Forest Research

Forestry Statistics

Chapter 5: Environment

2025

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OFFICIAL STATISTICS Accredited

The Research Agency of the Forestry Commission

Forest Research is the research agency of the Forestry Commission and is the leading UK organisation engaged in forestry and tree related research. The Agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, data, technical support and consultancy services.

Contents

Introduction

This chapter presents a range of information about the woodland environment, mostly using sources that are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. They are included to provide additional context to the topic.

Estimates for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are included, where possible, in addition to GB or UK totals. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

All of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released.

Figures in tables have been independently rounded, so may not add to the totals shown. Percentage changes quoted in this release are based on unrounded figures.

Key findings

The main findings are:

- In 2013, the total area of native woodland in Great Britain is estimated to be around 1.51 million hectares (49% of all woodland in Great Britain).
- In 2013, non-native coniferous woodland is the single largest habitat type in Great Britain, accounting for 1.29 million hectares (42%).
- Following a period of long-term decline through the 1970s and 1980s, the woodland bird index remained relatively stable during the 1990s and 2000s. Since 2010 woodland bird populations have continued to decline, with woodland generalist species down by 11% and woodland specialist species down by 18%.
- After moderate declines through the 1990s, butterfly abundance in woodland has remained relatively stable since the mid-2000s, and has shown no significant change in the short term.
- Around three-quarters of respondents (76%) to the UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2025 agreed with the statement "action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases".

5.1 Woodland types and habitats

National Forest Inventory (NFI) reports on woodland ecological condition provide estimates of the areas of woodland types and of woodland habitats in Great Britain. The latest results, published in 2020, are based on data collected during the first survey cycle of the NFI, which ran from 2010 to 2015.

Table 5.1a presents estimates of the extent of each type of woodland from this report. The total area of native woodland in Great Britain is estimated to be around 1.51 million hectares. This equates to around one half (49%) of the woodland area in Great Britain. The proportion of native woodland is highest in England (68%), followed by Wales (48%) and Scotland (32%).

The figures in section 5.1 are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Table 5.1a: Woodland area by woodland type, Great Britain, 2013

thousand hectares

Type of woodland	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
Native	914	150	443	1,507
Near native & fragments	29	7	20	57
Non-native	398	155	908	1,461
Not determinable	2	1	17	20
Total	**1,343**	**313**	**1,388**	**3,045**

Source: NFI Woodland Ecological Condition Report (2020)

Note:

1. The report NFI Woodland Ecological Condition Scoring Methodology provides further details on woodland types.
2. Comparisons with woodland area should not be made as woodland area is defined differently to woodland habitat (with woodland area being greater than habitat area due to the treatment of land uses like open space and clear-fell).
3. Clear-fell and transition land are included in the estimates. Woodland type for some clear-fell and transition land cannot be determined and are assigned as not determinable.
4. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Non-native coniferous woodland is the single largest habitat type in Great Britain (Table 5.1b), accounting for 1.29 million hectares (42%). This is the most common habitat type for Scotland (59%) and Wales (46%). For England, lowland mixed deciduous woodland accounts for over one half (56%) of woodlands.

Table 5.1b: Woodland area by habitat type, Great Britain, 2013

thousand hectares

Habitat type	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
Lowland beech/yew woodland	54	6	1	62
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	748	79	82	909
Native pine woodlands	0	0	124	124
Non-HAP native pinewood	0	0	38	38
Upland birchwoods (Scot), birch dominated upland oakwoods (Eng, Wal)	11	2	120	134
Upland mixed ashwoods	32	7	15	54
Upland oakwoods	44	26	33	103
Wet woodland	78	28	63	169
Wood pasture & parkland	8	0	3	11
Broadleaf habitat NOT classified as priority	19	12	21	53
Non-native coniferous woodland	328	145	819	1,292
Clearfelled and transition	22	6	70	97
Total	**1,344**	**313**	**1,389**	**3,045**

Source: NFI Woodland Ecological Condition Report (2020)

Note:

1. The report NFI Woodland Ecological Condition Scoring Methodology provides further details on habitat types.
2. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

5.2 Populations of wild birds

Bird populations provide a good indication of the broad state of wildlife in the UK. This is because they are a well-studied taxonomic group, enabling a more informed interpretation of observed changes, who occupy a range of habitats while still responding to the same environmental pressures that also operate on other groups of wildlife.

Indices of wild bird populations in the UK are produced annually by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and cover a range of species that are native to the UK. This data has been produced since the early 1970s for the majority of habitat groups, meaning there is considerable long-term data available on the changes in bird populations, which aids in the interpretation of more short-term variation. The latest statistical release on wild bird populations in the UK was published in 2024 and includes data to 2023.

The index for woodland birds was expanded in 2007 to cover 38 species. A further change in 2015 resulted in a reduction to 37 species, of which 12 are generalists and 25 are woodland specialists (those that breed or feed mainly or solely in woodland).

Since the early 1990s, when the majority of species group indices stabilised, the UK woodland bird index has generally been about 20 per cent below the level of the early 1970s, with the decline predominantly in woodland specialist species (Figure 5.1).

