



**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK  
MANAGEMENT PLAN 2001 - 2006**




©Published by Exmoor National Park Authority 2001  
Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9HL



West Water - Ione Willcock

# CONTENTS

	Page
	i – ii
<b>Conservation and Enhancement of Natural Beauty, Wildlife and Cultural Heritage</b>	
1. Landscape	1
2. Farmland	3
3. Moor and Heath	7
4. Woodland	12
5. Coast	15
6. Rivers, Streams, Wetlands and Groundwater	17
7. Wildlife – Biodiversity	19
8. Pollution and Resource Use	22
9. Cultural Heritage	25
10. Living Culture	27
<b>Promoting Understanding and Enjoyment of the Special Qualities of the National Park</b>	
11. Recreation	28
12. Tourism	31
13. Access	35
14. Visitor Facilities	38
15. Traffic & Transport	40
16. Education, Information and Interpretation	43
17. Communication	46
<b>Fostering Social &amp; Economic Well-being of the Local Community</b>	
18. Land Based Industries: Farming & Forestry	47
19. Employment and Economic Regeneration	50
20. Housing and Community Services	52
21. Development Control & Planning	54
<b>Making it Happen</b>	
22. Making it happen	55
Exmoor National Park Maps	58



# INTRODUCTION TO THE EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

i.1 The National Park Management Plan is a 5-year Plan for Exmoor National Park. It is the main policy plan and sets out our vision for the future of Exmoor and the measures needed to achieve this vision. Exmoor is, to a large extent, a 'managed' landscape, the product of centuries of human activity - farming, forestry, recreation and others. If Exmoor is to remain a beautiful place now and in the future, the processes that shape its appearance and character need to be carefully managed.

i.2 The Plan is called the Management Plan to distinguish it from other plans such as the Local Plan, which deals with policies for the development of land to guide planning decisions. The National Park Management Plan is the main policy plan from which others such as the Exmoor National Park Local Plan are derived and is much broader and less detailed than such plans.

i.3 The National Park Management Plan shows how Exmoor will be managed according to the statutory purposes of National Parks, set out in the Environment Act 1995, which are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks;
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public.

... and the National Park Authority's duty to "seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local community, but without incurring significant expenditure in doing so, and shall for those purposes cooperate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic and social development within the area of the National Park".

i.4 The National Park Management Plan is structured so that the policy-making process is as logical as possible. For each chapter of the Plan there is:

- a 'vision' or long-term aim which looks to a future for the National Park beyond the time frame of this National Park Management Plan, which is a relatively short time-scale in terms of achieving significant objectives.
- an introductory section setting out the background facts which provide the justification for the formulation of policies.
- objectives which, as far as possible, are: relevant to the topic; specific; can be achieved within the 5-year period of the Plan; and can be measured so that progress towards achieving them can be tracked.
- policies that set out the approach to a particular topic or issue to guide day-to-day decision-making.

### Implementing the Management Plan

i.5 The National Park Management Plan sets out the long term vision and policies for Exmoor. Specific targets and indicators will be set out in a separate Action Plan that forms a companion document to the Management Plan. The actions and the performance indicators will form a substantial part of the National Park Authority's work programme for the 5 years from 2000 to 2005 and will combine with those in the Authority's Best Value Performance Plan (see Figure 1) in the process of bidding for funding from Government.

i.6 However, the Exmoor National Park Management Plan is a plan for the National Park, not just the National Park Authority. The Plan is the result of wide consultation and sets out an agreed vision for Exmoor and the contributions each of the key partners will make to achieve this vision. Although the National Park Authority has a key role in implementing the plan, effective progress can only be made in partnership with other organisations and agencies.

i.7 The Environment Act, 1995, places a duty on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard to National Park purposes. Relevant authorities are:

- any Minister of the Crown
- any public body (including any local authority - County, District or Parish Council and any National Park Authority)
- any statutory undertaker
- any person holding public office

i.8 This requirement is intended to ensure that the purposes of National Parks are taken into account by these organisations when they are making decisions or taking action that will affect land in a National Park. The National Park Authority has consulted local county, district and parish councils, public bodies and others to agree the contribution they can make to the Management Plan and to the achievement of National Park purposes.

### Monitoring and evaluating the Plan

i.9 Implementation of the Management Plan will be monitored in two ways:

- an annual review of progress against the Action Plan and Best Value Performance Plan, and
- a review of longer term impact and achievement through regular 'state of the environment' reports.

i.10 It is important to know the state of the environment at any time, and how it is changing, and to be able to measure the changes in order to tell if environmental resources are being lost or maintained. Under Section 62 of the 1995 Environment Act, National Park Authorities have a duty to produce a State of the Environment report for their areas. Such information is crucial in ascertaining whether the actions of the Authority and its partners are achieving the future vision for Exmoor set out in this Management Plan.

### Sustainability

i.11 The Brundtland Commission (1987 World Commission on Environment and Development) defined sustainable development as "... development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Achieving sustainable development requires a long term approach that maximises economic development, social needs and effective conservation and protection of environmental resources.

i.12 In 1997, all the National Park Authorities of England and Wales adopted a joint statement on sustainability. National Parks have made a special contribution to work on sustainability aided by their twin purposes - to protect the environment and promote understanding of its special qualities - allied to the duty to foster economic and social well-being. The Exmoor National Park Management Plan builds on this work and will be reviewed to ensure that the policies and actions meet sustainability criteria.

i.13 If the principles of sustainability are to be followed on Exmoor, every decision and action carried out within the National Park should aim to enhance the value of the environment and the quality of life for visitors and local communities.

## OBJECTIVE i

To promote sustainable development on Exmoor and to raise awareness of the principles and importance of sustainability.

### Policies

Pi/1 The National Park Authority will ensure that its plans, policies and programmes take sustainability principles into account and will operate in as sustainable a way as possible in the full range of its activities.

