

The Langdon Hills Living Landscape



An initiative to cherish, uphold and improve the rich landscape and wildlife of the Langdon Hills, for the long-term benefit of both its residents and its visitors.



As part of a national strategy, Essex Wildlife Trust has taken on the vital business of identifying and developing a network of Living Landscapes, based upon natural regions and features of the county that are of particular landscape and wildlife importance.

Living Landscapes -- a vision for the future of Essex

The *Living Landscape* is number 38 in a list of 80 areas identified by Essex Wildlife Trust as being worthy of such designation. As such, it enjoys the recognition and support of the relevant local authorities. It is implicitly dependent upon a great deal of voluntary effort and public goodwill, invested in a variety of ways.

It is also fully consistent with government policy, with its shift away from simply relying upon isolated nature reserves, in favour of creating and supporting ecological networks, or wildlife corridors. These recognise the need for wildlife to move more freely across the landscape, to the long-term advantage of both our own interests and those of natural biodiversity.

The business in hand

The Langdon Hills are well endowed with nature reserves and other protected sites, but these are not enough when it comes to creating spaces to find new homes and food and, crucially, maintain appropriate healthy game ponds. Moreover, those reserves and protected sites themselves need adequate levels of survey, support and management - and they are superb resources for education, recreation and public enjoyment.

It is the business of the *Living Landscape* strategy to promote the interests of the indigenous wildlife, encourage educational and recreational activities on the public open spaces and nature reserves - and support local economic interests and activities. In fact, this helps support sustainable development and consumption patterns, and the local community in general.



It major aim is to uphold the beauty and integrity of the Langdon Hills, encouraging pride in what is one of the loveliest parks of the county – a unique landscape that needs to be cherished, not so it is in a wider area where residential and industrial development necessarily comes at a high priority.

The richness of Langdon

Langdon Hills constitutes an extensive, beautiful and geologically-diverse ridge, bearing an ecologically rich mosaic of natural and semi-natural habitats, including woodlands, enhanced meadows, heathland and wetlands, in addition to conservatively-managed farmland. The ridge constitutes a vital green lung for adjacent urban areas, with much public amenity being based upon country parks, nature reserves, golf courses, riding centres, footways and busways.



Extensive woodlands

Some of the woods represent fragments of the original forest which covered much of the region. Accordingly they contain many indicators of ancient woodland – the kinds of trees, plants and animals which are the best likely to occur in such recently-formed woodlands. Woodland Warblers, WSP, Redwing, Song Sparrow, Linnet, some of the rarer species of Wood Thrush, and great swarms of springtime Bluebirds all indicate the antiquity of the woodlands concerned. Some of the heathland are correspondingly ancient, being linear fragments of the original 'wetbush', and contain similar rarities.

Other woodlands are much more recent in origin, created or self-grown within the past couple of hundred years. Some are on the sandy and gravelly hillsides, while others are on the clay loam down the slope. Put together, all these woodlands make up one of the most fascinating landscapes in the county.

Special woodland



Postle-ridge Langdon heath is far more long-established woodland, made of 11 species-rich, tree clumps that are in the county. Three of these clumps, even older than all the rest, are now designated as sites of special scientific interest. They contain a remarkable variety of wild plants, many of which have become scarce, given that over 50% of England's pre-1945 traditional woodland has been destroyed. Some of them contain large numbers of wild orchids, particularly Green veined orchids, along with many other wild flowers. In fact, the heathland supports a remarkable diversity of insects and other invertebrates, including several rare British bee species.

Rare wildflowers

A detailed survey of the wild flowers of the Langdon hills, published in the 1940s, demonstrated just how rich the local flora is. It includes many species which have become rare, because they are associated with old woodlands, hedgerows and meadows. Incredibly, 11 species of wild orchid have been recorded on the slopes of the hills, as well as such rarities as Spotted Frit and Adonis-vivipara Frit. One species, rediscovered on Langdon in the 1980s, Long-stemmed Saxifrage, was formerly considered to be extinct in Britain.

Importance for bird migration

Band-ringing and long-term observations have made it clear that the Langdon ridge is important for migrating birds, particularly the smaller songbirds. Substantial numbers of these pass over the ridge and through its woodlands in spring and autumn, en route to breeding areas further north. Song Sparrows, Chaffinches, Field Sparrows and several warblers are among the species passing through. Other species migrate into this area to breed, including Hairy Woodpeckers, Turbot Gulls, Cuckoos, Spotted Flycatchers and various warblers. Substantial flocks of winter migrants descend upon the woodlands and hedgerows in food, including Fieldfares, Redwings and, some years, Starlings.

Butterflies and moths in profusion



The Langdon ridge is one of the best locations in Essex, and possibly in the whole of East Angles, for butterflies, in terms of the number of residents and visiting species, and also in terms of the sheer numbers of individuals in some species. The data here in terms of residents, hedgerows and woodland has to be the best in the area. Thirty-three species have been recorded in the past 40 years, and in a given year you can expect to see 20-30 species. In recent years three new species (common hairstreak, Marbled White and Silver-washed Frit) have colonised the area.

It has lately been shown that Langdon has a remarkable moth fauna, including several new species. This again makes the area very important for maintaining the biodiversity of Essex.

Small mammals, reptiles and amphibians

Once again, Llangollen is incredibly rich, supporting more of the small mammals which are under threat in other areas, including all three species of shrew.

Common Frog, three rare species (Great, Bury and Field), Yellow-bellied Frog, Greenish, Moats and Wharfedale. Four reptile species and six amphibian add to the diversity of the region.



Birds are well established locally. In addition to the normal song-birds, a few are sandy-coloured (perched).

Sustaining the Living Landscape



Elsewhere there is talk of creating Living Landscapes. We don't know yet – we already find an astonishingly rich area. But we do need to take some very imaginative steps if it is to continue to be so good, especially in view of rising demands upon the area.

We are starting to think in the longer term, looking at that wonderful traditional in-pool-lands, and maintaining our beloved flower-rich meadows, and referring back to all that just how fascinating and valuable it all is.

We need to restore and improve the series of ponds which have long been an important feature, and we need to approach the issue fully the importance of the network of hedgerows which links up the wildlife habitats. The central role of the local authority in managing arable verges for wildlife needs to be extended to new sites.

What happens next?

A definitive report document needs to be finished, reflecting the various expectations and possibilities. Already the original proposals have been registered. It will then be published and circulated to relevant landowners and businesses, schools, charity organisations, local authorities and interested individuals.

Meanwhile application is already being made for match-funded grants with which to tackle some of the projects which are commending themselves – projects such as the restoration of some of the traditional ponds in Langston, Spring in Chatterton way, with a view to feeding some of the Gaddy-bellied traditional conservation lakes; Cornish coracle work (with necessary licences); installing information boards; writing and printing useful materials; support for educational projects (as much as possible, and much will depend upon voluntary effort and local goodwill, hoping to maintain a role and benefit environment, will hopefully become a way of life.



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The report document will be available at:
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