Causes for the long-term decline in the woodland bird index may include a lack of diversity in habitats and food sources, loss of habitats and food

sources through damage caused by increasing deer populations, and a reduction in some migratory species following pressures in other parts of the world.

In recent years, woodland bird indices have largely decreased. Since 2010, woodland generalist species have fallen by 11% and woodland specialist species have fallen by 18%, resulting in a fall across all woodland birds of 16% (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Population of wild birds (2010 = 100), UK, 2014 to 2023

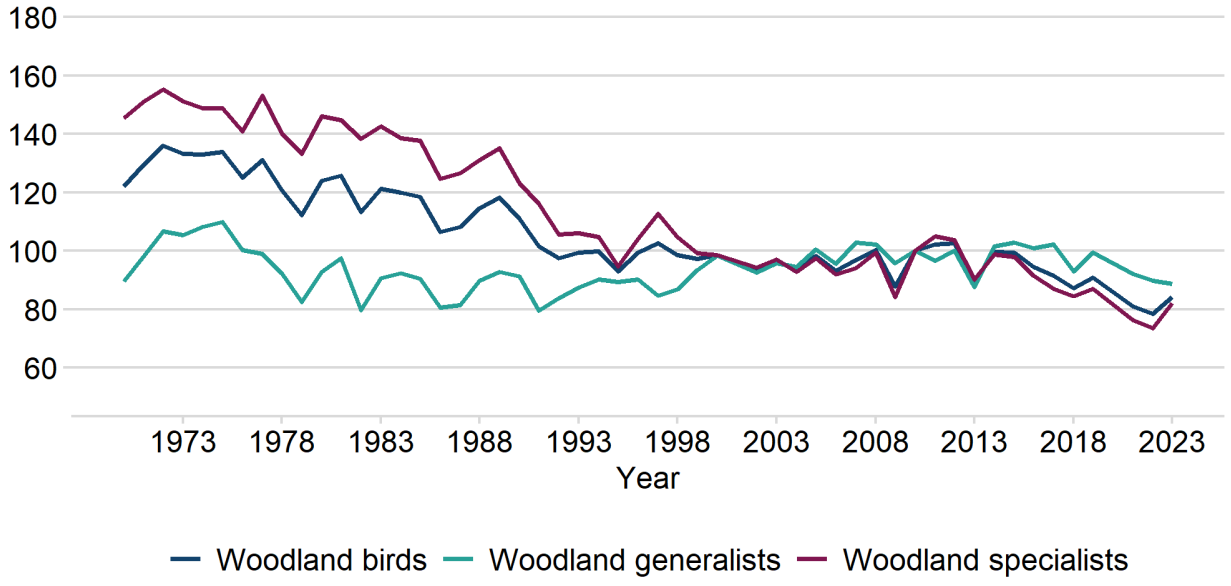
Year	Total breeding birds	Farmland birds	Seabirds	Woodland birds	Woodland generalists	Woodland specialists
2014	97.3	92.4	94.9	99.6	101.5	98.8
2015	99.7	97.6	92.4	99.4	102.7	97.9
2016	97.5	89.4	95.0	94.4	101.0	91.4
2017	98.4	93.2	98.6	91.6	102.1	86.9
2018	90.9	89.4	89.3	87.2	93.1	84.6
2019	94.7	89.4	93.3	90.8	99.5	86.9
2020	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
2021	92.0	87.4	94.8	81.1	92.1	76.3
2022	92.8	83.9	114.2	78.4	89.8	73.5
2023	93.6	83.2	87.1	84.2	88.6	82.2

Source: Wild bird populations in the UK (1970 to 2023), BTO, DEFRA, JNCC, RSPB.

Note:

1. [x] = data not available.

Figure 5.1: Woodland bird index (2010 = 100), UK, 1970 to 2023



Source: Wild bird populations in the UK (1970 to 2023), BTO, DEFRA, JNCC, RSPB.

Notes:

