



Working Wetlands  
Parish Biodiversity Audit for

# Milton Damerel



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for Devon Wildlife Trust.

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## **Introduction**

**A map of the key wildlife features and land use of the parish is shown in Appendix 1.**

Milton Damerel parish is a small parish of 1,780 ha located approximately 3km North-East of Holsworthy. The eastern boundary of the parish runs along the River Torridge. The River Waldon runs along the southern Boundary of the parish and out through the west of the parish. Tributaries of both of these rivers originate within the parish. The village of Milton Damerel is located in the centre of the parish and the village of Holsworthy Beacon is situated in the south-west corner of the parish.

The majority of land-use in Milton Damerel is agriculturally improved pasture for sheep or cattle grazing or production of hay or silage. There are also some areas of arable land, as well as coniferous and broadleaved plantation woodlands in the Woodland Grant Scheme.

Semi-natural habitats that occur within the parish include semi-natural broadleaved woodland and wet woodland along some of the stream valleys, Culm grassland, scrub and species-rich hedges. On some of the steeper areas of pasture, there are some areas of potentially species-rich grassland and some areas of rush-pasture occur within the parish which may be wildlife-rich. There are also some areas of species-rich grasslands along road verges and some old hedgebanks with diverse bank flora. A number of landholdings within the parish are in agri-environment schemes such as Entry Level Stewardship, Higher Level Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship for features including hedgerow management, buffer strips and management of in-field trees. These features contribute to the overall biodiversity of the parish.

There are two ***Culm grassland*** County Wildlife Sites within the parish, as well as other areas of potential Culm grassland which have been identified from surveys or aerial photographs. Some of these areas may be of high wildlife value.

*Most of the information used to create this report and land use map was secured from aerial photograph interpretation together with historical data collected with access permission (e.g. CWS surveys). Occasionally vantage points within the parish would be used to help to map habitats and establish land use.*

**The fact that potential and confirmed wildlife-rich land is mapped does not imply any right of access and does not change any existing rights or use of the land.**

Key species and habitats listed in the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan are indicated in ***bold italic*** text throughout the report.

## **Designated Sites**

### **Site of Special Scientific Interest**

There are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest within Milton Damerel Parish.

**Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** are notified by English Nature because of their plants, animals or geological features (the latter are geological SSSIs or gSSSI). English Nature needs to be consulted before any operations likely to damage the special interest are undertaken. SSSI is a statutory designation with legal implications.

### **Special Area of Conservation**

There are no SACs within Milton Damerel Parish.

**Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)** are notified by English Nature because they contain species and/or habitats of European importance (listed in the Habitats Directive 1994), and are part of a network of conservation sites set up through Europe known as the Natura 2000 series. On land, almost all candidate SACs are, or will be notified as SSSIs. English Nature needs to be consulted before any operations likely to damage the special interest are undertaken. SAC is a statutory designation with legal implications.

### **Chapman's Green County Wildlife Site**

Chapman's Green is a *Culm grassland* County Wildlife Site of 2.4 ha. It was last surveyed in 1990 and at this time was classified as NVC M25c. This fits the criteria for purple moor-grass and rush-pasture UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitat. The aerial photograph shows some scrub to be encroaching into the site from the hedges.



***Culm grassland*** is one of Devon's most important habitats, and because of this it is listed on the **Devon Biodiversity Action Plan** as a habitat of conservation concern. It is also listed on the **UK Biodiversity Action Plan**. Devon contains approximately 80% of the extent of the habitat in England, and approximately 8% of that in the UK as a whole.

There are three main concentrations of Rhôs pasture in Devon. On the Culm measures of north-west Devon and north-east Cornwall it is known as ***Culm grassland***. It also occurs on the edges of Dartmoor and on the Blackdown Hills around the springline.

Key species associated with this habitat include: wavy St. Johns-wort, whorled caraway, meadow thistle, petty whin, greater butterfly orchid, lesser butterfly orchid, ***marsh fritillary*** butterfly, brown hairstreak, narrow-bordered bee hawkmoth, ***curlew***, snipe, and ***barn owl***.

Rhôs pastures are a priority for nature conservation because they are highly susceptible to agricultural modification and reclamation throughout their range.

