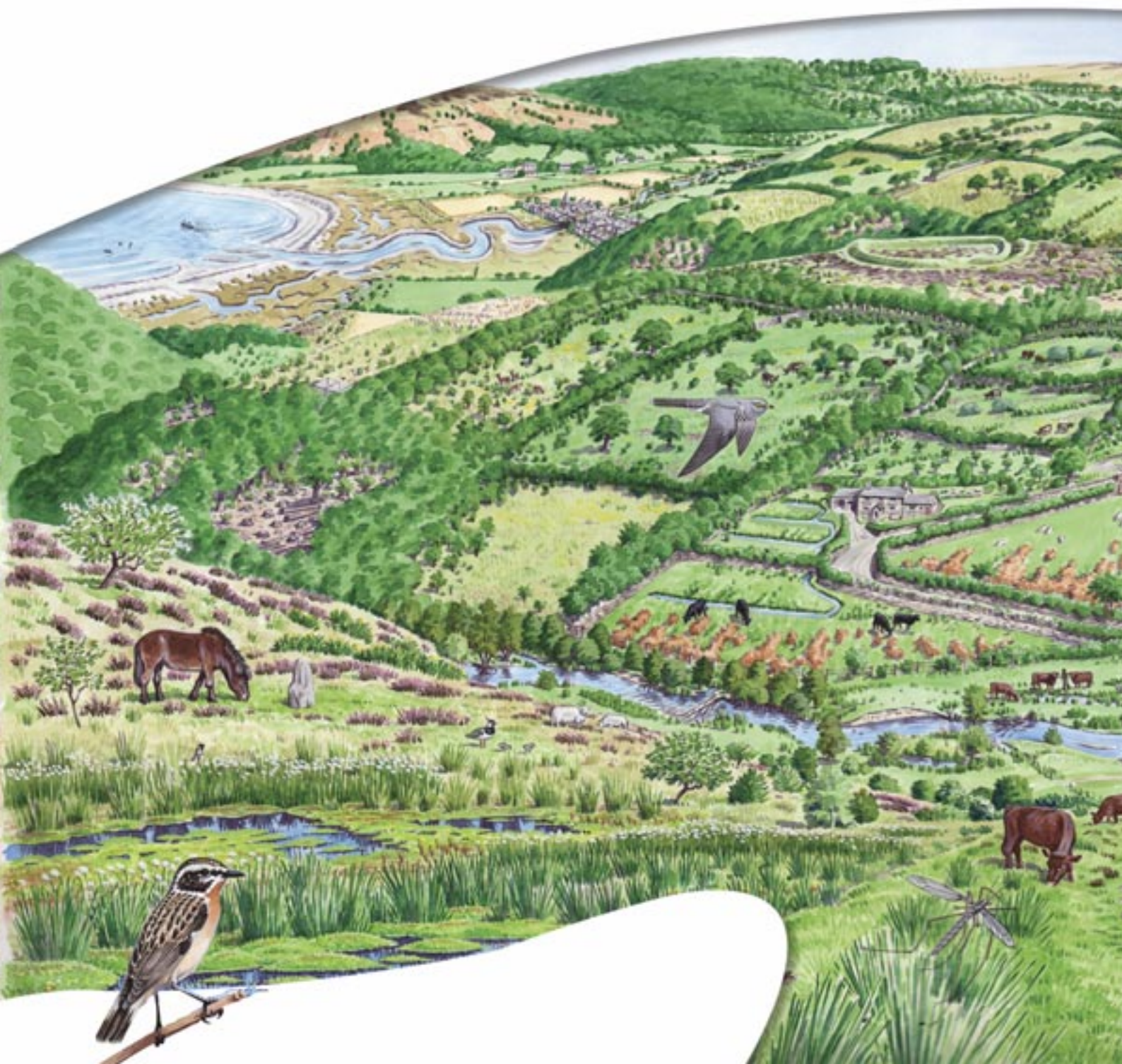


The Vision for Nature Recovery on Exmoor





The Vision for Nature Recovery on Exmoor

Exmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset, TA22 9HL
Tel: 01398 323665
email: info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

FRONT COVER:
A vision for a nature-rich Exmoor, illustration by Richard Allen

INSIDE COVER:
Dunkery Beacon by Jon Harris

Photos kindly provided by: Alasdair Akas, Victoria and Chris Eveleigh, Chris Gomersall (Stonechat, rspb-images.com), Mark Hamblin, Andy Hay, Neil Hulme, Anne and Bob Rivett, Steve Round, Jack Siviter (National Trust), Bob Walters and Exmoor National Park Authority staff past and present.

