

TAYSIDE'S RICH BIODIVERSITY

Perthshire, Kinross-shire, Angus and the City of Dundee – which, for the purpose of this LBAP, encompasses the Tayside area - covers 7,500 square kilometres of widely different landscapes in which 385,000 people live and 3.75 million tourists visit. The area covers nearly 10% of the land area of Scotland.

Our geological heritage has contributed directly towards the variety and abundance of flora and fauna. To the west is the forbidding Rannoch Moor and the ancient pines of The Black Wood. In the east mineral-rich rocks and soils have created the rare alpine habitats on Caenlochan. On the coast we have the most extensive reedbeds anywhere in Europe and at Barry Buddon one of the largest sand dune complexes anywhere in the UK.

For the purpose of the Tayside Biodiversity Action Plan we have separated the region's great diversity into six habitats –

- Coasts and Estuaries
- Farmland
- Upland
- Urban and Built Environment
- Water and Wetlands
- Woodland



STRATHMORE

LORNE GILL/SNH

INTRODUCTION TO TAYSIDE'S HABITATS

Coasts and Estuaries

For centuries we have looked upon our local coasts and estuaries as a source of food, for sheltered anchorage and for trade. There is massive diversity: from the muddy shallows of Montrose Basin to the sand dunes of Barry Links and the wide nutrient-rich Tay Estuary. In the latter, the reedbeds form the largest continuous stand of this habitat anywhere in Britain and are host to the only breeding site in Scotland of the rare Bearded tit.

The variety of life supports shoals of commercially important fish and internationally important groups of Dolphins and Porpoises. More than half the world's Pink-footed geese can be found here in the winter. Our beds of seagrass and seaweed also provide important nursery grounds for flat fish in the summer and food for ducks and geese in winter.

Farmland

The vast majority of Tayside, stretching from the mountains, hills and glens, through the fertile valleys and straths and down to the coastal plains carses - would be correctly classified as 'agricultural land'. Totalling around 700,000 hectares, the area has been influenced by people for over 6,000 years.

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



Extensive upland sheep grazing units utilise semi-natural grasslands, whilst on the lower ground highly intensive vegetable, fruit and cereal crop growing regimes means that our area includes all the main farm enterprises seen in Scotland. Just over 200,000 hectares of arable land provides a patchwork of fields, hedges, dykes, veteran trees and farm buildings in the lowland areas.

Upland

Heather moorland is by far the most extensive single upland habitat in Tayside and represents an eighth of the whole area. Additional mosaic heather moorland also occurs with peatland, rough grassland and montane habitats. The total area of 223,300 hectares represents 9% of upland heath in Scotland and some 5% of the whole UK figure. Impressive though these figures are, the area of heather moorland in Tayside has actually declined by over a third in the past 50 years.

Montane habitats, which account for approximately 5% of Tayside's landmass, are those found above the natural tree level - 600m above sea level. These alpine and sub-alpine areas represent some of the most natural and undisturbed habitats anywhere in the UK. They are seen as a key habitat, not only because Tayside holds a significant proportion of the Scottish total (13%), but also because of the number of rare species associated with the habitat. The high incidence of calcareous rocks also gives rise to a flora which is unusually rich in species for the Highlands of Scotland where mainly acidic rocks and habitats predominate.

Urban and Built Environment

Although only making up a small percentage of the actual land surface in Tayside, the built and developed environment has a significant impact on our biodiversity in the last hundred years. We have utilised ancient sand dunes in golf course creation, engineered rivers and burns into narrow channels in every town, opened up parkland and old grazing pastures as public open spaces. Our buildings have replaced cliff-top habitats for many of our favourite species such as House martins and Swifts; modern housing offers cave-like roofs for our most common bat, the Pipistrelle.

Our influence can therefore be seen throughout all the built up areas of the region from school grounds and gardens in sheltered housing complexes, to our private gardens and urban roadside verges.

Water and Wetland

The Tay drains the largest area of any river in Scotland and its flow is the greatest in Britain. Our other large river systems such as the North and South Esks rise in the mountains and drain the north-east of the region, whilst the Angus coastal burns rise in the lowlands.

Tayside boasts a wealth of lochs and standing waters. Many of these now attract breeding pairs of Osprey – a third of the entire UK population of these rare birds of prey now nest here. Flood plains contribute valuable habitat mosaics and at the same time help regulate seasonal water flow. The transition between rivers and other habitats frequently gives rise to some of our most valuable and unique habitats, including wet woodlands and reedbeds. Thousands of kilometres of burns also act as wildlife corridors between farmland and woodland which heighten their biodiversity.

Woodland

There are few areas of Scotland which offer the range and variety of the woodlands found in Tayside. They range from the wet woodlands found on the banks of the River Tay to the ancient Scots Pine found in The Black Wood of Rannoch. Many of our woodlands are steeped in a rich historical and cultural background which has led famous poets and songwriters to such works as Rabbin Burns' "The Birks O' Aberfeldy". Perthshire has also been called "the cradle of Scottish forestry" in recognition of the part played by the Planting Dukes of Athol in the 18th Century.

Of our 13% tree coverage (103,000 hectares), only a fifth is of ancient or semi natural origin. The outlook for Tayside's native woodland habitats and the species that rely on them is undoubtedly better than it has been for a very long time, but there are still challenges to overcome, one of them being the safeguarding of the Capercaillie which is now down to dangerously low numbers.

Of the 50 'Great British Trees' nominated to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002 we should be proud that three of them are from our area. The Parent Larch at Dunkeld has a girth of 5.6m and is one of the biggest European larches in the UK. At Scone grows the Douglas Fir, an original tree grown from seed sent back from the Columbia River in Canada in 1826 by David Douglas. But what might be viewed as an icon of Tayside's unique tree and woodland biodiversity heritage is the third nomination. The renowned Forthingall Yew, reputedly Europe's oldest tree, could be anything between 3,000 and 5,000 years old. It is believed to be the oldest living thing in Europe – surely Tayside's best tribute to celebrating our biodiversity through the ages.