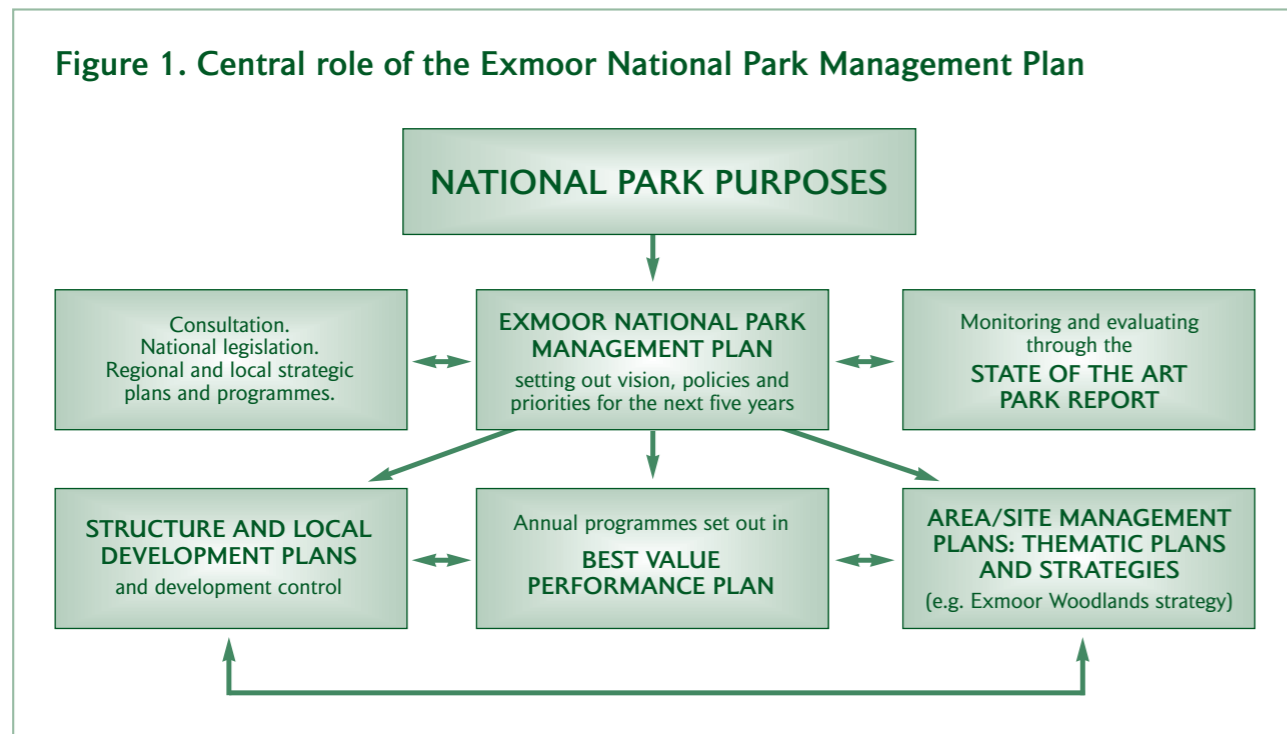
### Special qualities of Exmoor

i.14 The Environment Act, 1995 charges the National Park Authority with 'promoting understanding and enjoyment of the National Park's special qualities' without seeking to define those qualities. All national Parks share some special features such as the quality and remoteness of the scenery and a sense of wildness.

i.15 When asked what they think are Exmoor's special qualities people give a wide range of responses. These results indicate what people value and this, together with information about what is actually different about Exmoor, helps us to decide what is most important to conserve, enhance, understand and enjoy.

Special qualities of Exmoor	Residents %	Visitors %
Deer	38	-
Peaceful/spiritual/uncrowded	25	36
Variety/contrast/blend of scenery	35	26
Beauty/scenery	34	35
Unspoilt/uncommercialised	29	20
Openness	19	-
Wooded combs/trees	18	-
Moorland	-	10
Wildness	16	7
Friendly locals	-	10
Wildlife	15	11
Rural way of life/rural community	15	-
Ease of access for walking/riding	14	15
Exmoor ponies	11	-
Sense of history/timelessness	-	7
Gentle/warm/soft scenery	-	7

Figure 1. Central role of the Exmoor National Park Management Plan



# CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL BEAUTY, WILDLIFE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE NATIONAL PARK.



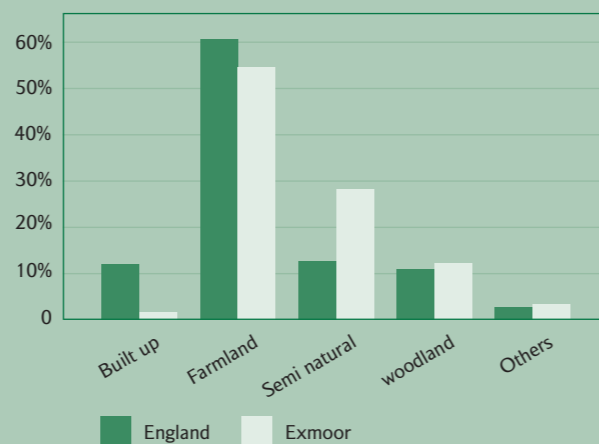
Wimbleball Lake - Heather Lowther

## 1. Vision for the Landscape

Increased areas of wild landscape, including moorland, native woodland, bracken, scrub and mires. Sustainable farming practice conserving landscape features such as hedgebanks, orchards, unimproved grasslands and farm woodlands. Fewer eyesores and buildings combining local materials and good design.

- 1.1 National Parks are protected landscapes of national importance and government accords them the highest level of landscape protection. They were selected for their high landscape quality and large areas of unspoiled and relatively open countryside.
- 1.2 The distinctive character of Exmoor's landscape is derived from both natural and man-made elements: landform (including geology, soils and rivers), land cover (including natural habitats and agricultural crops) and cultural patterns (including boundaries and settlements). It is the combination of these elements that makes Exmoor distinctive.

Land Use



- 1.3 The most valued features of Exmoor's landscape are its semi-natural areas of moor and heath, woodland, coast and foreshore. A number of these habitats are of national and international importance, including: blanket bog; upland heath; western heath; western oak woods, particularly the extensive coastal woods, and parkland. These habitats provide most of the special qualities for which Exmoor is valued as a National Park, including openness, wildness, tranquillity, beauty and suitability for walking and riding.
- 1.4 What is undoubtedly special is the lack of intrusion into this beauty over a wide area. Exmoor has few large eyesores such as major roads, derelict land and buildings, electricity pylons and active quarries. There are no large caravan or camp sites, no holiday camps, no theme parks and Exmoor remains one of the quietest National Parks. Intrusive developments tend to be of a smaller scale such as car parks, masts, overhead wires, vehicle erosion, farm tips, silage wrappings and modern farm buildings.
- 1.5 Exmoor's landscape exhibits a very long continuation of settlement on the same sites. The landscape still shows signs of past cultures from prehistoric settlement, through old and characteristic buildings to the designed parks of the 18th century and later. Because parliamentary enclosure came relatively late on Exmoor, its effects, coupled with those of the agrarian revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, are well preserved in the Exmoor landscape. Also valued is the continuation of traditional practices: the mixed farming of the Vale of Porlock and Brendon Hills; the old orchards and varieties of crops; the maintenance of buildings with traditional materials and the designed features of the landscape which add to its local distinctiveness.
- 1.6 There are a number of designed landscapes associated with estates on Exmoor and two scheduled historic parklands. As well as their beauty, these areas are an important part of the history and cultural heritage of the area.

