

Statement of ecological consideration

The value of Stoke Park for wildlife has been reviewed during the process of writing the Stoke Park Conservation Management Plan. Our analysis included a full review of all ecological data relating to Stoke Park as held by the Bristol Regional Environmental Record Centre (BRERC), and a review of ecological reports commissioned by Bristol City Council. BRERC have agreed that we can publish data provided by them (which runs to several hundred pages of species records). We have published the ecological reports for Stoke Park that have been undertaken / commissioned by the Council. The location of badger setts and other sensitive species data are not published to avoid potential disturbance. No active badger setts have been identified in the current working areas.

The Conservation Management Plan sets out a number of aims, including the restoration of a more balanced mix of ancient and historic woodland, hedgerows, open down, pasture woodland and grazed parkland. The restoration aims have been informed by a number of considerations including the review of ecology and Stoke Park's historic interests, reflecting its grade II Registered Landscape status, and the park's current uses.

To begin to take forward the Conservation Management Plan a programme of scrub removal is now underway, alongside restoration of hedgerows and, later this year, selective thinning within defined woodland areas. The works are part funded by Natural England, who have given a substantial grant under their Countryside Stewardship Scheme (£337,000 capital plus £184,000 revenue over 10-years). Natural England supports the best outcome for the important features at Stoke Park; this will be a balance consideration of the sites historic importance, its ecology and landscape value.

Scrub is a recognised wildlife habitat and certainly has value to certain species, particularly some birds. But scrub habitat is common, and in the case of Stoke Park is preventing the restoration of nationally important species rich grassland and parkland with historic trees. This is why we are removing scrub from certain areas within Stoke Park.

Many of the scrub areas within Stoke Park are dense and impracticable to survey for certain wildlife such as hedgehogs. With this in mind, and as is common practice when managing landscape change, we have required our contractor Ecovigour to assess potential harm to wildlife immediately ahead of and during works. We have published the reports that have been prepared by Ecovigour, which demonstrate that these observations were done and, when necessary, working methods adjusted to avoid harm to wildlife. We will continue to publish reports produced by our contractor as they continue to monitor works and avoid harm to wildlife.

Reflecting the importance of scrub to birds we have avoided clearance during the 'bird nesting season', which typically runs from the beginning of March to mid-August, but this can vary year-on-year. All scrub removal and hedgerow works at Stoke Park (except replanting) stopped at the end of February. We have retained a small percentage of scrub (around 5% within the areas worked) to continue to provide some habitat for nesting birds and invertebrates; this is good practice when removing scrub where the aim is to restore species rich grassland and is detailed in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Further, we have selected areas of retained scrub to reflect where there are pockets of archaeology, where the scrub is more diverse for wildlife and to provide good scrub to grassland margins. Larger expanses of scrub within Stoke Park are not being touched and birds and other species still have access to scrub on other parts of the estate.

Some species of bats can roost in trees. Our contractor has followed protocol in relation to bats to ensure that trees that have been cut as part of hedge restoration works did not contain any features to suggest that they were used as roost sites.

We will be conducting further wildlife surveys from April, as we prepare for selective thinning works in various woodland areas later in 2018 to ensure that we approach these works in the right way. The results of these surveys and any recommendations will be made available online. We also want to support local people's knowledge of the ecology of Stoke Park and we will provide support to volunteers in wildlife recording.

Through this current restoration programme we are restoring some 50 acres of species rich grassland and historic parkland, 1.7 miles of hedgerow, planting five acres of new woodland, planting an orchard comprising 200 traditional varieties of apples and pears and planting 70 parkland trees.