



Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project

Developed in
partnership with
**Small Woods
Association** and
Severn Trent Water



SmallWoods



Developing a significant biodiversity benefit project

Small Woods Association (SWA) has developed a major new project intended to boost the biodiversity of up to 600ha of woodland and hedgerow in the Severn and Trent river catchment areas through targeted, simple and effective management interventions. The project will run from April 2022 until December 2025.

Severn Trent Water (STW) is working alongside SWA as project funder, ensuring continuity of the biodiversity gain.

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Why do we need a woodland biodiversity project?

The nation's woods have co-evolved over centuries, with human stewardship, to host a dazzling array of wildlife. But, since the end of World War 2 the woodlands of the UK have become increasingly less biodiverse as traditional management goals and methods have declined. This project will focus on helping to turn the tide.

Why should my wood be involved in the project?

There is a staggering loss of biodiversity across the UK. Key reports from the Natural History Museum/RSPB in 2019¹ and the UN in October 2021² place the UK firmly at the bottom of the G7 nations for biodiversity and in the bottom 12% globally. The nation has lost 50% of its overall biodiversity since 1970 alone.

Woodlands are crucial to bolstering the fight back to biodiverse health and even the smallest of well informed and well executed management actions can have hugely positive effects. The Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project aims to help woodlanders to do just that – make a big impact with small inputs.

Woodland owners and managers are invited to express their interest

and sign up to be part of the project. The project has a target to swiftly secure 600 hectares of woodland to transform the biodiversity of the region's woodlands over a three year-schedule of work, with further hectares to follow.

What is the project designed to do?

The project has been designed by SWA to support woodland owners and managers across the Severn and Trent region in gaining and honing woodland management skills, to identify and assess the biodiversity potential of their woods, to write practical and achievable plans based on biodiversity gain and to help execute cost effective solutions to boosting woodland biodiversity.

The project will provide a suite of online resources, and will include, where needed, on-the-ground assessments and advice from SWA's dedicated Woodland Biodiversity Advisors; leading to an agreed Biodiversity Management Plan, which would encompass a range of practical and achievable interventions.

This is not a grant awarding programme. However, the advice, planning and demonstration which are available through the project will be of real value. We know from research with woodland owners and managers that the biggest barrier



to making improvements to their woodlands is access to advice and guidance. The Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project offers the chance for woodland owners and managers to develop real skills that will serve them for years to come, far beyond the life of the project itself – skills such as identification of species and hazards, access and working assessment and the development of solid management thinking, planning and recording.

The project's advice and the accompanying planning skills should also mean that those in receipt of it will be more likely to be successful in applying for mainstream grants and better placed to embrace future available land stewardship programmes.

How does the project work?

The Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project is open to all woodland owners or managers whose

woodlands fall within the STW area. The core philosophy of the project is to work with owners and managers to understand each participant's personal biodiversity priorities for their woodland and help them in their desired goals wherever possible.

- Signing up will entitle participants to support from a SWA Woodland Biodiversity Advisor to produce an Initial Site Assessment, Biodiversity Potential Assessment and Woodland Biodiversity Management Plan. The assistance will be free to the participant, on the condition that they commit to implementing a minimum level of eligible interventions in their wood, which will be defined in the Biodiversity Management Plan – eligible interventions are listed below.
- The SWA Woodland Biodiversity Advisor and woodland owner/manager will work together to draw up the Biodiversity



Management Plan. At its heart will be simple, verifiable woodland biodiversity improvements, which the woodland owner/manager can carry out. The range of interventions will be agreed with the participant prior to the finalisation of the plan to reflect their biodiversity priorities.

- Woodland Owners/Managers will then undertake simple recording of the interventions agreed in the Woodland Biodiversity Management Plan, through the project monitoring process.
- Successful completion of the agreed Simple Interventions triggers the ability to apply for financial support from a Challenge Interventions fund, which can support further improvements.
- Challenge Interventions can be applied for as part of the standard Biodiversity Management Plan review process during the life of the project and are for work on a

much larger and more complex scale than Simple Interventions. Where successful applications require extra support to be executed, SWA will undertake such support work to achieve the intervention*.