### Conservation of geology and soils

- 1.7 Exmoor's distinctive landscapes are determined by the underlying geology and soils. The reds and greys of the sandstones and shales and their soils pervade both landscape and settlement. Although there are rock outcrops on Exmoor, it is essentially a smoothly rounded landscape reflecting the long history of erosion. The classic Exmoor landform is of long, flat and gently sloping ridges intersected by deep, smooth, convex-sided combs.
- 1.8 The National Park contains four Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated purely for their geology and another three sites designated for geological and wildlife interest. In addition, there are many Regionally Important, and County Geological Sites. Such sites are divided into 'exposure' and 'integrity' sites. The former tend to be extensive deposits valued because of the educational opportunity afforded by their continued access and exposure, whilst the latter are limited deposits or landforms which would be irreplaceable if destroyed. Some 'exposure' sites on Exmoor are threatened by lack of access to and obscuring of rock faces and 'integrity' sites by natural and human erosion.
- 1.9 It is extremely difficult to re-create habitats once the soil has changed and areas which have not been ploughed and fertilised are the most valuable sites for habitat restoration. Natural soil profiles tend to take hundreds of years to evolve and if the soils cannot be recreated it is unlikely for the habitats to be recreated. However, there is little protection offered to the soil resource. Very little of Exmoor has been mapped in detail for soils and there is considerable need for more mapping and more up to date information so that the resource can be monitored.

### OBJECTIVE 1/2

To maintain the integrity of Exmoor's geology and soils for the purposes of conservation and understanding.

#### Policies

P1/5 Efforts will be made to conserve, interpret and improve our understanding of sites of particular geological and soil interest.

### OBJECTIVE 1/1

To promote the conservation and enhancement of Exmoor's special landscape.

#### Policies

- P1/1 A high priority will be given to the recreation of natural and semi-natural habitats and a landscape wild in character.
- P1/2 The maintenance of traditional landscape features and techniques will be supported.
- P1/3 Opportunities will be taken to remove or reduce the effects of visual intrusions on the Exmoor landscape.
- P1/4 The conservation of historic parklands and designed landscapes on Exmoor will be encouraged.

*“To maintain the integrity of Exmoor's geology and soils for the purposes of conservation and understanding”*

## 2. Vision for Farmland

Farmland that is managed sustainably to conserve and enhance wildlife and protect historic features, and maintain a beautiful landscape for people to enjoy, while at the same time producing a viable income from agriculture and land management to help support a thriving local economy and community.

- 2.1 Farming on Exmoor is several thousand years old. It is largely the effect of farming on nature which has created the landscape we see today: the combination of improved fields, rough grazing, moorland and woodland, bordered by characteristic hedges.
- 2.2 Despite post-war agricultural intensification and mechanisation, Exmoor's upland climate and topography has helped to perpetuate a relatively low-input style of farming, which has maintained a highly valued and locally distinctive countryside. The contrast between the farmland and the semi-natural elements of the landscape such as moorland, woods and coast is regarded by many as one of the special qualities of Exmoor.
- 2.3 Boundaries form important features associated with Exmoor's farmland. These are mainly hedges set on earth banks, some of which are stone faced. There are also some earth or stone-faced banks without hedges, and dry stone walls, usually associated with the moorland and moorland edge. Hedges themselves are very much a feature of the British Isles. Hedgebanks are a typically West Country feature. Ancient hedges can be very species rich and are valuable habitats for butterflies, moths, farmland birds, bats and rodents, including rare dormice.
- 2.4 Exmoor has an estimated 2,699 km of hedgerows, 1,288 km of banks and ditches, 538 km of fences and 35 km of dry stone walls. The Monitoring Landscape Change study of changes in the landscape between the 1970s and 1980s showed loss of hedges as being one of the most significant changes taking place on Exmoor but accurate statistics could not be provided by this method.
- 2.5 The remaining small areas of unimproved meadows and pastures provide a range of habitats and support a great variety of wild plants including the scarce mountain pansy and adder's tongue and moonwort ferns. Unploughed grassland supports ant hills of the yellow meadow ant; butterflies and the scarce hornet robber fly, plus bats, which feed on the insects. Leat systems and other archaeological features can still be seen where ploughing has not been frequent.
- 2.6 Legislation concerning wildlife can be used to protect rare species and habitats but in general excludes what may be considered to be more common features. Further agricultural intensification is leading to farmland being less and less suitable for anything but a handful of very common species and even those appear to be in decline. The numbers of some farmland birds have declined by more than 50% in the last 30 years due to the loss of hedges and areas of semi-natural habitats and the change from mixed farming to intensive pastoral systems. Similar declines are likely to have occurred among mammals, invertebrates and plants, especially arable weeds, but they are not so well documented.
- 2.7 Remaining areas of scrub are being cleared, winter stubbles are rare due to the practice of sowing cereals in the autumn and fallow land is a thing of the past. Arable farming is part of the Exmoor tradition and its decline is of concern for both landscape and wildlife purposes. Less intensively used farmland that is more valuable for wildlife, especially around settlements is often targeted for improvement. Ploughing, liming and the use of artificial fertilisers destroyed more than 90% of flower-rich meadows and pastures during the second half of the 20th century.
- 2.8 Agricultural incentives are becoming increasingly directed towards environmentally friendly farming practices, although Agenda 2000, the review of the Common Agricultural Policy, has not greatly hastened this trend. The introduction of the Agri-Environment Regulations under EU legislation offers a range of grant-aided schemes so that farmers can enhance the wildlife interest of their land.
- 2.9 The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's Countryside Stewardship scheme has had some initial success on Exmoor, but like the National Park Authority's own management agreements and Farm Conservation Scheme agreements, on Exmoor it has now been largely superseded by the introduction of the Ministry's Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, operated by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency. This scheme has prevented further intensification, but has yet to bring significant areas into agreement for the restoration and recreation of more diverse farmland.
- 2.10 Furthermore, extensification on one part of the farm can lead to intensification elsewhere. Reducing winter grazing on moorland has contributed to the development of large buildings for housing stock. Despite the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, overall inputs of chemicals are not declining significantly and can accumulate in biological systems. Increased interest in organic farming could help to address this problem.
- 2.11 The next few years are likely to be a time of change within agriculture, as changes to the Common Agricultural Policy are implemented. The National Park Authority will need to work closely with the farming community to ensure that Exmoor's farmed landscape is conserved and with MAFF to ensure that agri-environment schemes are effective.