***Culm Grassland*** is a variable habitat whose main plant communities are classified by the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) as follows:

- **M16 *Erica tetralix*-*Sphagnum compactum* wet heath** (this community is usually dominated by cross-leaved heath, with purple moor-grass and *Sphagnum* moss. It can be very species-rich and support uncommon species such as bogbean, sundew, butterwort and bog asphodel).
- **M23 *Juncus effusus/acutiflorus*-*Galium palustre* rush pasture** (rush-dominated pasture usually with sharp-flowered and sometimes soft rush dominating, with other species such as marsh bedstraw, greater bird's-foot trefoil, ragged robin and lesser spearwort).
- **M24 *Molinia caerulea*-*Cirsium dissectum* fen meadow** (the most species-rich of all the communities, dominated by purple moor-grass with meadow thistle and species such as devil's-bit scabious, saw-wort, tormentil and carnation sedge).
- **M25 *Molinia caerulea*-*Potentilla erecta* mire** (usually dominated by large tussocks of purple moor-grass and tormentil. Other species can occur between the tussocks, but this community is less flower-rich than M24).
- **M27 *Filipendula ulmaria*-*Angelica sylvestris* mire** (this is a community with very tall vegetation usually consisting of meadowsweet, angelica, common valerian and hemlock water-dropwort).
- **M6 *Carex echinata*-*Sphagnum recurvum/auriculatum* mire** (this community is sometimes found over peat and is generally dominated by star sedge, with *Sphagnum* moss and marsh violet).

### **West Bridge Fields and Bridge Copse County Wildlife Site**

This is a large County Wildlife Site of 14.49 ha. It was surveyed in 2006 and was found to contain a mosaic of ***Culm grassland***, unimproved acidic grassland, ***wet woodland*** and dry woodland. The woodland is semi-natural and 15 ancient woodland indicator species were recorded in the survey.

***Wet woodland*** is a **UK Biodiversity Action Plan** habitat and is also listed on the **Devon Biodiversity Action Plan**.

***Wet woodland*** occurs on poorly drained or seasonally wet soils, usually with alder, birch and willows as the predominant tree species, but sometimes including ash, oak, pine and beech on the drier riparian areas. It is found on floodplains, as successional habitat on fens, mires and bogs, along streams and hillside flushes, and in peaty hollows. These woodlands occur on a range of soil types including nutrient-rich mineral and acid, nutrient-poor organic ones.

***Wet woodland*** supports a rich lichen flora as well as a rich invertebrate flora. Such an abundance of insect food attracts a rich assemblage of breeding birds including the uncommon willow tit. Wet woodland may also provide lying up areas for otters and suitable habitat for dormice.

**County Wildlife Sites (CWS)** are sites of county importance for wildlife, designated on the basis of the habitat or the known presence of particular species. This is not a statutory designation like SSSIs, and does not have any legal status. County Wildlife Sites are usually included in Local Plans as sites of regional or local biodiversity interest and are covered by Planning Policy Statement nine (PPS9). CWS recognition does not demand any particular actions on the part of the Landowner and does not give the public rights of access. However, it may increase eligibility for land management grants.

Note: 'Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation' was published by the Department of the Environment in August 2005. Planning Policy Statements (PPS) set out the Government's national policies on different aspects of planning in England. PPS9 sets out planning policies on protection of biodiversity and geological conservation through the planning system. This PPS replaces Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 (PPG9) on nature conservation published in October 1994.

### **Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS):**

There are no RIGS sites within the Milton Damerel parish boundary.

**Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)** are earth science sites that are of regional or local importance. Like County Wildlife Sites, they are included in Local Plans and referred to under PPG9. These may represent good examples of local rock formations or landform features or they may contain interesting fossils. There are xx RIGS within xxx district.

### **Gidcott Wood Ancient Woodland Site**

2.2 ha of woodland. Aerial photos (2006) show this area to be broadleaved woodland but it could be replanted. Current management of the woodland is not known.

### **Gidcottmill Wood Ancient Woodland Site**

3.3 ha of woodland. Aerial photos (2006) show this area to be broadleaved woodland which looks semi-natural but it could have been replanted. Current management of the woodland is not known. This woodland is also an Unconfirmed Wildlife Site (UWS) called Halsepark wood.

### **Grawley/Knott's Woods Ancient Woodland Site**

24.1 ha of woodland. Aerial photos (2006) show this area to be broadleaved woodland and it looks semi-natural from the aerial photo although current management of the woodland is not known. This woodland is also an Unconfirmed Wildlife Site (UWS).

### **Churchpark Wood Ancient Woodland Site**

2.7 ha. Aerial photos (2006) show some of this area to be broadleaved woodland which looks semi-natural from the aerial photo although current management of the woodland is not known. Part of the wood is now a field.

### **Miltonmill Wood Ancient Woodland Site**

7.7 ha. Aerial photos (2006) show some of this area to be broadleaved woodland which looks semi-natural from the aerial photo although current management of the woodland is not known. Some of the woodland is now improved fields.