©Exmoor National Park Authority

August 2023



In order to minimise the environmental impact of this publication, it has been printed locally by Stable Print using vegetable based inks on FSC®certified paper.

The Vision for Nature Recovery on Exmoor



Over the past 20 years the focus for nature conservation has been on specific species and habitats using tools like 'Biodiversity Action Plans', but this approach hasn't succeeded overall. We now need a fundamentally different approach that is coordinated and at landscape scale - a huge effort to reverse the decline in nature and help our native species to recover. This is also a key part of our response to the climate emergency showing how nature-rich landscapes can both combat and be resilient to the changing climate.

We have developed the vision so everyone involved in managing land for wildlife, especially farmers and landowners, our local partners in the Devon and Somerset Local Nature Partnerships and national environmental agencies can be clear on how we can work together towards a common goal. This includes setting out what Exmoor can deliver towards the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies of Devon and Somerset. Delivering the vision will require significant investment via opportunities such as the new Environmental Land Management Scheme which will be guided by the Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

The vision is a starting point to reset ambitions, guide investment opportunities and open up dialogue on how to take it forward. There is much that is already happening, whether it's nature-friendly farming or targeted conservation projects, that accords with the vision and can point the way for others.

There are also new opportunities through Environmental Land Management, Biodiversity Net Gain and other grants and private funding that the vision can help guide. Making a difference for nature can be at any scale and everyone can make a difference be it a community-led initiative or wildlife garden.

Our vision statement defines what we would like to achieve and is illustrated with an inspiring image showing how this might look across the Exmoor landscape, expanding and joining the places where the landscape is already rich in habitat. The scale of change needed for Exmoor to play its part in helping nature to recover is set out in targets and this allows us to measure our progress.





The Exmoor Nature Recovery Vision takes forward our Partnership Plan ambition 'Exmoor is richer in wildlife: habitats are in good condition, expanded, connected and supporting a greater abundance of species'.

Exmoor's designation as a National Park recognises its importance for wildlife, in a landscape shaped over millennia by the interactions between people and nature.

Its 692 square kilometres contains large expanses of unenclosed moorland and coastal heath, clear rivers, steep wooded valleys and pastoral farmland connected with its characteristic hedge banks. The National Park is still a haven for wildlife, however, Exmoor has not escaped the declines in biodiversity seen in other parts of England with losses of habitat including species-rich grassland, dwarf shrub heath and upland mires and reductions in characteristic species including many songbirds and butterflies. The threat posed by the changing climate and the uncertainties posed by the agricultural transition are likely to affect Exmoor as much, if not more, than other areas. Our national status means we have a special responsibility to safeguard Exmoor's wildlife and develop a plan to recover what has been lost.

What is special

38% of area of National Park is recognised as **UK priority habitat**.

38%



Exmoor holds a range of habitats which are internationally rare such as **heath, blanket bog** and **western oak woods**, with 19,300 ha of the National Park, including 131 kilometres of rivers and streams, designated by UK and European law to protect its distinctive wildlife.

Exmoor is still an important stronghold for birds like **whinchat** and **cuckoo** which are declining nationally, with cuckoos having been almost lost from lowland Devon in recent decades.



Exmoor supports 16 of the 17 breeding British bats including the **barbastelle** and **bechstein's bat**.

A new SSSI was recently designated on Exmoor because of the importance of its **waxcap fungi**.



What we have lost



On Exmoor we estimate that we have less than 2500 ha of **unimproved grassland** left.

Salmon numbers have plummeted due to the loss of spawning habitat, barriers to fish passage, the impact of invasive species plus issues affecting them further downstream and out to sea.