### Conservation of Farmland Features

- 2.12 The most effective way of protecting important features is for the farm to be entered into the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme. This scheme is voluntary for those whose land is eligible. Statutory protection is very limited on farmland, being confined to a few areas of unimproved grassland in Sites of Special Scientific Interest and some archaeological features that are scheduled. The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 require that the National Park Authority be consulted before any hedges are removed, and the Authority can refuse permission for the removal of a limited number of hedges that satisfy specific criteria. There is a need for criteria in the legislation to be widened. Very few beech hedges are protected by this legislation and no banks or dry stone walls.

Farmland



Bye Common - Heather Lowther

## OBJECTIVE 2/1

Farmed land to be managed so as to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the wildlife, natural beauty and cultural heritage of Exmoor.

### Policies

- P2/1 Environmentally friendly farming will be encouraged and supported through a range of mechanisms including agri-environment schemes.*
- P2/2 These schemes will take into account habitat quality and potential, including statutory and County wildlife site status*
- P2/3 The protection and management of ecologically and historically important hedges and other boundary features of Exmoor, including watercourses, and locally distinctive features such as beech hedgebanks, will be encouraged.*

### Farmland Wildlife

- 2.13** Agricultural improvement and intensification has reduced substantially the area of semi-natural grassland. There is a significant amount of semi-improved grassland on Exmoor where light and irregular applications of artificial fertilisers and lime has reduced the variety of plant life. The sward is still largely of native grasses with some of the more robust herbs such as yarrow, black knapweed and birds foot trefoil present.
- 2.14** The greatest wildlife gains could be achieved by stopping further inputs of fertiliser and lime to these grasslands. It is, however, recognised that sufficient stock levels are required to maintain appropriate grazing. The separation of the improved permanent

grassland into two tiers in the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme should help tackle this issue, except that at present the incentive to join the higher tier is inadequate. The introduction into the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme of payments for works to benefit UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species such as hornet robber fly, high brown and marsh fritillaries are much welcomed.

- 2.15** Fields are productively managed right up to the boundaries, reducing the wildlife potential of hedges, banks, ditches and streams. Wider field margins in both arable fields and pastures would greatly benefit wildlife. The change from spring to autumn sowing of cereals has reduced the winter feeding available on stubbles for many seed-eating birds, notably finches and buntings. Many of the species have declined on Exmoor and nationally as a result.

## OBJECTIVE 2/2

To increase the extent of semi-natural habitats and the richness and variety of native species within farmland.

### Policies

- P2/4 The conservation management and restoration of species-rich and semi-improved grassland will be encouraged.*
- P2/5 The integration of biodiversity targets into agri-environment schemes will be encouraged.*
- P2/6 Management of land to achieve biodiversity targets will be encouraged.*

## Sustainable Farming Systems

- 2.16** Most farms on Exmoor rely on imported feed, fertiliser and straw. Present subsidy payments have encouraged an increase in stock numbers. It would be better for the environment if farms were less intensive and more self-reliant. Organic farming is an extension of this philosophy.
- 2.17** A grant system is available nationally for conversion to organic farming and the possibilities for the introduction of organic systems of farming on Exmoor should be explored with the farming industry. No incentive scheme is available to encourage sustainable systems that are not organic, but the opportunity exists to explore these farming systems through the National Park Authority's Farm Conservation Scheme in conjunction with Devon County Council's initiative into sustainable farming. There could also be opportunities to consider sustainable energy systems on farms generating energy from crops, including coppice, as well as wind, water and solar power.
- 2.18** The change from a mixed farming system to intensive pastoral agriculture has also had a profound effect on farmland wildlife. This has been well documented for birds but must also be true for invertebrates and plants, especially arable weeds. Even a modest proportion of farms reverting to a more mixed regime could help to reverse the decline in wildlife, although much depends upon the intensity of the farming. Replacement of pasture by intensive arable with high fertiliser and pesticide inputs and without winter stubble is not likely to be beneficial.

## OBJECTIVE 2/3

To increase the extent of farmed land managed by more sustainable methods.

### Policies

- P2/7 Encouragement will be given for sustainable and organic farming systems.*
- P2/8 Encouragement will be given for sustainable energy systems on farms.*

## Game Shooting

- 2.19** Game shooting can provide valuable extra income to a farm or estate and also generates considerable economic benefit to the wider community in the National Park.
- 2.20** However, high densities of reared gamebirds can damage hedges, unimproved grassland and the ground flora and invertebrate fauna of woodland. Their droppings can change vegetation and wildlife can be affected by vermin control and chemicals used in management of game birds, such as disinfectants and the antibiotics added to their food. Pens and feeding areas can also be unsightly and their siting affects vegetation, as does the creation of tracks and planting of conifers for roosting and shelter. Game crops can also have a major impact on the beauty of the landscape if their siting, shape and composition are not designed to fit in with existing field patterns.
- 2.21** More positively, recent research by the Game Conservancy Trust, has shown that, if managed properly, game crops can make a significant contribution to providing winter feeding areas for many farmland birds which have suffered substantial declines since the 1970s.

## OBJECTIVE 2/4

To ensure that game shooting is managed sustainably so as to avoid adverse impacts on landscape, wildlife and public safety.