### **Woodford Woods Ancient Woodland Site**

16 ha. Aerial photos (2006) show most of this area to be broadleaved woodland which looks semi-natural from the aerial photo although current management of the woodland is not known. Some of the woodland is no longer present is now put to pasture. This woodland is also an Unconfirmed Wildlife Site (UWS)

**Ancient Woodland** is a term applied to woodlands which have existed from at least Medieval times to the present day without ever having been cleared for uses other than wood or timber production. A convenient date used to separate ancient and secondary woodland is about the year 1600. In special circumstances semi-natural woods of post-1600 but pre-1900 origin are also included. The Devon Ancient Woodland Inventory was prepared in 1986 by the Nature Conservancy Council.

### **Other Sites of Wildlife Interest**

There are no OSWIs within Milton Damerel parish.

**Other Sites of Wildlife Interest (OSWI)** are sites of significant wildlife interest within a local context that do not reach the criteria for County Wildlife Sites. They are not covered by PPG9, but may be included in Local Plans.



## **Other habitats (identified from field survey):**

### **Species-rich hedges**



**Species-rich hedge in Milton Damerel**

Hedgerows tend to be taken for granted as they always seem to be there, providing such a constant in a familiar landscape. However, they do require regular attention to keep them in good condition. That so many are still in good condition is a testament to the skill and hard work of generations of farmers. But there are changes even in the oldest hedgelines as the way the majority are managed has altered with less farm labour available and greater reliance on mechanical cutting. Even the mechanical techniques have changed as reciprocating cutters that could cut shrub stems cleanly have given way to tractor-mounted flails which can tackle slightly older growth but at the expense of woody growth being shattered, leaving them much more susceptible to infection. As individual hedge plants die, they leave gaps which render the hedge less effective and which would in the past have been filled when the hedge was next layed.

With the advent of mechanical hedge-trimming has come another change - it is now possible to trim all the hedges on a farm in one year. It is this that perhaps has the most impact on the vertebrate wildlife as the fruiting and seeding species are very much less productive and there is a different and less varied structure. Shrubs that do produce a good berry crop may be cut in the early autumn before the birds, particularly the migrants, can gain any advantage. A couple of generations ago, many hedges on a farm might have been cut only once in five or even seven years, allowing them to be much more productive in the meantime.



Recognising these changes does allow choices in the way hedges are managed in the future with perhaps reducing cuts to once every other year or only one or two of the three 'faces' (the top and the two sides) being cut in any one year. This wouldn't stop road or drive side hedges being cut from both the safety and visual aspects but for the majority of hedges it would have two major benefits, it would take less time and, hence, cost and it would benefit wildlife!

The link below will take you to a series of information leaflets produced by Natural England on hedgerows.

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/browse.aspx?CID=06dc1fd9-66dd-4fd9-9bc2-1d17cf68d3ab>

Once it was recognised nationally that many thousands of kilometres of hedgerow were being destroyed annually and that action needed to be taken to prevent further loss, the Hedgerow Regulations (made under Section 97 of the Environment Act 1995) were introduced in England and Wales in 1997 to provide protection. The Regulations are intended to prevent the removal of most countryside hedgerows without first submitting a hedgerow removal notice to the local planning authority. The local planning authorities are only able to require the retention of 'important' hedgerows. The Regulations then set out criteria to be used by the local authority in determining which hedgerows are important. (Bickmore, 2002).

In such a clearly agricultural landscape, the hedgerows and hedgebanks represent continuity as features in the landscape and provide a significant wildlife resource at a time when the fields themselves are being more intensively used. The **UK Biodiversity Action Plan** (UK Steering Group, 1995) lists ancient and or species-rich hedgerows as one of its priority habitats.

Various definitions of species-rich hedges have been used in different parts of the country but it would not be unreasonable to treat a hedge that has five or more woody species in a 30 metre length as a 'species-rich' one.

Hedgerows are often an essential corridor for the movement of wildlife and may support many animals and plants. Many of the hedgerows around Milton Damerel are species rich.

Several species-rich hedges were found across the parish including between Venngreen and Derworthy Cross where seven woody species were recorded in a 30m length - Hazel, willow, blackthorn, oak, hawthorn, holly and ash. The bank flora included hogweed, bracken, bramble, thistles, ferns, cleavers, creeping buttercup, cocksfoot and common hemp nettle (see photo above).

A further species-rich hedge was found between Croyden Cross and Gidcott Cross where 10 woody species were recorded in a 30m length – hazel, rowan, blackthorn, hawthorn, holly, elder, oak, ash, willow and sycamore. This is very species rich and suggests the hedge could be several hundred years old.



### **Cemeteries/ churchyards**

There are two churchyards in the parish of Milton Damerel. Both churchyards support semi-improved grasslands which are of some wildlife value.

The churchyard in the centre of Milton Damerel village includes the following species: cock's-foot, ribwort plantain, creeping buttercup and creeping cinquefoil. There are several large trees present including yew, lime and beech.