The **red squirrel** was once a common sight in our woodlands but the hard winter of 1947 saw the last red squirrel on Exmoor as grey squirrels began to increase rapidly in numbers.

Birds such as the **curlew** are now at the edge of extinction on Exmoor and other species such as **kestrel, yellowhammer** and **willow tit** have seen a big drop in numbers across the National Park.



Pearl-bordered and **marsh fritillary** butterflies are now extinct within the National Park.





Exmoor's landscapes have been created through the interaction of people and nature over centuries which has created a diverse mix of habitats and species and the natural beauty that so many people treasure.

But Exmoor has not been immune to the wider declines in wildlife seen over the last few decades. We all need to act now to turn this tide, and to provide the tools and resources for farmers, conservationists, and communities to help nature return to all parts of the National Park. Together, we can make a difference, and deliver an even more nature-rich National Park.

What is nature recovery?

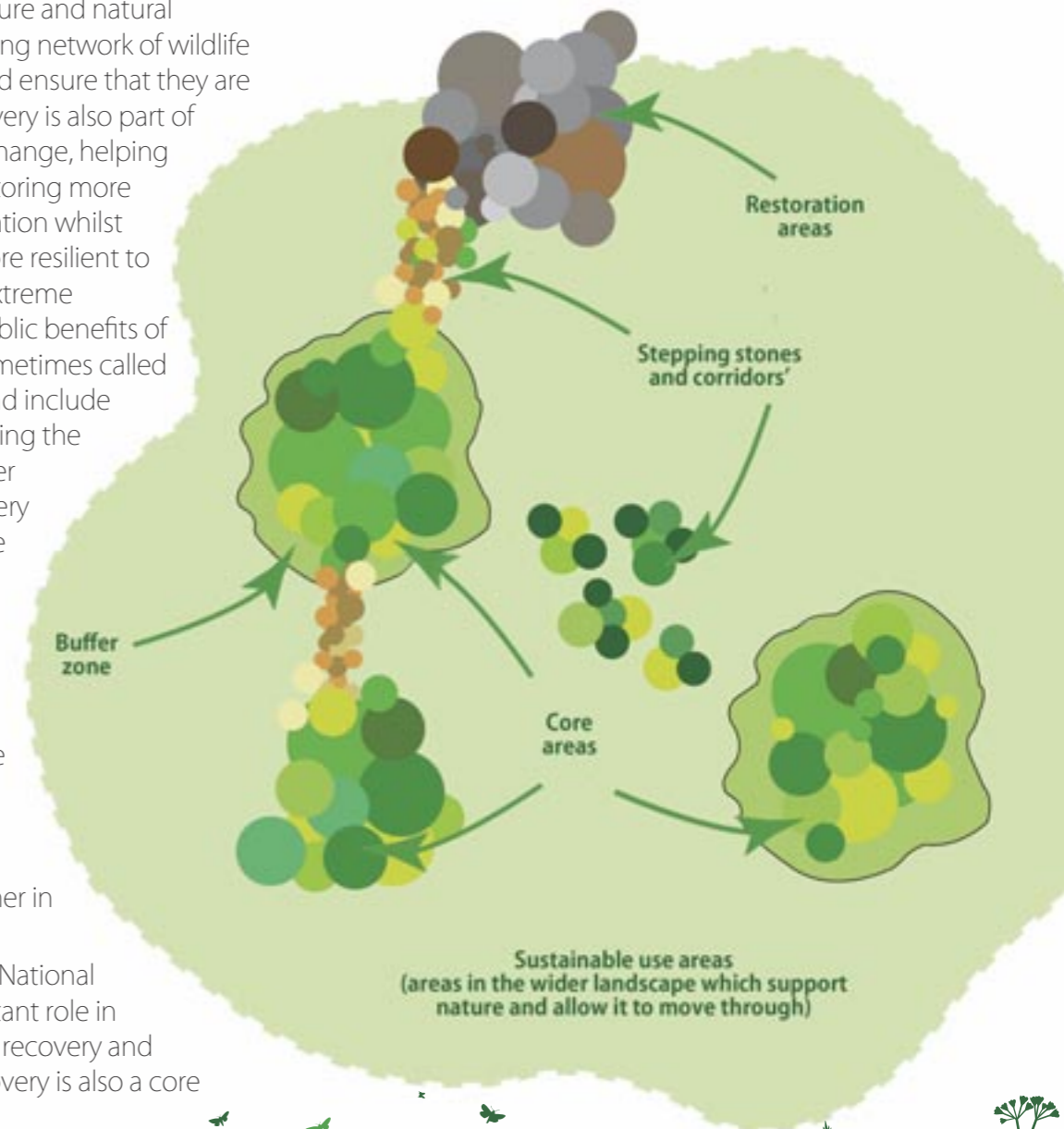


Nature is in steep decline both nationally and internationally partly due to climate change but also other pressures from human activities. Clear evidence for this is shown in National Biodiversity Network's 2019 State of Nature report. Nature recovery is simply reversing this steep decline and requires significant and co-ordinated change. Nature conservation efforts until now, however positive, have not been sufficient and a more fundamental approach is needed. We need to create more space for nature and natural processes, make our existing network of wildlife sites bigger and better and ensure that they are all joined up. Nature recovery is also part of the response to climate change, helping us achieve 'Net Zero' by storing more carbon in soils and vegetation whilst allowing wildlife to be more resilient to changes in climate and extreme weather events. These public benefits of a wilder landscape are sometimes called nature-based solutions and include flood attenuation by slowing the flow of rainfall into our river systems. For nature recovery to happen it needs to take place across whole landscapes so that populations of wildlife have space to move and adapt to the inevitable pressures and disturbance that will occur through time. This often means multiple landowners and managers working together in a coordinated way.