- The project is open now for woodland owners and managers to express interest and once eligibility has been established, they will be invited to sign up**.

* The Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project is not a grant awarding project, and no cash grants will be available. All benefits and resources up to and including any successful Challenge Intervention work is free to participants throughout the life of the project and will be provided by SWA.

** To be eligible to participate the project requires that:

1. The woodland lies within the STW area
2. That the owner/manager has the right to access and manage the woodland
3. That the manageable area of woodland be a minimum of 2 ha in size



How to use the table of allowable interventions

The table on the opposite page lays out the types of interventions supported within the project, along with how each intervention is measured within the woodland it is applied to.

The table is read from left to right showing intervention type, whether that intervention is classed as a Simple or Challenge type during the management planning process, and how that intervention impacts the woodland it is situated in. Impacts are shown as ‘intervention scope’ – for example, deadwood areas created in locations across a whole site will be counted as a ‘whole wood’ intervention, but dead hedging can only count along its length in a specific area.

During the Assessments and Biodiversity Management Planning process SWA Woodland Biodiversity Advisors will work with owners and managers to create an individually tailored mix of interventions for both the woodland and the priorities of the participants within it.

What can the Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project achieve?

The project can make real and significant improvements to the biodiversity of any woodland through advice, knowledge transfer and easy, low impact management interventions and, by working to a set of simple reporting criteria, the project can help owners develop and monitor greater biodiversity well into the future, far beyond the life of the project itself.

Intervention type	Simple interventions	Challenge fund interventions	Intervention scope		Notes	Qualification
			Whole woodland	Area with intervention		
Creation of deadwood (standing/fallen/brash)	Yes	No	A	No		Whole wood
Coppicing	Yes	Yes – multiple coups	No	Yes	In the year it was cut as part of the Biodiversity Management Plan	Areas of intervention
Thinning (including halo thinning)	Yes	Yes – whole site thinning	A	Yes	Can include whole site thinning	Whole wood or area
Felling (edges/scalloping)	Yes	Yes – if enclosing site	A	Yes	Whole woodland if rides enclose wood or hard against transport corridors or farmland	Edge length related to hectareage -1000m edging = 1 ha
Livestock/pest mammal fencing	No	Yes	No	A		Area
Dead hedge creation	Yes	Yes	No	Yes		
Glade creation/open area creation	No	Yes	A	No	Provide a differing habitat across an entire site	Whole wood – glades provide biodiversity islands
Removal of invasives	Yes	No	A	No	Biodiversity protective action	Removal benefits whole woodland protection
Water course/pond margins	Yes	No	A	No	If the water course runs through a significant portion (30% or more) of the site	Edge length related to hectareage - 1000m edging = 1 ha
Tree/hedge planting (new)			A			Edge length related to hectareage - 1000m edging = 1 ha
Pond creation	No	Yes	A, B	No	Provide a differing habitat across an entire site	Whole wood – ponds provide biodiversity islands
Leaky dams	Yes	No	A	No	Affecting the flow up and downstream	Whole wood
Squirrel traps	No	No	No	No		
Bat / bird boxes	No	No	No	No		
Mammal boxes	No	No	No	No		
Raptor perches	No	No	No	No		

Table key

A - Yes, if implemented as part of the Biodiversity Management Plan across whole woodland
B - Must be implemented with other options.

How can I involve my woodland in the project?

If your woodland falls within the Severn Trent catchment and you would like to hear more about the Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project, please get in touch.

Contact the project co-ordinator

David Reeve

✉ davidreeve@smallwoods.org.uk

Visit our website

🌐 smallwoods.org.uk/mercian

Follow us on social media

📱 SmallWoodsUK



References

1. RSPB. 2019. *Biodiversity loss – The UK’s global rank for levels of biodiversity loss*. [Online]. RSPB. Available from: [48398rspb-biodiversity-intactness-index-summary-report-v4.pdf](#)
2. United Nations Environment Programme. 2021. *Protected Planet Report 2020* [Online]. UNEP-WCMC and IUCN. Available from: [Protected Planet Report 2020](#)