### **Allotments and gardens**

Gardens are a haven for wildlife and can provide links to other areas of wildlife habitat. Several species have been recorded from gardens in Milton Damerel parish including ***Brown Hare***, Brown Long-eared Bat, 45kz Pipistrelle bat, Grass snake and roe deer.

### **Roadside verges**

Some of the roadside verges throughout the parish are species-rich and provide valuable habitat for birds and invertebrates. This area shown below in the photos ran alongside Chapman's Green County Wildlife Site (between Chapman's Green and Twinaway) and contained a diverse range of plant species including meadowsweet, soft rush, common birds-foot trefoil, greater birds-foot trefoil, marsh thistle, silverweed, creeping buttercup, angelica, ribwort plantain, cocksfoot, Yorkshire fog, red clover, sharp-flowered rush, tormentil, common knapweed and germander speedwell. Goldfinches and house martins were seen using the area.







Roadside verges often support *flower-rich grassland*, as well as a variety of semi-natural habitats including calcareous grassland, neutral grassland, acid grassland, heathland, open water (ditches), broadleaved woodland, scrub, hedgerows and walls. They may also support populations of scarce or declining species of flora and/or fauna, some of which enjoy statutory protection. Linear grassland habitats provide a valuable wildlife resource. Verges provide shelter and food for a variety of species from small mammals, to birds of prey and insects.

Devon has a very substantial resource of roadside verges; approximately 14,000 km of roads, corresponding to about 2,000 ha of roadside verge. However, of this very large resource, the area which is species-rich is relatively small and localised in distribution.

Devon County Council and Highways Agency manage roadside verges to incorporate prescriptions to maintain or enhance wildlife interests. DCC operate a Special Verge Scheme to manage areas of particular wildlife or amenity value. These verges are protected from damaging activities, and grass cutting is limited to specific periods to avoid the destruction of attractive stands of wildflowers.

Flower-rich meadows and pastures are a habitat of conservation concern in Devon and are listed on the **Devon Biodiversity Action Plan** as well as the **UK Biodiversity Action Plan**. Unimproved neutral grassland habitat has undergone a huge decline in the 20th century, almost entirely due to changing agricultural practice. It is estimated that by 1984 in lowland England and Wales, semi-natural grassland had declined by 97% over the previous 50 years to approximately 0.2 million ha.

Unimproved grassland is often very flower-rich and as a result of this attracts an abundance of butterflies and other invertebrates. The rich insect life in turn attracts bats such as the greater horseshoe bat and birds such as the green woodpecker and *cirl bunting*.

## **Arable land**

Arable land occurs within the parish and some of these areas are in agri-environment schemes such as Countryside Stewardship for leaving permanent grass margins, wildlife strips and hedgerow management.

### **Arable plants:**

There are a number of rare arable weeds associated with spring cereals and winter stubble including cornflower, corn marigold, shepherd's-needle and weasel's-snout. Arable land in Britain has lost most of its arable plants over the last 50 years; several species have become extinct and there are many more that are now rare.

Changes in arable farming practice are thought to be responsible for the losses. Technology that allowed more effective seed-cleaning caused an initial decline, but herbicide development was catastrophic for many plants. Nowadays, arable plants are generally confined to the strip along the field edge, which provides a home to many animals, invertebrates and plants.

## **Veteran trees**

A veteran beech tree was noted near to East Wonford Farm on the parish visit. There are also farms which are in Entry Level Stewardship for protection of 'in-field trees'. These are likely to be old or veteran trees.

Natural England have defined veteran trees as: "trees that are of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of their age, size or condition". In relation to oak it has been taken that trees with a diameter of more than:

- 1.0m are potentially interesting
- 1.5m are valuable in terms of conservation
- 2.00m are truly ancient.

Veteran trees will be at least as big as these measurements:

- 1 metre - Hawthorn, blackthorn
- 2.5 metres - Field maple, rowan, yew, birch, holly
- 3 metres - Oak, ash, scot's pine, alder
- 4.5 metres - Sycamore, limes, chestnuts, elms, poplars, beech, willows, pines, non-native trees.

It has been estimated that Britain may be home to around 80% of Europe's ancient trees. Veteran trees are large old trees found in wood-pasture and parkland, but also in a number of other locations: ancient yews in churchyards; mature oaks in hedgerows; black poplars along stream-sides; and many noble trees in ancient woodlands.

Ancient trees support particularly rich assemblages of invertebrates, fungi, mosses and lichens. Several species of bat may use hollow trees as roosting sites and birds such as tree creepers and woodpeckers feed on the insects living in the bark. Insects such as stag beetles and hornets are associated with old trees.