The UK government sees National Parks as playing an important role in achieving national nature recovery and climate goals. Nature recovery is also a core

component of the new Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) which place emphasis on supporting farming that delivers "public goods" such as supporting wildlife, cultural heritage, carbon storage and flood resilience.

What makes up a Nature Recovery Network?





What does nature recovery look like on Exmoor?



Our illustration on pages 10-11 represents a nature-rich landscape that remains productive and viable for land managers and helps mitigate the impacts of climate change - an inspiring glimpse into the future of our National Park. It is an illustration

showing features that the whole National Park could support in abundance through the principles set out in our statement to give an idea of the transformative 'step-change' that is needed to bring about nature recovery at a landscape scale.



A vision for a nature-rich Exmoor



- 1** More space for nature - habitats bigger, better and joined
- 2** Species thriving in abundance and diversity
- 3** More trees in the right place
- 4** Peatland restoration
- 5** Healthy rivers, streams and sea
- 6** Better management for pollinators
- 7** Control of non-native invasive species
- 8** Clean air and healthy soils
- 9** Natural flood management
- 10** Re-introduction of key species

Illustration by Richard Allen
© Exmoor National Park Authority

Our Vision Statement



Exmoor's farmers, land managers, communities and environmental organisations will work together to deliver "a nature-rich Exmoor National Park" which is great for wildlife and great for people. Across the Park:

- Wildlife is abundant and thriving. It can easily move across the landscape and adapt to a changing climate;
- Exmoor's rich mosaic of wildlife habitats is enhanced, extended and integrated into a network of nature-rich areas with blurred edges between them, and corridors linking them together;
- Exmoor's farmers and landowners play a central role in delivering this historic and nature-rich landscape producing high quality food;
- People living in and visiting the National Park are connected to nature. They understand and are inspired by Exmoor's special wildlife and are actively engaged in its conservation.

By 2050 we aim to have at least 75% (or 51,750ha) of the area of the National Park in nature-rich condition, with the remaining areas providing networks and corridors for wildlife to move through and beyond its boundaries.



