

Gresham House
Specialist investment

Managing biodiversity in forestry sites



Executive summary

Managing biodiversity in productive landscapes is impossible without a methodology to measure and summarise the diversity that is there. Gresham House has been trialling a leading approach in a biodiversity baselining project at one of our forests, Priesthaugh, in the Scottish Borders.

Applying the Wallacea Trust methodology, the pilot project has yielded interesting results:

- Non-forest habitats are, unsurprisingly, rich sources of biodiversity with floristic and invertebrate diversity particularly high within grassland, wetland and riparian habitats
- Young plantations have been confirmed to be biodiverse across all the survey-based metrics within the methodology, supporting several plant and bird species of conservation concern
- Mature crop forest habitats have been shown to harbour unique assemblages of woodland specialists, particularly within invertebrate communities

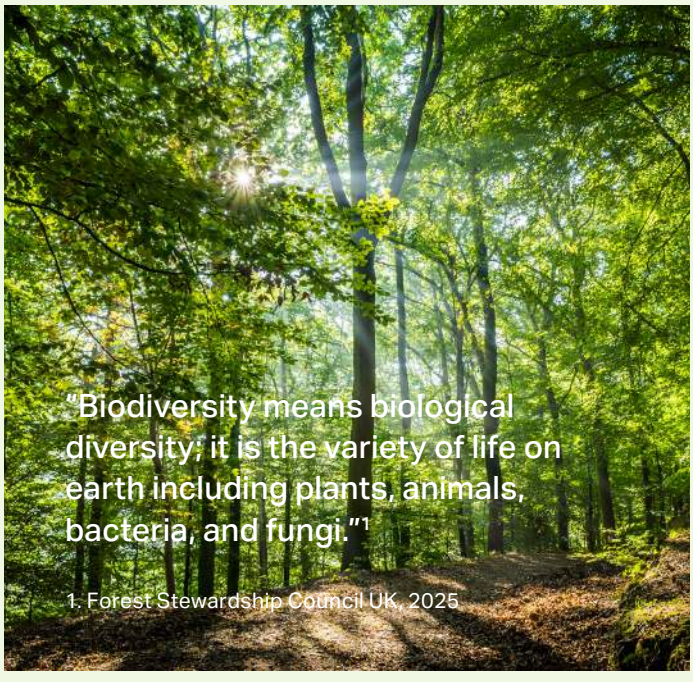
While further analysis is required to confirm the patterns of biodiversity revealed in headline reporting, this study could provide the basis for a net-positive approach to biodiversity within sustainable commercial forestry.

Introduction

Forestry is inherently a long-term asset class and therefore the consideration of long-term sustainability risks and opportunities is a crucial aspect of our management approach.

At Gresham House, we commit to maintaining, conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of all forests under management. We work closely with specialists to better understand the biodiversity of our forests, and to develop strategies to enhance the biodiversity of our assets.

For more information on our Forest Charter, please click here



Our approach to forest biodiversity

Modern sustainably managed forests are complex mosaics of habitats. Managing the impact of forestry operations on local biodiversity therefore depends on having a comprehensive picture of the ecological complexity found within these diverse communities of animals and plants.

Traditional approaches to surveying biodiversity that rely on simple observations of iconic species fail to capture the complexity of extant ecological communities, while being difficult to scale and lack the scientific robustness required to inform management and investment decisions.

Over the last two years, we have been exploring the use of systematic sampling methodologies that can provide such robustness. In 2023 we trialled the use of environmental DNA ('e-DNA') sampling in a pilot project, where samples of watercourses were taken to look for traces of DNA from invertebrates, mammals, birds to get a picture of the biodiversity on our sites.

While this method provided large amounts of data, it was difficult to aggregate the results into a usable format for comparisons between habitats and sites.



The Wallacea Trust methodology

There are currently more than 52 different published methodologies that can be used to generate validated Nature Positive claims and biodiversity/nature credits.

The Wallacea Trust Methodology is one of a handful of these approaches that is being widely adopted because it is opensource, scientifically robust, and easy for people from nonecological backgrounds to understand.

The metrics adopted in the study scored habitats based on their distinctiveness and regional or national strategic significance, as well as condition.

The Wallacea Trust methodology provides such a basis, and in March 2024, Gresham House engaged rePLANET, a nature-based consultancy, to conduct a biodiversity baselining exercise across two Gresham House managed sites, using the Wallacea Trust methodology.

The aim of the study was to build a database of forest biodiversity data to inform the continued development of our biodiversity management strategy.

Project work began in April 2024, with ecological surveys conducted over two periods in June and July 2024.

Adopting the Wallacea Trust methodology, rePLANET visited different locations within our forest site at Priesthaugh and gathered samples to produce a biodiversity baseline.

The baseline is a measure of the biodiversity that exists in a given area before changing forest management practices.

This preliminary step utilised five metrics:

- The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) metric, developed by the UK government assessing structural components
- Abundance and species richness of plants
- Abundance and species richness of breeding birds
- Abundance and species richness of above-ground invertebrates (such as mayfly, woodlice, dragon fly)
- Abundance and species richness of detritivores (organisms that feed on detritus or organic waste)

Positive baseline results

The rePLANET baselining dataset reveals several interesting aspects of biodiversity at Priesthaugh.



Non-productive habitats are important sources or reservoirs of biodiversity, shown consistently across all metrics

Structurally, they contain areas of high distinctiveness and local or regional importance, such as the blanket bog and fenland habitats They also contain unique flora which support distinct assemblages of invertebrates and, consequently, bird species of conservation concern.

Maintaining the health, condition and extent of these habitats will be crucial to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and ecological integrity at the site level, which is a core commitment under the Gresham House Forest Charter.



Productive areas of the forest contribute significantly to the biodiversity of the forest

Looking at invertebrate and bird populations, mature plantations support unique assemblages of woodland specialists that would otherwise be absent, especially given the challenges of establishing broadleaved woodlands in upland landscapes.



Young plantation habitats have emerged as an overlooked yet important source of biodiversity.

At odds with its classification under the DEFRA metric, this habitat has supported levels of biodiversity comparable with, or higher than, non-forest habitats across all metrics.



The habitat's high floristic diversity supports significant resources of alpha diversity across taxonomic or functional groups that are essential for ecological health.

These results hint at the prospect of net positive aspirations being achievable within productive forests , although more research will be needed.



Site level scores for the Wallacea Index show a positive picture at Priesthaugh.

Across the basket of metrics, Priesthaugh compares well against non-forest habitats, indicating that sustainable forestry can deliver positive outcomes for nature.

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