### Policies

- P2/9 Good practice relating to game shooting, the environment and public safety will be encouraged.*

## Understanding the Farmland Landscape

- 2.22** The farming landscape has the potential to change rapidly as farmers respond to economic pressures and changing agricultural practices. Valuable areas and features could be lost unwittingly unless they are identified. It is therefore important to survey unimproved grassland, hedgerow systems and other historic features. Monitoring will then be necessary to keep a check on their well-being.
- 2.23** Many farmland birds and insects have declined drastically in the last 50 years and information is needed on the factors affecting farmland wildlife. Much research is already being carried out nationally, but it is important that the National Park Authority is involved in this research to ensure that it is relevant to Exmoor.
- 2.24** There are national monitoring systems for birds and insects (particularly butterflies), largely relying on a network of amateur observers. If we are to be sure that agri-environment measures are being effective in the National Park, we must arrange to increase the monitoring effort of these species here. Over 90% of semi-natural grassland in the National Park has been destroyed. Survey and monitoring is needed to target agri-environment schemes more effectively.
- 2.25** However, with the changes likely to occur in farm support, opportunities may arise to restore some of these lost habitats. Research into restoration techniques, and experimentation, is urgently needed. A Farmland Research Strategy must be prepared and implemented to identify and prioritise the research, survey and monitoring.
- 2.26** It is also important to increase understanding of the importance of agriculture to the past development of the Exmoor landscape and its future conservation and enhancement.

## OBJECTIVE 2/5

To improve knowledge about, and understanding of, the farmland landscape of Exmoor.

### Policies

- P2/10 Encouragement will be given for research, survey and monitoring of the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of Exmoor's farmland.*
- P2/11 Opportunities will be sought to increase public understanding of the role of agriculture in the conservation and enhancement of the Exmoor's landscape and wildlife.*



## 3. Vision for Moor and Heath

All Exmoor's existing moor and heath retained and managed to conserve and enhance the variety of wildlife and landscape. The area increased, where appropriate, by reinstating former moor and heath that has been improved for agriculture or planted up forestry.

- 3.1 Exmoor has roughly 190 sq km of moor and heath. This includes 23 out of the 82 types of moor and heath vegetation under the National Vegetation Classification. In broad categories, the moor and heath comprises 70 sq km upland heath; 46 sq km upland grass moor; 39 sq km bracken; 15 sq km lowland heath, including coastal heath, and 20 sq km mosaic of heath or grass and blanket bog. Exmoor is regionally important for its extent of upland and coastal heaths, upland grass moor and blanket bog. It is nationally important within England and Wales for the presence of a wide combination of upland heath types. It has two rare types of heathland within the National Vegetation Classification: bristle bent (*Agrostis curtisii*)/ western gorse (*Ulex gallii*) heath and ling (*Calluna vulgaris*)/ western gorse heath. These are of international importance.
- 3.2 Moors and heaths in general are rare internationally. Britain has 10 -15% of all the world's wet moorland and peatland. In Europe, heathland can be found all along the Atlantic seaboard from southern Norway to northern Portugal, but Britain has the most as it provides ideal growing conditions for ling, the most common heathland plant.
- 3.3 While they may not be truly natural, moors and heaths mostly contain plants that have not been introduced by people. They are not very diverse habitats in terms of variety of species, but the species they contain contribute greatly to overall biodiversity in that many are not found in other habitats. Exmoor's moors and heaths support nationally important populations of whinchat, stonechat and heath fritillary butterflies.
- 3.4 Moors and heaths are a product of farming. Most are still farmed, providing grazing for sheep and cattle and nectar for honey and are therefore an important food resource and part of the local economy. They are also a valuable recreational resource, providing much opportunity for walking and riding. They are large areas of relatively wild and open scenery, which include many of the attributes of Exmoor that people consider important.
- 3.5 The habitat has been in serious decline over the last two centuries. Exmoor lost over 65% of its moor and heath in the first half of the 20th century and over 20% in the second half, mostly to agricultural improvement. This was echoed throughout England and Wales, while Scotland lost 26% in the second half of the century, largely to grassland and forestry.
- 3.6 The pace of active reclamation has slowed, but it is estimated that nationally 70% of moor and heath is vulnerable or in decline, often through changes in land management. For example, intensification of grazing has resulted in shrubby plants such as whortleberry and heather being replaced by grasses, rushes and bracken and gorse spreading on heath.
- 3.7 Whilst these changes can be detrimental for many moorland species, they may provide new habitats for other species and future management requires care and is demanding on resources.

Of greatest concern is the increase in certain introduced plants that support little native wildlife, such as rhododendron. Once established, rhododendron can completely take over heathland habitats and demands substantial resources to bring under control.

- 3.8 Many European and all English heaths and moors are threatened by nitrogen deposition from the air, which also reduces shrubby species. Acid rain also affects Exmoor. In general the capacity of Exmoor soils to absorb the increase in acidity has meant that vegetation has not been affected but there are indications that the limits of this capacity are being reached and changes are beginning to result.
- 3.9 Global warming, if it results in drier conditions, will also be disastrous for moorlands and increase the spread of bracken, which is already a problem. Indications are that winters will be wetter but average air temperatures are set to increase by 3°C in the next hundred years, increasing evaporation. Thus soils may become drier in summer and harmful summer fires may become more frequent.

### Conservation of Moor and Heath

- 3.10 Moor and heath is one of the National Park's most important resources and has many valued attributes. Given this importance and the fact that such habitats have severely declined and are internationally under threat, it is paramount that there should be no further decline in the extent or diversity of such habitats and that they should be managed to conserve and enhance them and reinstated where possible.
- 3.11 Moors and heaths provide the largest areas of semi-natural habitat and a sense of wildness rare in southern Britain. The large blocks which comprise the North Exmoor SSSI provide the greatest potential within the National Park to create a sense of wilderness where wildlife seems to predominate.
- 3.12 Currently, about 88% of Exmoor's moor and heath is legally protected through SSSI status. This gives it statutory legal protection and much of the heather-dominated moorland has now been proposed by English Nature as a Special Area of Conservation indicating its importance in a European context. Some important areas of coastal heath remain unprotected, as do many of the smaller fragments of moor and heath. This does not mean that such areas are not valuable as they often contain a great diversity of wildlife and most are recorded as County Wildlife Sites. In some areas we simply do not know what is there. There is a need for greater protection for such fragments of moor and heath and greater survey of their wildlife, especially on privately owned land.
- 3.13 Starting in 1979, Exmoor National Park Authority pioneered management agreements whereby landowners were compensated for loss of potential income through undertaking conservation measures, particularly on moor and heath. Over a number of years, this scheme provided protection from agricultural improvement for 19,000 Hectares of Exmoor's moors and heaths.

