

3. Additional Habitats (for High Focus Species)

Additional Habitats (for High Focus Species) have been included as they are habitats important to the High Focus species of the Biosphere (Table 1). Appropriate habitat management is often key to halting the decline and stabilising High Focus Species numbers in the Biosphere.

3.1 Woodland Fringe for Black Grouse

3.1.1 Habitat Description

Woodland fringe is a habitat mosaic found on the interface between both native and coniferous woodland and open hill/moorland. It is a transitional habitat that is sparsely wooded and scrubby and therefore includes pockets of more open ground. A once common feature of the Scottish landscape, it has largely been lost to forestry plantations, grazing and fires. It is an important habitat for a range of species of conservation concern such as hen harrier, black grouse, nightjar, tree pipit, pine marten and adder. The Biosphere High Focus Species black grouse will use this habitat for breeding and feeding, and golden eagle feed on prey such as young deer, hare, and grouse chicks. Woodland fringe also softens the harsh edges of conifer plantations, enhancing the landscape value of an area. The mix of tree species will vary according to the topography, soil and altitude, but will typically include juniper and downy willow in the higher areas, rowan, aspen and birch in the mid height areas and willows, hazel, birch, hawthorn, aspen, oak, cherry and rowan in lower lying areas. Alder, a very important food plant for black grouse, can also be found in wetter areas. The potential location of woodland fringe in the Biosphere is shown indicatively in Map 8.

3.1.2 Conservation Objectives

The main conservation objective for woodland fringe woodland is to expand the extent and network of this, once common habitat, throughout the Biosphere by:

- Retaining existing areas of woodland fringe.
- Identifying areas appropriate for new woodland fringe planting, especially in relation to black grouse leks.
- Increasing awareness of the importance of woodland fringe so appropriate management can be adopted for this transitional habitat.
- Monitoring change and developing supply chains of locally rare trees and shrubs to enrich this habitat further.

3.1.3 Management

Without intervention, succession is inevitable and the fringe areas will gradually develop into denser woodland. Shrubs and scattered trees are an important component of the fringe habitat, supporting a wide range of species. The main management tool for existing woodland fringe is grazing management by deer.

Suggested Actions:

- Appropriate grazing of woodland fringe, taking account of wild herbivores when formulating grazing management, is required to retain the balance between open grassland and scattered trees and scrub and allow for regeneration.
- Newly planted areas of woodland fringe may need to be fenced to eliminate browsers such as deer and goats. However, in order to prevent smothering of newly established trees further management may be required, such as a short period of grazing or cutting in the late summer.

3.1.4 Example Projects

- As part of a significant restructuring programme within the Galloway Forest Park 3,000ha of woodland fringe at the interface between conifer plantations and open moorland are being created. This includes a partnership project between Forestry Commission Scotland and Cree Valley Community Woodlands Trust where 260 hectares of woodland fringe have been established on the Bennan Hill, north of Loch Trool, creating a buffer for woodland species, contributing to a forest habitat network from 'source to sea'. Volunteers have produced and planted over 9000 downy willow trees and carried out surveys.

In addition the project has a number of research aims which are:

- to quantify the bird assemblages of restructured Forestry- woodland fringe areas;
 - to assess factors that influence those assemblages;
 - to contribute towards the production of best practice guidance for the creation of the fringe areas;
 - to contribute towards the assessment of the sustainability of such fringe areas.
- Woodland fringe has been created around various black grouse leks in the buffer and transition zones through a project led by RSPB Scotland, in association with various public and private landowners.

3.1.5 Considerations

- Management implications need to be carefully considered for an area: without suitable management shrubs and small trees, particularly taller conifer species such as Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine, will develop into large trees and could create a new 'hard' boundary. Management decisions need to be taken, such as periodic cutting or grazing, to prevent this.
- Careful selection of species planted can affect how the habitat develops. Slow growing species will need less intervention for example.
- If there is no grazing taking place the sward needs to be monitored and mowing undertaken if necessary and practical to enhance habitat for black grouse.
- Development of new woodland fringe habitats over an extended timescale will provide a better range of habitat age classes and therefore structure types.

3.1.6 Opportunities

- Incorporating woodland fringe as part of forest restructuring in appropriate areas.
- Woodland fringe creation should be targeted towards existing and historical black grouse leks to maximise the conservation benefit for this species.
- Funding opportunities under Forestry Grant Schemes.

3.1.7 Further Information

More information can be found in Section 4.1 Black Grouse

Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 456. Monitoring of woodland fringe biodiversity: the bird communities of the interface between conifer plantations and moorland in the Galloway Forest Park and their relationships with woodland fringe habitats (2014).

http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/456.pdf

Information on new native woodland planting projects in Galloway Forest Park available at:

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/news/1321-new-native-woodland-in-galloway>