Vision Targets

We have identified four key targets to deliver over the next 10 years. By 2030 we will work together to as a minimum:

1 Bring 95% of existing designated wildlife areas into 'favourable condition', providing the core of our nature-rich areas



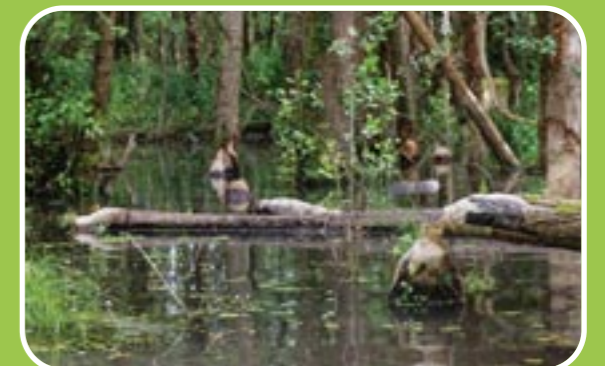
2 Create or restore an additional 4,500 hectares (6.5% of the National Park) of priority habitat as 'nature corridors and buffers' to expand and link the nature-rich hubs and to create a web of connectivity



3 Identify and establish 11,500 hectares (17% of the National Park) of 'nature-friendly farming areas' where land is or will be managed working with nature as part of a sustainable farm business



4 Create 7,000 hectares (10% of the National Park) of 'nature recovery opportunity areas' where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course. In these large, wilder areas land will be allowed to recover, healthy soils and clean water will be restored, and wildlife will recolonise





Bring 95% of existing designated wildlife areas into ‘favourable condition’, providing the core of our nature-rich areas.



Achieving the target

Designated wildlife areas make up over 26,500 hectares, over a third of the total National Park area. This includes 19,300 hectares of nationally and internationally designated sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation) and 7,230 hectares of locally designated sites (County and Local Wildlife Sites). We need to ensure that these areas are managed in a way which allows adaptation to extremes of weather resulting from climate change whilst also safeguarding or recovering our special species.

Where existing sites are not in good condition, we will examine the reasons why and develop plans to either reach favourable condition in the following 5 years or revisit the designation criteria to ensure they are valid for the future. As a result of climate change we may have to accept some change in species composition with the possible loss of some species but potential gain of others. We will ensure that our network of Local and County Wildlife Sites are brought into good condition and will continue to identify and designate new sites which merit inclusion within that framework.





Create or restore an additional 4,500 hectares (6.5% of the National Park) of priority habitat as 'nature corridors and buffers' to expand and link the nature-rich hubs and to create a web of connectivity.



Achieving the target

- 1,500 ha of additional species-rich grassland;
- 2,080ha of new woodland or wood pasture - to achieve 17% woodland cover across the National Park (in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change target);
- 500 ha of new/restored wetlands/mires in addition to the 2000ha already restored;
- 100 km of new hedgerows planted;
- 100 km of wooded corridor/shelter belt greater than 20m wide to ensure they are a corridor for a wide range of species;
- We will also restore at least 3 river catchments, including the rivers Exe & Barle, northern streams including the Horner, Aller & Hawkcombe Water and Lyn through improving water quality and innovative 'slowing the flow' techniques;
- In addition to the new habitat, 50% of woodlands (4,750 hectares) are managed for nature with all deadwood retained and in the remaining 50% of woodlands at least 50% deadwood is retained.





Identify and establish 11,500 hectares (17% of the National Park) of 'nature-friendly farming areas', where land is or will be managed working with nature as part of a sustainable farm business.



Achieving the target

Every farm has something to offer and many are already achieving a great deal. There is a huge opportunity to get more land into a condition where it is delivering for nature and climate whilst still being agriculturally productive. The target of 17% of the National Park is approximately half of its enclosed farmland and represents the scale that we believe will make a real difference. Achieving more than this would be even better for nature. The opportunities are varied and could be based around low input, high quality output, regenerative systems, improved soil management, hardy livestock breeding and selection, improving conditions for nature both within fields and in the

uncropped areas around them, avoiding artificial inputs such as pesticides and fertilisers, allowing areas to be 'roughened up', hedgerow management that works well for wildlife, minimal cultivations, creating field margins for pollinators, allowing scrub and trees to establish and protecting riparian corridors. It could also involve developing wood pasture systems.