3.14 Since then there has been a complete change in policy nationally towards moorland and this has been reflected on Exmoor. Instead of offering grants to farmers to plough up and improve moor and heath for agriculture, so called 'agri-environment schemes' offer payments for conservation management of this habitat and for the restoration of damaged areas. Thus, the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, introduced by MAFF in 1993, has largely superseded former management agreements, although there is still a case for 'top up' schemes to bridge gaps in the types of work the scheme covers. The introduction of environmental cross-compliance conditions to livestock subsidy schemes, together with Environmentally Sensitive Area payments, have significantly reduced damage to moor and heath vegetation from overgrazing and winter feeding.

3.15 Intensive and uncontrolled burning appears to be one of the greatest obstacles against improving the biodiversity of Exmoor's moors and heaths. Frequent burning of grass moorland is often detrimental to conservation yet it continues, damaging wet moorland and upland bogs and impoverishing biodiversity. However, burning on drier areas is a necessary part of their maintenance. Each area of moor and heath is different and management needs to be carefully tailored to the needs of individual species and towards targets for the overall extent and condition of particular habitats. Bringing Exmoor's moorlands into such scientifically based management for conservation purposes is one of the greatest challenges of this plan.

3.16 There is a high priority to protect vulnerable areas against inappropriate burning and for long-term research to demonstrate how careful scientific management can benefit both farming and wildlife. As one reason given for burning is for tick control, there is a need for more research on tick control, ticks and tick-borne diseases and to put to practical use the information that is already available.

### OBJECTIVE 3/1

To retain Exmoor's existing moor and heath and improve management to increase the age structure and dominance of heather, where appropriate, and the diversity of other native species.

#### Policies

- P3/1 *There will be the strongest possible presumption in favour of the conservation of the natural flora, fauna and landscape of areas of moor and heath.*
- P3/2 *Priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of moor and heath habitats identified in the Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan and grant aid targeted at those habitats.*
- P3/3 *Support will be given for the management of all areas of moor and heath by traditional grazing and burning systems that are compatible with the conservation of the natural beauty, wildlife and historic features.*

#### Important Moor and Heath Habitats

3.17 Exmoor's moors and heaths contain a great variety of plant communities, some rarer than others. At present rare communities are given no separate management to ensure their survival or spread. Among the most natural communities are the sedge and bog moss communities of Exmoor's blanket peat. These plant communities have diminished considerably over the last two

centuries through peat cutting, drainage, heavy grazing and burning and still appear to be in decline. Such areas must be given a high priority for conservation management.

3.18 Areas totally dominated by purple moor grass (*Molinia*) have replaced large areas of former sedge and moss communities. *Molinia* is an integral part of Exmoor's moorland vegetation, but it supports little wildlife when it becomes dominant to the exclusion of other plants. There is a clear need to diversify such areas through reduction in management practices that favour *Molinia*.

3.19 The most diverse and valuable parts of moors and heaths are often the fringe areas where there is a natural succession between different habitats such as broadleaved woodland and heath, coastal heath and coastal grassland, heath and moorland, moorland and bog. In order to maintain such areas there has to be a balance between allowing the succession to progress in some areas and reversing it in others.

3.20 Careful management of such areas is necessary and it is important not to draw up rigid boundaries between habitats with contrasting management practices. On heathland fringes there is often a problem of invasion of bracken, gorse, scrub and non-native species such as rhododendron. Such areas need careful monitoring and often very labour intensive management. There is a need for accurate information on the extent and spread of bracken, gorse and rhododendron, the reasons for their spread and their benefits and drawbacks.

3.21 The process of preparing plans to increase biodiversity began as a result of the UK's commitment to the Biodiversity Convention at Rio in 1992. Among the habitat action plans prepared nationally, which are relevant to moor and heath, are plans for upland and lowland heath and blanket bog. Regional plans have also been prepared for upland and lowland heath. This work has provided the context for the Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan. In view of the importance of moor and heath in the National Park, four Habitat Action Plans that are relevant to this landscape type are being or have been prepared: Upland and Lowland Heath, Blanket Bog and Bracken and Scrub.

### OBJECTIVE 3/2

To extend and enhance important moor and heath habitats.

#### Policies

- P3/4 *Support will be given for agri-environment schemes and other measures to encourage sympathetic management of important moor and heath habitats.*
- P3/5 *Efforts will continue to ensure that all important areas of moor and heath on Exmoor are fully protected.*

#### Re-establishment of Moor and Heath

3.22 Some 5,000 Ha of moor and heath on Exmoor have been lost since World War II. About 80% was improved for agriculture and the rest was planted with trees. A complete policy change means that there are now opportunities to return some of these areas to heathland.

3.23 A national target for the re-establishment of 6000 ha by 2010 has been set for lowland heath. Exmoor's Biodiversity Action Plan has set targets of 200 ha by 2010 for lowland heath and 100 ha for upland heath.

3.24 Re-establishment of heath by clearing plantations is quite straightforward, as there has been little change to the soil. The same process on agriculturally improved soils is more complicated especially if the archaeological resource is to be protected. Research and field trials will have to precede any large scale projects. The research has been outlined in the Moorland Research Strategy.

### OBJECTIVE 3/3

To undertake research on techniques for the re-establishment of moor and heath and select suitable sites for implementation in order to achieve targets for heath and moorland restoration set out in the Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan.

#### Policies

- P3/6 *The re-establishment of upland and lowland heath on former heathland sites will be sought.*

#### Conservation of Moor and Heath Species

3.25 Many species that occur on moor and heath have suffered substantial declines in recent years. Species such as cranberry and upland waders such as curlew and snipe may have declined due to degradation of blanket bog resulting from drainage, burning and overgrazing. Numbers of waders breeding in the South West generally have declined drastically in recent years. Strong action will be required to prevent the extinction of lapwing, curlew and snipe as breeding species on Exmoor. Others such as high brown fritillary have suffered from changing farming practice resulting in less cattle grazing of bracken slopes.

3.26 Many species have declined where heathland has been planted with conifers. Usually these species have very specific requirements and so need management of moor and heath to be tailored to their needs. A few species such as nightjar may also benefit from management of plantations. Species action plans are being drawn up for three moor and heath species - high brown and heath fritillary butterflies and nightjar - and other plans will follow as the Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan is developed.

