

Plans to protect and enhance the region's important wildlife and habitats are revealed

The importance of our region's rich and diverse wildlife and its habitats came under the spotlight today as Natural England, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly met with other organisations to launch a visionary new plan. This plan will be vital in safeguarding our wildlife and the places they live on the land and in the sea from mounting land use pressures and help it adapt to a changing climate.

The loss and damage to our region's wildlife and habitat is well known and although there have been some major advances in the protection and management of wildlife in the past few years, our biodiversity is still under threat.

Jobs and therefore our regional economy also depend directly on a rich environment; new businesses and employees are more attracted to working in an area with a healthy and attractive natural environment. Our countryside, coastline and the wildlife found there also attracts millions of visitors from both the UK and around the world, bringing much needed income into the local economy.

Natural England's Regional Director for Yorkshire and Humber Peter Nottage said today

"It is vital that we elevate our sights – we shouldn't content ourselves with stopping the rot, we need to fight for a real renaissance in nature conservation and in the process enrich people's lives.

Peter added

I am pleased to say that the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Biodiversity Strategy is an ambitious document – with an ambitious vision - which spells out the call for action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in the Yorkshire and Humber region"

Speaking at the launch at Potteric Carr nature reserve Dr Rob Stoneman Chief Executive of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust added

"The launch of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy represents an important moment for the conservation of Yorkshire and the Humber's wildlife resource. For the first time, at a regional level, has wildlife conservation been seen as a challenge for all of society. Ghetto-ing nature conservation to organisations like Natural England and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is not enough. This is a challenge that must be taken up by all sectors – health, transport, the minerals industry, housing."

Peter Box, Chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly, said: "It's a good time for this work, the first strategy of its kind, to be developed so we have

clear priorities for addressing the biodiversity challenges we face in the region.”

The Yorkshire and Humber region has an exceptional biodiversity resource which therefore needs protecting:

- the Humber Estuary is the second largest coastal plain estuary in the UK, which acts as a feeding service station for migrating birds
- There are 23,600ha of ancient woodland in the region, which are rich in wildlife
- England’s largest area of raised bog is found at Thorne and Hatfield Moors near Doncaster and is home to rare insects, adders and nightjar
- 50% of the UK’s distinctive and globally rare limestone pavements are found in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and provide a home for rare and unique plants.
- The Lower Derwent Valley contains the greatest area of high quality lowland hay meadows than any other area in the UK
- The North York Moors National Park contains the largest continuous tract of upland heather moorland in England

The strategy has been produced by the Yorkshire and Humber Biodiversity Forum which includes Natural England, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Regional Assembly and the RSPB includes objectives and targets for these key partners and others including Yorkshire Forward and local authorities.

A copy of the strategy, which includes an executive summary is available from the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Assembly on 01924 331587 or their website.

Case studies

Potteric Carr – a natural solution to flood protection

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust’s Potteric Carr Nature Reserve on the edge of Doncaster is a good example of sustainable management of the lowlands around the Humber. It provides a stark example of how an increasing flood risk requires new solutions. This can be partly achieved by developing wildlife-rich landscapes that can store flood-waters. This nature reserve is a bird-spectacular but also stored a huge volume of flood water during the June 2007 floods, reducing flood damage in south Doncaster and further down the River Torne.

Potteric Carr is the largest inland wetland in the UK outside of London. The main habitats include pools, reedbed, woodland, marsh, and small meadows, all of which create a rich natural tapestry. The reserve is a flurry of wildlife all year round. In spring there are migrating birds arriving in large numbers and in summer you can discover the excellent populations of dragonflies, butterflies, and flower assemblages. Autumn brings in the wintering birds and a wide ranging colourful display of fungi. Into the winter months the reserve plays host to large numbers of birds and is an excellent spot to see bitterns, water rails and kingfishers.

The Humber Estuary –internationally important for birds and trade

The Humber Estuary is a nationally important site with a series of nationally important habitats. It is England's 3rd largest Site of Special Scientific Interest and drains a fifth of the country. The Humber Estuary is internationally important for the birds, animals and habitats that it supports and has a number of important wildlife designations. The site is also of national importance for the geological interest at South Ferriby Cliff and for the shifting sands of Spurn Point. One of the most important features of the estuary is the huge numbers of waders and wildfowl which use the estuary on migration and during the winter (over 150,000 water birds per year). It is also nationally important for its breeding colony of grey seals, river lamprey and sea lamprey.

At one of the UK's busiest and therefore economically important estuaries, Natural England continues to work with and advise local authorities and other organisations in situations where planning applications and activities may affect sites that have been designated for their nature conservation and landscape importance.

Notes for editors

For further information including electronic copies of the strategy, quality photographs and interviews, contact Emma MacDonald in Natural England's regional press office on 0113 2303533 or 07900 608073

Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. We conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people, and the economic prosperity it brings.

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is part of the influential UK-wide partnership of 47 Wildlife Trusts. The Trust has worked for more than 60 years to maximise the region's modern landscape by protecting wildlife and wild places, and educating, influencing and empowering people. We manage 80 of the best sites and help others to manage theirs. Our work is helping to secure the future of many important habitats and species, which might otherwise be lost.

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly is the region's strategic partnership. It brings together key partners to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of everyone who lives and works in the region. A voluntary organisation, with members drawn from the region's 22 local authorities and the social, environmental and economic sectors within the region.