and the ambition is to create strong, resilient and ecologically diverse landscapes where people live their everyday lives. The Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area (NIA) is our Living Landscape, and since 2012 we've developed an ecological strategy built on analysis of data and evidence collected over 17 years to deliver this vision for our urban area.

Birmingham and the Black Country NIA ecological strategy map



Describing the ecological network of Birmingham and the Black Country*

The ecological network of Birmingham and the Black Country has been mapped and all parts of the landscape have been assigned to one of three broad categories:

- a) The '**Core Ecological Areas**' are the areas of the conurbation that are richest in wildlife. As might be expected these include the parts of our landscape least affected by urban development – such as Sutton Park and the countryside in the south of the borough of Dudley – but it also includes areas where wildlife has reclaimed sites that were once at the heart of the industrial Black Country.
- b) Joining the Core Areas and the wider landscape together are '**Ecological Linking Areas**'. These include the majority of our remaining 'natural' open spaces where many of the more frequently encountered species and habitats exist – often in very close proximity to dense human populations. Much of this part of the network is concentrated around key wildlife corridors including the extensive system of rivers, streams and canals.
- c) Outside of the Core Ecological Areas and Ecological Linking Areas are the '**Ecological Opportunity Areas**'. These are the most intensively used parts of the landscape where the greenspace is dominated by formal parks, public open spaces, gardens, road verges and the most productive farmland.

Using the ecological network mapping to prioritise action that benefits biodiversity

For each of the three broad categories a priority for targeting biodiversity action has been identified:

1. **Protect** Core Ecological Areas through pro-active engagement with the planning of development, advocacy, supporting land-owners to manage land sympathetically and encouraging sustainable land-use.
2. **Enhance** Ecological Linking Areas by restoring habitats and improving existing sites.
3. **Create** new sites in Ecological Opportunity Areas that together form networks of sites that allow wildlife to move through the most developed parts of the conurbation.

Wildlife Trust priority landscapes and focus sites

Working with our partner organisations, the Wildlife Trust has used the ecological network mapping to identify locations where we will prioritise the development of new Nature Improvement Area projects. These Focus Sites and Priority Landscapes, along with our own nature reserves, are the current focus of our ecological improvement work.

NIA achievements 2012-2016

- 250 sites improved for nature
- 111 hectares of woodland/improved created
- 78 hectares of grassland improved/created
- 6 hectares of heathland improved/created
- 6.5 kilometres of hedgerow habitat improved/created
- 8.5 kilometres of wetland corridor improved/created
- 60 partners organisations involved
- 45,000 volunteer hours contributed to projects
- 46 schools involved
- 150 community groups involved in project delivery

*** Technical summary of how the Core Ecological Areas, Ecological Linking Areas and Ecological Opportunity Areas were identified**

The ecological network of Birmingham and the Black Country is based on a coincidence map of 279 axiophyte species (see below) - i.e. a map in which each 1km² (monad) is represented by the number of these plant species which it contains. Monads or parts of monads containing sites designated for their nature conservation value, or where significant landscape features continue from adjacent core areas, are also variously included in the Core Ecological Areas and Ecological Linking Areas at a 250m x 250m square resolution. The Ecological Strategy map is thus a surrogate for habitat richness across the conurbation.

Core Ecological Areas:

- All monads that contain 28 or more axiophytes.
- Parts of monads (250m x 250m square units) containing Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Ecological Linking Areas:

- All monads that contain 9-27 axiophytes.
- Parts of monads (250m x 250m square units) containing Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs).

Ecological Opportunity Areas:

- All monads and parts of monads that contain fewer than 9 axiophytes and that do not contain sites designated for their nature conservation value.

Definition of Axiophytes

Axiophytes are indicators of habitat that is considered important for conservation, such as ancient woodlands, clear water and species-rich meadows. The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) has attempted to define axiophytes as follows:

- Species 90% restricted to habitats of nature conservation importance
- Species recorded in fewer than 25% of tetrads in a vice-county
- Very rare species should be considered for omission as chance occurrences

See <http://bsbi.org/axiophytes> for more information.

For further information on the Birmingham and Black Country Nature Improvement Area and to view case studies of nature improvement projects undertaken since 2012 see our website bbcwildlife.org.uk/NIA.

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