### OBJECTIVE 3/4

To ensure that the variety, populations and ranges of species found on moor and heath are maintained and that research, survey and special management is carried out to ensure the survival of important and vulnerable species.

#### Policies

- P3/7 *The conservation of important and vulnerable species of animals and plants of moor and heath will be encouraged.*

#### Common Land

3.27 Some of Exmoor's most important moor and heath is common land. Registered commons amount to 4,581 Ha (27% of Section 3 moor and heath). It can be difficult to get agreement over management due to the number of people involved in the common, some of whom may have conflicting interests. Entering a common into an agri-environment scheme is often complicated by the fact that the sum of the registered rights far exceeds the carrying capacity of the common. On Exmoor there are also two moorland blocks where several farmers have non-exclusive grazing rights on the same land and these areas can suffer some of the problems of commons.

*“ To retain Exmoor's existing moor and heath and improve management to increase the age structure and dominance of heather, where appropriate, and the diversity of other native species ”*

3.28 While much progress has been made, several commons are still showing signs of overgrazing. In these cases the National Park Authority supports the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in enforcing the environmental conditions required under the various subsidy schemes, coupled with the incentive for suitable stocking offered through the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme.

### OBJECTIVE 3/5

To secure the positive management of registered common land to reflect National Park purposes.

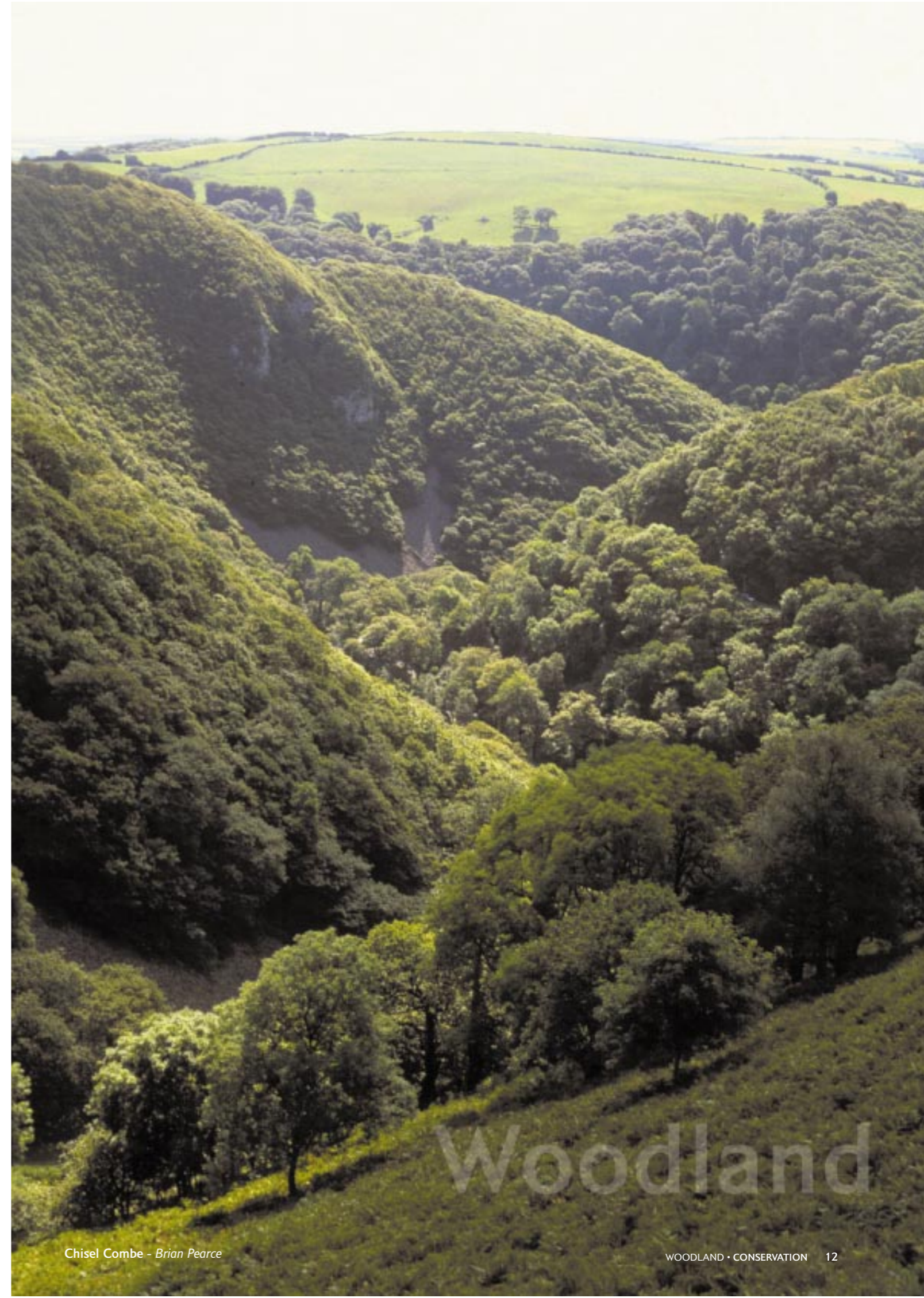
#### Policies

P3/8 Encouragement will be given for the management of common land in line with National Park purposes.

### Responding to environmental change

3.29 The policies for the natural environment assume little change in environmental factors affecting wildlife, habitats and land use across the National Park. However, significant changes are possible within the timescale of this plan, for example, those that may arise from global processes of climate change or from any major restructuring of the livestock industry. Given the scale of these potential changes, the National Park Authority and its partners may need to consider the potential for more radical habitat change on Exmoor to maintain overall ecological benefits.

*“To extend and enhance important Moor and Heath habitats”*



Woodland

# 4. Vision for Woodland

A rich mix of woodland rich in wildlife, adding to the beauty of the landscape and providing opportunities for understanding and enjoyment. Native woodland to be extended onto new sites and into former ancient woodlands. Individual trees and landscape features to be conserved and new features to be created in keeping with the character of the local landscape. Conifer plantations to be well designed with a diversity of wildlife. Woodlands to be sustainably managed and to continue to produce a variety of products for local use.