## Unconfirmed Wildlife Sites

There are 10 Unconfirmed Wildlife Sites in Milton Damerel parish listed below. These are sites identified as having possible interest but not fully surveyed. Some of these sites will be areas of significant wildlife interest.

File Code	Site Name	Grid Reference	Area (ha)	Description	Notes
SS30/078	Brendon	SS369081	15.5	Possible culm site	From aerial photos (2006) this looks like a possible area of rush pasture.
No site code	Knotts Wood	SS410110	29.2	Semi-natural broadleaved woodland on ancient woodland site with areas of culm and an area of unimproved rank grassland/rush pasture	Aerial photos (2006) show this area to be broadleaved woodland which looks semi-natural but current management of the woodland is not known.
No site code	Halsepark Wood	SS416096	4.8	Semi-natural broadleaved woodland on ancient woodland site with adjacent area of unimproved/semi-improved rough grassland	Aerial photos (2006) show this area to be broadleaved woodland which looks semi-natural but it could be replanted. Current management of the woodland is not known.
No site code	Morecombe	SS418102	3.5	Semi-natural broadleaved woodland with possible adjacent area of semi/unimproved grassland	Identified from Aerial photos (2006).
SS31/042	White Bear Farm	SS393109	1.5	Culm grassland	This was surveyed in 1990 and found to be culm grassland (M27c). Site now looks quite scrubby from Aerial photo (2006.)
No site code	Derworthy	SS366122	5.3	Wood, scrub, grassland	Identified from Aerial photos (2006).
No site code	Hill Copse and Meadows	SS362118	34.9	Broadleaved woodland along a river valley with clearings of possible wet grassland	Identified from Aerial photos (2006).
No site code	River Waldon Meadows	SS373114	14.3	Possible Culm grassland	Looks like possible rush-pasture from aerial photo (2006).
No site code	Woodford Woods	SS394127	16	Semi-natural ancient woodland	Ancient woodland site that looks like it may still have semi-natural woodland from aerial photo (2006).
No site code	Woodford Bridge - Newton Mill Marsh	SS407120	22	Possible floodplain grazing marsh	Identified from Aerial photos (2006).

## Species

### Important Species

The DBRC database was checked to see what legally protected, locally notable or noteworthy (e.g. Japanese Knotweed) species are known to be present in and around Milton Damerel, and key species are mentioned below.

### Birds

There are records of several notable species of bird from the parish. These include:

- Snipe and Dunnock from Chapman's Green
- Barn Swallow from West Bridge
- House Martin, Kestrel and Barn Swallow at Pipers Gidcott

During the visit to the parish goldfinches and house martins were also recorded at Chapman's Green.

### Plants

Devon Notable plant species recorded from the parish include:

- Wavy St. John's-Wort from West Bridge and Bridge Copse.
- Marsh Cinquefoil from West Bridge and Bridge Copse.
- *Primrose* from West Bridge and Bridge Copse.
- Great Pond-Sedge from Newton Mill.

Plants recorded from Chapman's Green *Culm grassland* CWS in 1990 include jointed rush, marsh bedstraw, meadowsweet, saw-wort, sharp-flowered rush, soft rush, water mint and wild angelica.

### Mammals

Roe deer have been recorded at Chapman's Green and White Bear Farm. Badgers have been recorded at Fore Street, Milton Damerel and Godcott Bridge (these may be road kill records). Hedgehogs have been recorded near Stibb Cross and South of Woodford Bridge. *Otters* have been recorded in the River Torridge at Gidcott Mill and *Brown Hare* have been recorded in gardens at Pipers Gidcott.

The *otter* is listed on the **Devon Biodiversity Action Plan** as a species of conservation concern.

Formerly widespread throughout the UK, the otter underwent a rapid decline in numbers from the 1950s to 1970s and was effectively lost from midland and south-eastern counties of England by the 1980s. Populations remain in Wales, south-west England and much of Scotland, where sea loch and coastal colonies comprise one of the largest populations in Europe. There is also a significant population of otters in Northern Ireland. The decline now appears to have halted and sightings are being reported in former habitats.



Devon has an internationally important otter population and otters are now found on most watercourses and wetlands throughout the County. Otters are even now recolonising areas where they were thought to have been lost during the 60's and 70's. The main serious threat to otters today is from road kills, with many animals sadly reported dead each year.

The *brown hare* is listed on the **Devon Biodiversity Action Plan** as a species of conservation concern. The brown hare was probably introduced to us by the Romans and is fairly common in areas of arable crops and grass leys. The hare is listed on the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan as it has undergone a significant decline in the last 50 years, probably associated with changes in farming practice and increased use of pesticides.

Brown Long-eared Bat and 45kz Pipistrelle bat have been recorded in farmhouses in the parish. All species of British bat are protected under UK law and International law. This makes it illegal to intentionally kill, injure or take a bat, or to damage, obstruct or destroy any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection.