Create 7,000 hectares (10% of the National Park) of 'nature recovery opportunity areas' where nature and natural processes are allowed to take their course. In these large, wilder areas land will be allowed to recover, healthy soils and clean water will be restored, and wildlife will recolonise.

Achieving the target

A further 10% of the National Park will be given space to regenerate into a more natural state. Rivers and their catchments will be managed sensitively, allowing time and space for nature to take its course and wildlife to establish. Large herbivorous animals, such as livestock and Exmoor ponies will ensure these landscapes are in a state which is diverse and constantly changing. These landscapes will be producing other high quality public goods which are the National Park's life support systems – clean air, fresh water, and productive, healthy soils. There will be space to take a harvest of key products such as timber and also high quality meat from livestock. Species such as pine marten, red squirrel and beaver may recolonise these landscapes.

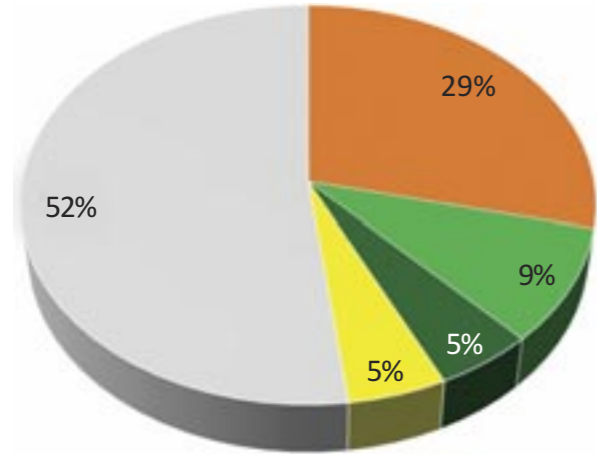


As a longer-term target, by 2050 we aim to have at least 75% (or 51,750ha) of the area of the National Park in nature-rich condition, with the remaining areas providing networks and corridors for wildlife to move through and beyond its boundaries.

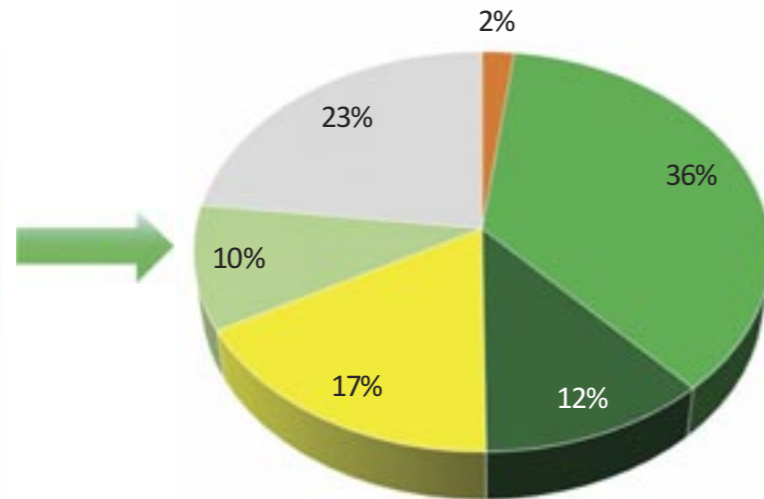


Vision habitat targets as a proportion of Exmoor as a whole

Current habitat areas as a percentage of Exmoor



2030 Nature Recovery target habitat areas as a percentage of Exmoor



Notes on current habitat areas
(all as a percentage of Exmoor)

38% of the National Park is designated for wildlife (28% SSSI, 10% Local / County Wildlife Site)

Of this, 9% of the National Park is classified in favourable condition designated site.

(4.3% in SSSI, 5% in Local / County Wildlife Site).

- Designated sites in unfavourable condition
- Designated sites in good condition (Target 1)
- Other good (priority) habitat (Target 2)
- Nature friendly farming areas (Target 3)
- Nature recovery opportunity areas (Target 4)
- Remaining area of National Park - by 2030 will have better connectivity for nature





Exmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset, TA22 9HL
Tel: 01398 323665
email: info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