- 4.1 There are about 8,400 Ha of woodland on Exmoor, representing 12% of the area of the National Park. About half of this woodland is broad-leaved, of which about 2,000 Ha are ancient semi-natural woodlands. These are usually the most important for wildlife.
- 4.2 Exmoor has a high proportion of woodland cover compared to other parts of England, and a higher than average percentage of ancient semi-natural woodland. Woodland systems on Exmoor also tend to be large when compared to the rest of the country. The National Park Authority owns about 5% of the woodland area; the National Trust about 20%; Forest Enterprise about 14% and the Crown Estate a further 6%. The remainder, about 55%, is privately owned.
- 4.3 The National Trust's Horner Woodlands are important enough to have been declared a National Nature Reserve. Significant areas of woodland have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and some have recently been designated as Special Areas of Conservation. Many of the woodlands contain a profusion of lichens, some of them rare. There are four varieties of whitebeam that are found only on Exmoor. The coastal woodlands, which extend to the shoreline in places, are unique in the region.
- 4.4 Trees and woodlands are also important in less measurable ways. They are attractive features of the landscape and have been identified by many people as one of the most valued aspects of Exmoor.
- 4.5 In many of Exmoor's most important woodlands there has been little management this century. While this may have improved their chances of remaining in a natural state, in some cases the lack of management means that their conservation value is being threatened. Woodlands may be even-aged and lacking in other native tree and shrub species. They are sometimes overgrazed by deer or livestock.
- 4.6 A serious threat facing some of the woodland systems arises from colonisation by non-native species such as Rhododendron ponticum and sycamore. The character of some woodlands is changing through an increase in species such as sweet chestnut and beech. There is some debate as to whether beech is native to Exmoor. Beech does not appear to have grown on the moor before Roman times although it may naturally have colonised the area by now. While it is part of the landscape character of Exmoor, it can cause problems for conservation in woodlands.
- 4.7 the National Park Authority's priorities for positive management of trees and woodlands on Exmoor over the five year period 1997-2002 are set out in the Woodland Action Plan. The National Park Authority also provides guidance on woodland management and published Trees and Woodlands on Exmoor, A Guide to Conservation and Management, in January 1997. The Management Plan should be read in conjunction with the Woodland Action Plan and Guide.

## Woodland Conservation

- 4.8 The most important woodlands for landscape and nature conservation are those defined on the Section 3 Conservation Map. This map includes all SSSI and Special Area of Conservation woodland and other ancient semi-natural woodlands on Exmoor above 2 Ha in size.

### OBJECTIVE 4/1

**Exmoor's woodlands to be managed in line with National Park purposes.**

#### Policies

- P4/1 *Encouragement will be given to the appropriate management of ancient semi-natural woodland and proposals that might adversely affect them will be strongly resisted.*
- P4/2 *Efforts to promote the conservation management of Exmoor Woodlands will be encouraged, including the control of invasive species.*

## Extending and Restoring Native Woodland

- 4.9 Exmoor has a significant proportion of the UK and world total of the remaining Western Oakwoods. The National Biodiversity Action Plan for upland oak woodland proposes expanding the area of oak woodland on open ground by about 10% by 2005. On Exmoor this equates to the planting or natural regeneration of about 200 ha of oak woodland. Much of this restoration will involve removal of rhododendron from existing woodlands but some will be from replacement of conifer plantations. About 1000 Ha of ancient woodland sites on Exmoor have been converted to commercial plantations.

### OBJECTIVE 4/2

**To extend the area of new native woodland within the National Park in line with national targets and to restore former ancient woodland.**

#### Policies

- P4/3 *The creation of new native woodlands in appropriate locations where they do not conflict with other conservation objectives will be encouraged.*
- P4/4 *Emphasis in the extension and restoration of native woodland will be on natural regeneration and planting with stock of local provenance.*
- P4/5 *To encourage the restoration of native woodland on former ancient woodland sites in line with national targets*

## Individual Trees and Features

- 4.10 Veteran trees, orchards, parklands, copses and individual trees are often distinctive features of the Exmoor landscape and may be important habitats in their own right. Their conservation requires careful management. The National Park Authority has a duty under section 197 of the Local Planning Act to make provision for protection and planting of trees when granting planning permission. It also has powers to make Tree Preservation Orders and create Conservation Areas, which include tree protection.
- 4.11 There is a need to be more proactive in the identification of important trees. At the same time it may be helpful to review existing Tree Preservation Orders as in the case of groups of trees or woodlands they may present difficulties for management.

### OBJECTIVE 4/3

**To conserve individual trees, orchards and woodland features where they are characteristic of the Exmoor landscape or important for wildlife.**

#### Policies

- P4/6 *Tree Preservation Orders will be used to protect important trees, veteran trees and orchards where appropriate.*
- P4/7 *The conservation of current and potential future veteran trees and orchards will be promoted.*
- P4/8 *Orchards and their products will be promoted.*

## Conifer Plantations

- 4.12 About 36% of Exmoor's woodlands are conifer plantations. Most are growing on former heathland or ancient woodland sites. The priority is to restore such areas to their previous semi-natural habitats. Restoration has most often depended upon voluntary agreements and is likely to be a slow process as time should be allowed for the commercial potential of plantations to be realised and for alternative sites for plantations to be found. Where this is not possible or where such habitats did not exist, redesign of these plantations could improve the landscape, nature conservation and recreational interest of these sites.

### OBJECTIVE 4/4

**To ensure that conifer plantations are well designed, rich in wildlife and sited to allow restoration of semi-natural habitats.**

#### Policies

- P4/9 *Government bodies, other organisations and private owners will be encouraged to achieve the redesign of commercial plantations.*
- P4/10 *Forest Design Plans will include biodiversity targets.*

## Understanding the Woodland Resource

- 4.13 In order to conserve and enhance trees and woodland on Exmoor, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the resource. The National Park Authority has recently produced a Woodland Research Strategy which details priority areas for further investigation. The main strands to the research programme are:
  - to provide baseline information about features of significance in Exmoor's woodlands
  - to monitor the effects of management and of natural processes on woodland
  - to carry out experimentation into all aspects of the woodland environment, with particular reference to the testing of innovative management techniques aimed at enhancing Exmoor's woodlands.
  - to disseminate the results of research, in an accessible form, to other bodies landowners and the general public.

### OBJECTIVE 4/5

**To gain a deeper understanding of Exmoor's trees and woodlands through a comprehensive programme of research and survey work derived from the Exmoor Woodland Research Strategy.**

*“ To extend the area of new native woodland within the National Park in line with national targets and to restore former ancient woodland”*