The pipistrelle is Britain's smallest and most common bat. They vary in colour, but are usually medium to dark brown on the back and only slightly paler underneath. They are the most common species in towns. Only very recently have scientists recognised that two separate species have been confused under the name *P. pipistrellus*. Their flight appears fast and jerky as they dodge about pursuing small insects, which are caught and eaten in flight. A single pipistrelle may consume up to 3000 insects in a night.

Buildings are the most favoured roost sites and more than half of known roosts are in buildings less than 30 years old. Pipistrelles prefer to roost in very confined spaces around the outside of the building, typical sites being behind hanging tiles, weather boarding, soffit and barge or eaves boarding, between roofing felt and roof tiles or in cavity walls. Pipistrelles rarely enter roof spaces except in the more stable, well-established large colonies found particularly in older buildings.

## **Reptiles and Amphibians**

Reptiles and amphibians aren't very well recorded in the parish. There is only one record of a toad.

## **The Devon Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).**

The Devon Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) describes the key actions needed to look after 37 of Devon's most important habitats and species. It does not stand alone, but is part of a much wider process aimed at conserving our biodiversity.

The Devon BAP is a direct descendent of a process started at the famous 'Earth Summit' held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At this summit, world leaders pledged to halt and reverse the loss of the planet's biodiversity. For its part, the UK government produced a series of Action Plans for a great many threatened habitats and species. These national plans have been joined by a series of regional Action Plans aimed at providing a more local perspective.

The Devon BAP builds on this endeavour, identifying local priorities and providing targets and plans of action for the County.

All of this work has one aim: to encourage practical action on the ground. Its success depends upon us all.

### **Biodiversity links:**

- The Devon BAP can be viewed at [www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity). This site also contains links to other nature conservation issues relevant to Devon, such as information on hedges. If you do not have access to the internet and require paper copies of relevant sections of the Devon BAP please contact Devon County Council's Biodiversity Officer on 01392 382804.
- Details of biodiversity planning in the South West region can be viewed at [www.swbiodiversity.org.uk](http://www.swbiodiversity.org.uk).
- National Action Plans can be viewed at [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk). This site also contains useful background information on UK biodiversity action planning.

## Links between the wildlife of Milton Damerel and the Devon BAP:

Milton Damerel wildlife feature	Brief description of feature	Link with the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)
Hedgerows	Species-rich and ancient hedgerows throughout the parish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Species rich hedges</li> <li>• Primrose Species Action Plan</li> <li>• (Dormouse Species Action Plan)</li> </ul>
Culm grassland County Wildlife Sites	Chapman's Green is a culm grassland County Wildlife Site West Bridge Fields and Bridge Copse is a mosaic of Culm grassland, unimproved acidic grassland and wet and dry woodland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rhos pasture Habitat Action plan</li> <li>• Otter Species Action plan</li> <li>• (Marsh fritillary Species Action Plan)</li> <li>• (Barn Owl species Action Plan)</li> </ul>
Possible areas of semi-improved and unimproved grassland	Small areas of semi-improved grassland, which have been protected from agricultural improvement. Species-rich road verges containing unimproved neutral grassland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flower-rich meadows and pastures Habitat Action Plan</li> <li>• Brown Hare Species Action Plan</li> <li>• (Barn Owl Species Action Plan)</li> <li>• Primrose Species Action Plan</li> </ul>
Rivers, streams and open water	River Torridge and network of streams which join it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Otter Species Action plan</li> </ul>
Woodlands and copses	Ancient semi-natural woodlands and secondary with some ancient woodland indicators. Some areas of wet woodland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primrose Species Action Plan</li> <li>• Dormouse Species Action Plan</li> <li>• Wet Woodland Habitat Action Plan</li> </ul>
Arable fields	Arable fields can provide habitat for the brown hare and many different farmland birds. There are quite a few arable fields in Milton Damerel parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brown Hare Species Action Plan</li> </ul>
Milton Damerel Village and hamlets	Village with old buildings, churchyard, gardens and stone walls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cities, towns and villages Habitat Action Plan</li> <li>• Primrose Species Action Plan</li> <li>• Greater Horseshoe Bat Species Action Plan</li> </ul>

\*Species and habitats in brackets have not been recorded from the parish  
View the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan at [www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity).

## Some Ideas for Local Action...

This section of the report is provided by Devon County Council (contact: [nature@devon.gov.uk](mailto:nature@devon.gov.uk)).

A major step to knowing what you can do for your local wildlife and geology is to know what you have already got. This report will help you in this, but it is just a start. Ultimately, the protection and enhancement of the local natural environment requires the interest and enthusiasm of the local community.

