

Nature Recovery Plan 2023-2030 Summary



Why do we need a Nature Recovery Plan?

The Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and its partners want to prioritise and invest in the recovery and enhancement of nature. This will help safeguard the future of our wildlife, our landscape, our communities and our local economy.

We need nature!

Nature, and nature-based services (such as clean air, clean water, healthy soils, flood control and carbon storage), provide the essential basis upon which we all rely for our health and wellbeing, for a thriving economy and for the quality of our landscapes. Due to a combination of factors, caused mainly by human activity over recent decades, nature is struggling. Species and habitats are being lost or have deteriorated dramatically – caused by changes in land, river and sea use and its management; by resource extraction and pollution (especially from mining and agriculture); and by invasive non-native species. These are all playing their part, compounded by the impact of a changing climate.

How will the Plan help?

This Nature Recovery Plan is intended to provide a framework for action and improvement. It sets out some priorities and actions that are necessary, including the urgent steps required to ensure significant benefits for nature, climate change adaptation and people across the Tamar Valley AONB and its neighbouring areas. It is intended to identify actions and unlock funding for practical measures over the next seven years that will help to achieve long-term positive change. Critically, as highlighted in the National Association for AONBs' 2019 Colchester Declaration, change can only be achieved with the necessary powers and resources. If these additional powers and resources are not provided, our outcomes, no matter how well we plan, will be limited.

What will the Plan achieve?

Our objective is to focus effort over the next seven years as we work to deliver three interconnected key pledges:

- Habitat enhancement and recovery
- Species recovery
- Natural connectedness

Nature Recovery Plans are key to the shared vision of AONBs, and of our partners in Government, Natural England, etc., to create resilient landscapes that are great for wildlife and people, to play a key role in the global '30x30' ambition to ensure that 30% of land is actively conserved or protected for biodiversity benefit. The Plan will help target investment in nature going forward.

Which habitats are in most need of our help?

The Plan will focus on the following priority habitats (habitats of high ecological value and of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity across the country), as well as designated sites within the Tamar Valley (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, County Wildlife Sites):

- Woodland, orchards and hedgerows
- Grassland and arable margins
- Wetlands and coastal (estuarine)
- Rivers, streams and ponds
- Lowland heathland.

The working landscape (dominated by agriculture and forestry) within the AONB, and our urban and post-industrial areas, are also both vital to support and enhance.

These habitats are home to thousands of species including many of national or international importance. It is critical that action is taken to protect and conserve them.



The Tamar Valley AONB contains 24 of the UK's 56 priority habitats

What nature recovery in the Tamar Valley can look like



Artist's impression of the Upper Tamar 2023



Artist's impression of the Upper Tamar
Enhanced Nature Recovery Network
Artist: Phil Collins

arable field margins wetlands
coastal
grasslands hedgerows
deciduous woodland
ancient woodland
traditional orchards
freshwater
lowland heathland veteran trees



Threats to habitats

All of our habitats are under threat from climate change, for example changing temperature and rainfall patterns across the seasons, drought, sea-level rise and fire. More specific threats apply to each habitat type, as highlighted below;

Woodland - Over 20% of the Tamar Valley AONB is under total woodland cover; it is one of the most wooded designated landscapes in the South West, supporting a wealth of wildlife, including the heath fritillary butterfly and nightjar. Fragmentation of woodland, inappropriate management, pathogens and disease, invasive non-native species are all threats to this habitat.

Hedgerows - Culturally and ecologically rich, hedgerows are a distinctive landscape feature within the Tamar Valley AONB. Hedgehogs and hazel dormice, as well as many other small mammals and birds, benefit from their corridors for connectivity, shelter and food. Tamar Valley hedgerows are also home to one of Britain's rarest trees, the Plymouth pear, and the vulnerable/near-threatened bastard balm. Loss of hedgerows and standard trees through disease, storms, felling without replacement, inappropriate cutting regime and lack of management incentives all contribute to threaten this species-rich habitat.



Ancient woodland and trees are defined as ‘an irreplaceable habitat’

Traditional orchards - Apple and cherry trees were once a familiar sight in the Tamar Valley. Each parish cultivated their own distinctive apple varieties. Traditional orchards provide important habitat for diverse species from invertebrates to mammals such as the hedgehog and greater horseshoe bat. Surviving habitat contains increasingly rare Tamar Valley varieties, but as they were planted around the same time, they are at risk of ageing and dying within a short space of time of each other. Excessive scrub growth, lost trees not being replaced, lack of management and neglect are concerning for the future of this important habitat.