1. Data not available in 2001 or 2020.

5.3 Populations of woodland butterflies

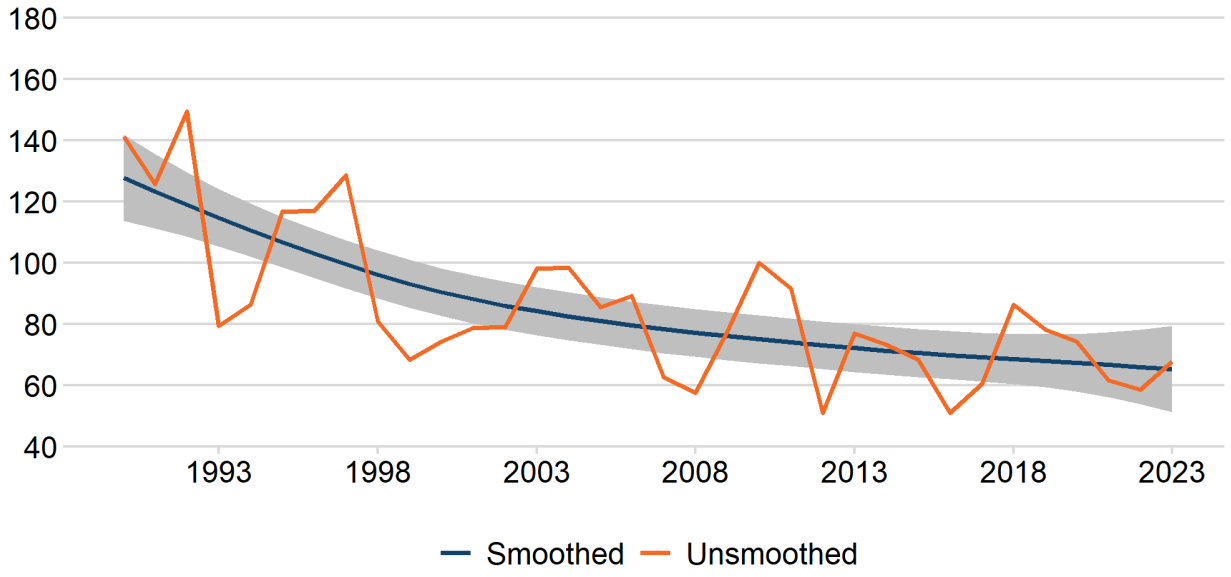
Pollinating insects are important to many plants, including crops and wildflowers, as they help them reproduce and fruit. Their populations are a good indicator of ecosystem health and food security.

Indices of pollinating insects, including butterflies, bees and hoverflies, are produced annually by Defra, in partnership with Butterfly Conservation, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, BTO and JNCC. For most butterfly species, abundance data has been collected since the mid-1970s. However, for woodland species there is insufficient data to provide reliable estimates prior to 1990. The latest UK Biodiversity Indicators were published in 2024 with data for 2023 (Table 5.3). The butterfly index includes 50 species, of which 39 are commonly found in woodland.

Figure 5.2 shows the trend in woodland butterfly populations from 1990 to 2023. After a statistically significant long-term decline through the 1990s (smoothed index), butterfly abundance in woodland has remained relatively stable since the mid-2000s, and has shown no significant change in the short term (Table 5.3).

Each species has individual and regional circumstances, however, the main causes for decline in woodland habitat specialists are the loss, fragmentation and degradation of their habitats.

Figure 5.2: Woodland butterfly index (Unsmoothed index, 2010 = 100), UK, 1990 to 2023



Source: Butterfly Conservation, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, BTO, DEFRA, JNCC.

Note:

1. Orange line: unsmoothed butterfly index; blue line: smoothed butterfly index; grey shading 95% confidence interval.

Table 5.3: Population of woodland butterflies (Unsmoothed index, 2010 = 100), UK, 2014 to 2023

Year	Unsmoothed index	Smoothed index
2014	73.3	71.3
2015	68.2	70.5
2016	51.0	69.8
2017	60.3	69.1
2018	86.3	68.5
2019	78.2	67.9
2020	74.3	67.3
2021	61.7	66.6
2022	58.5	65.9
2023	67.8	65.3

Source: Butterfly Conservation, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, BTO, DEFRA, JNCC.

5.4 Public attitudes to tree health issues

Forest Research (and previously the Forestry Commission) has surveyed public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues since 1995. The most recent surveys were conducted in 2025 (with separate surveys in Wales, Scotland, England and across the UK as a whole). Full results are available on the Public Opinion of Forestry homepage.

The figures in section 5.4 are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Respondents to the UK survey in 2025 were asked to rate their knowledge of tree health and diseases either "High level", "Reasonable" or "Low". Only 8% of respondents identified as having a high level of knowledge. Over one half (57%) reported having a low level of knowledge.

Table 5.4: Proportion of respondents by self reported knowledge of tree health and disease, UK, 2025

Statement	2025
High level of knowledge	8
Reasonable level of knowledge	29
Low level of knowledge	57
Don't know	7

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry (2025)

Base: 10,300 (2025)

Note:

1. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Respondents to the UK survey in 2025 were also asked their views on a range of statements relating to tree health. The highest level of agreement was seen with the statement "Action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases", with 76% of UK respondents agreeing (agree or strongly agree) (Table 5.4). This compares with only 30% agreeing with the statement "there is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases".

Table 5.5: Proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with issues related to tree health and diseases, UK, 2021 to 2025

Statement	2021	2023	2025
Action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases	77	82	76
Everyone should take action when visiting woodlands to help prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases	69	69	74
I would be willing to look out for and report sightings of pests and diseases on trees, if appropriate information and advice was available to me	62	64	65
If I buy an imported tree, it is more likely to carry tree pests and diseases than a tree grown in the UK	44	38	49
I am aware that possible tree pests and diseases can be reported using the Tree Alert app or website	29	17	35
There is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases	24	15	30

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry surveys (2021 to 2025)

Base: Approximately 5,100 (2021), 11,100 (2023), 10,300 (2025)

Note:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than 2.1% in 2021, and 1.4% in 2023 and 2025.

2. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

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