There follow some initial ideas for local nature conservation action. Many of them will directly help to achieve the objectives of the habitat and species action plans contained in the **Devon Biodiversity Action Plan**.

It is by no means an exhaustive list. As a community, you may have many more ideas for action that you would like to take forward in the coming years.

### 1 Further survey:

This report is just a beginning. Carrying out further survey within your area will help build a better picture of the wildlife present, and of the opportunities for enhancement. Gaining a better understanding of the resource is usually a key objective of the Devon BAP's habitat and species action plans.

Specific features to survey in Milton Damerel might include species-rich hedgerows and flower-rich road verges. The last two actions would directly contribute to the **Species-rich hedgerow Action Plan** and the **Flower-rich meadows and pastures Action Plan**.

One example of survey work that might usefully be undertaken would be to produce a hedgerow appraisal for your local area. Comparing the current distribution of hedges against boundary lines shown on old maps will give a clue as to how this important resource has changed over recent years. It may also highlight opportunities for restoring hedges in your area. It might also be possible to assess the condition of hedges and this may, in turn, give some ideas about improving their future management to benefit wildlife.

Survey work could be undertaken as a community group or in liaison with conservation groups active in the area. For example, the Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) is active in the area.

Help to build up a picture of the state of Devon's environment by sending your records to the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre where they can be properly collated.

## **2 Influence the management of Public Open Space:**

Creating areas of more species-rich grassland will help to reduce the isolation of the remaining fragments of traditionally managed agricultural land, contributing to the **Flower-rich Meadows and Pastures Action Plan**. Churchyards have often received less intensive management than the surrounding land and can provide good opportunities for wildlife.

Planting up areas that are currently of little wildlife interest with new copses of native trees and shrubs will also help to attract wildlife. Suitable sites might include unused areas of playing fields, for example.

## **3 Build relationships with local landowners:**

Encourage the adoption of more wildlife-friendly land management. For example, hedges which are cut only every other year will provide an autumn and winter source of nuts and berries for birds and small mammals (and can save the landowner money in management costs). The improved management of hedgerows is a key objective of the **Species-rich Hedges Action Plan**. If the owner is willing, why not get involved with practical management, such as traditional hedge laying or pond restoration?

## **4 Adopt a road verge:**

Many verges can have a significant value for wildlife because they have escaped the intensive management of the surrounding farmland. Ensuring such verges are managed for their wildlife is a very positive step, again contributing to the **Flower-rich Meadows and Pastures Action Plan**.

There are, of course, obvious health and safety implications to roadside management. It is an action that would need to be undertaken in close liaison with the relevant highways authority (generally, this is the Highways Agency for motorways and trunk roads, and Devon County Council for all other roads).

## **5 Wildlife gardening:**

Green up your garden! Collectively the gardens of Milton Damerel represent a significant area that could be used to benefit wildlife. Large or small, you can turn your garden (or a part of it!) into a haven for wildlife. A very good source of information on wildlife gardening is the Natural England web site: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/advice/wildlifegardening/leaflets.aspx>

Natural England is the Government's adviser on nature conservation. Its web site also contains links to a number of other very useful sources of information.

## **6 Join local conservation organisations:**

An example of a prominent local conservation organisation is the Devon Wildlife Trust. The trust has a number of Local Groups which, amongst other things, get involved in practical management work.

## **7 Japanese Knotweed:**

Not something to cherish, but it can't be ignored! Unfortunately Himalayan knotweed (a hybrid of Japanese Knotweed- see photo) is present in several locations in Milton Damerel, as well as Japanese knotweed.



Introduced into Britain by the Victorians, Japanese Knotweed is a native of Japan, north China, Korea and Taiwan. It flourishes in Britain's mild and fertile environment and has no natural biological enemies here. Consequently, it is very invasive and can overrun large areas, replacing our native flora. It is a serious pest which can be so vigorous as to cause significant damage to buildings and roads. It is also a difficult plant to eradicate.

For these reasons Japanese Knotweed is listed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as a plant that is not to be planted or otherwise introduced into the wild. In addition, all parts of the plant are considered as controlled waste under the Waste Regulations.

What can you do?