Grassland and arable field margins - Species-rich grasslands and arable field margins, supporting small mammals, including the harvest mouse, are fragmented within the Tamar Valley AONB. Agricultural intensification by use of fertilisers, herbicides and other pesticides, liming, re-seeding or ploughing for arable crops can threaten these habitats.

Lowland heathland - Lowland heathland is an important habitat in the AONB with Kit Hill, the largest site, home to a variety of species including the adder. Fragmentation through historical development and land use, under-management, expansion of quarrying and high level of public access on some sites is a threat to this habitat.

Wetlands and coastal habitats - Both freshwater and intertidal wetlands are magnets for wildlife, due to their dynamic and productive habitats. The avocet, *Palaemon longirostris* (known locally as the ‘Calstock’ prawn) and the rare and vulnerable triangular club-rush all benefit from this rich habitat. Our most significant wetland habitats are marginal estuarine sites. Human influences, including waste tipping, pollution, sewage discharge and invasive non-native species are threatening these habitats.

Freshwater habitats - Our rivers, streams, ponds and ditches form a network of interconnected blue corridors which, if managed well, are a central feature of the nature recovery network, linking terrestrial and marine systems and providing migration corridors for important and threatened species, such as allis shad, salmonids (Atlantic salmon, etc.) and water voles. Leaching of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers from agricultural land and raw sewage discharge have a major impact on river habitat and aquatic species. Winter die-back of invasive non-native species leads to erosion and sedimentation, while increased pressures from recreation users can also have an impact.



The rivers Tamar, Tavy and Lynher are the central defining feature of the Tamar Valley AONB landscape. What happens upstream impacts the whole river system downstream.

Which species will we focus on?

Species-rich communities are essential for functioning, resilient ecosystems and the recovery of high-quality 'priority habitats' is key to securing the future of associated species.

Since its establishment in 1995, the Tamar Valley AONB Partnership has supported nature conservation work but it has never adopted particular species to champion, until now.

Choosing which animals and plants to champion in the Tamar Valley is difficult – after all, every species has an intrinsic value and what is considered special by one person may not have the same resonance with another. With this in mind, and in consultation with experts, we have selected a number of species to help as many people as possible to engage and understand what we're aiming to achieve. Our list includes;

- Species of most conservation importance or concern (priority species), particularly where the Tamar Valley is an important area for a population.
- Species associated with the diverse habitats which should be flourishing in the Tamar Valley and beyond, and which can benefit from our work to improve and connect priority habitats across the AONB.
- Species that people will recognise and might be able to see – and help – in their own back gardens and local areas.

We will also take action for other species, including our important invertebrates and pollinators, working together with our partner organisations and the wider community, where opportunities arise, and resources allow.

The **Tamar Valley Special Species** are:



*Salmonids (represented by the Atlantic salmon)

* 'Calstock' prawn (*Palaemon longirostris*)

What action will be taken?

We will:

1. Take action in our designated ecological areas

By working with farmers, landowners, statutory bodies and other partners to help improve the condition of existing high-value sites, in particular Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and County Wildlife Sites. Together, we will identify volunteering and resourcing opportunities at SSSIs to assess conditions, and implement improvements and resilience measures (where sites are in an unfavourable condition or under-managed).

2. Take action across the working AONB landscape

By working with farmers, foresters and landowners to create and manage more, bigger, better and joined-up priority habitats across the landscape. Together, we will identify our top five distinct opportunity habitat, species and connectivity improvement opportunities (nature recovery projects), and secure the additional resources to implement these improvements.

3. Take action in our built-up and post-industrial areas

By working with community groups, parish councils, local authorities and other partners, to encourage and support the management of private and public spaces for wildlife in villages, gardens, parks, heritage sites, school grounds, verges and other areas. Using a list of Tamar Valley Special Species and other resources, we will work to engage key stakeholders and local communities to identify practical opportunities for nature recovery action in the wider community.

4. Take action (projects and initiatives) to increase opportunities for people to connect with nature

By providing meaningful opportunities, we want people to enjoy, understand and access the natural environment. This will bring wellbeing benefits as well as a sense of pride of place; what we care for we value, what we value we protect.

5. Review this Plan, monitor and report on its progress every two years.



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