- Firstly, it is important to build up a picture of where Japanese Knotweed is present. This will give an idea of the scale of the problem and will help to prevent it being accidentally spread during any ditch clearance, highway work and so on. To help develop an understanding of the problem in Devon, records should also be sent to the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre<sup>1</sup>. Ideally, records should include when you first saw it and confirmation of when it was seen most recently; its precise location (notes or a sketch map are helpful, as is a grid reference if you have one); the kind of habitat it is in (e.g. next to running water, on a road verge), and a rough indication of how abundant it is.
- Secondly, be careful not to spread the plant further! This is all too easily done as it can regenerate from even the smallest fragment and is easy to spread unknowingly. It is important not to flail it or to try and dig it up. Often, it is best not to cut Japanese Knotweed at all, but if it is it should be very carefully disposed of on site when dead or removed as Controlled Waste. Any tools used should be properly cleaned.
- Finally, if Japanese Knotweed is on your land, the best way to prevent its spread is to control or eradicate it as soon as possible. Regular cutting can weaken and eventually kill the plant but it is a time-consuming job and proper disposal of the cut material can be a problem. Usually, the most effective method of control is to treat the plant with herbicide. This can take a number of years to be successful but if the plant is left untreated it will inevitably spread. A number of issues should be taken into account in deciding which herbicide to use, particularly the presence of water (where special care needs to be taken and the advice of the Environment Agency must be sought).

Fortunately, a great deal of advice (including an Environment Agency Code of Practice) is available on the Devon Knotweed Forum's web pages. You are recommended to view these at:

[http://www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity/japanese\\_knotweed](http://www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity/japanese_knotweed)

## 8 Himalayan Balsam:

Himalayan or Indian balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is another very invasive plant. A relative of the busy Lizzie, it is known by a wide variety of common names, including Indian balsam, jumping jack and policeman's helmet. It was introduced to Britain in 1839, but escaped from gardens and rapidly colonised riverbanks and areas of damp ground.

Himalayan balsam grows in dense stands that suppress the growth of native grasses and other flora. In the autumn, the plants die back, leaving the banks bare of vegetation and vulnerable to erosion. It is sometimes seen in gardens, either uninvited or grown deliberately, but care must be taken to ensure that it does not escape into the wild.

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<sup>1</sup> DBRC, 27 Commercial Road, Exeter, EX2 4AE. Tel: 01392 274128. [dbrc@dbrc.org.uk](mailto:dbrc@dbrc.org.uk)



It is a tall, robust, annual producing clusters of purplish pink (or rarely white) helmet-shaped flowers. These are followed by seed pods that open explosively when ripe, shooting their seeds up to 7m (22ft) away. Each plant can produce up to 800 seeds.

Devon Biodiversity Records Centre does not hold any records of Himalayan Balsam in Milton Damerel parish,

The main method of control is pulling or cutting plants before they flower and set seed. Himalayan Balsam can be controlled by using a weedkiller based on glyphosate, such as Roundup or Tumbleweed. Glyphosate is a non-selective, systemic weedkiller that is applied to the foliage. It is most effective when the plant is actively growing in early spring.

Before using weedkillers alongside waterways it is necessary to contact the Environment Agency for advice. General advice line: 08708 506 506 or website: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

A useful leaflet on Himalayn Balsam can be viewed by following this link:

[http://www.nonnativespecies.org/documents/Himalayan%20Balsam%20\(v3b\).pdf](http://www.nonnativespecies.org/documents/Himalayan%20Balsam%20(v3b).pdf)

## Useful sources of further information:

- Devon Wildlife Trust: [www.devonwildlifetrust.org](http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org)
- Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society: [www.devonbirds.org](http://www.devonbirds.org)
- Natural England: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)
- Plantlife: [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk)
- RSPB: [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)
- The Woodland Trust: [www.woodland-trust.org.uk](http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk)
- The Living Churchyards & Cemeteries Project, Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Society, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, CV8 2LZ Tel: 01203 696969 ext. 364/339.

## Possible sources of funding:

A number of potential sources of funding are available for local biodiversity projects. Each has its own rules, criteria and objectives but the following sites may be worth checking for suitability:

Awards for All: [www.awardsforall.org.uk](http://www.awardsforall.org.uk)

Countryside Trust Awards: 01242 521382 or [www.countryside-trust.org](http://www.countryside-trust.org)

Living Spaces: 0845 600 3190 or [www.living-spaces.org.uk](http://www.living-spaces.org.uk)

Local Heritage Initiative: 01226 719019 or [www.lhi.org.uk](http://www.lhi.org.uk)

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Devon Biodiversity Partnership (1998) *The Nature of Devon: A Biodiversity Action Plan*

Farrell I and Reay P (Eds) *Devon Bird Report 2002* (2003) No 75 Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society Okehampton

Hubbard CE (1984) *Grasses* Penguin Group London

Rose F (1981) *The Wild Flower Key* Penguin Group London

UK Steering Group (1995) Biodiversity: *The UK Steering Group Report Vol 1 Meeting the Rio Challenge* HMSO London

UK Steering Group (1995) Biodiversity: *The UK Steering Group Report Vol 2 Action Plans* HMSO London

### **Websites:**

[www.devonwildlifetrust.org](http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org)

[www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.devon.gov.uk/biodiversity)