Habitat Action Plan

Wasteland

purple toadflax, Deptford Power Station
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"…that day there was barely a soul about in the official parks. But as soon as we hit waste wetland again, up near Lea Bridge, they reappeared, whole families out blackberrying, picnicking, taking short cuts. The land here was as bizarre and artificial an ecosystem as you could find. There was a coot's nest on a floating car seat…close by you could stand and look down across a wonderful jungle of plants from three continents…It was like a wildlife version of the Notting Hill Carnival, rowdy, colourful and cosmopolitan, but with a touch of old village England, too." (Mabey, 1998)

1. Aims

- To promote the retention, incorporation, enabling and management of wasteland habitats within new developments in London
- To maintain a diverse network of wasteland sites
- To highlight the important value of London's wastelands for people and wildlife

2. Introduction

Wasteland comprises the range of habitats that develop on land whose industrial, commercial, or residential use has declined or ceased. Much of London's wasteland is also termed brownfield land – land that has been previously developed. Brownfield sites may once have been the location of railway sidings, factories, housing, sewage

treatment works, docks or quarries. The biodiversity they support can be stunning and unique, providing a mosaic of species and communities at different stages of succession that enriches our urban environment. Wasteland provides ideal foraging habitat for birds like goldfinches, linnets and, on a few sites, black redstarts. The open character of these areas, with their small-scale variations in topography and climate, makes many sites excellent for invertebrates and reptiles. London's wasteland may be second only to ancient woodland for rare invertebrates.

Their substrates can be highly variable and include demolition rubble, railway ballast, and pulverised fuel ash, as well as natural substrates. These substrates are characteristically nutrient-poor and free-draining and, as a result, the vegetation of early-colonised wasteland is typically sparse, containing species adapted to the physical and chemical conditions.

Wasteland provides important open spaces for local people in the urban environment. These sites are often the true 'wild' city spaces, and there is great potential to make them more accessible, safe and enjoyable through positive management. Both native and exotic species are found in these habitats and this mixture is a reflection of the city's past and present international trade and cultural links.

3. Current Status

The current distribution of wasteland sites in London is not adequately known, but concentrations can be found in the Thames Gateway and the Lee and Wandle valleys. Sites include Battersea Power Station (Wandsworth), Essex Filter Beds (Waltham Forest), Silwood Triangle and Bell Lane Gasworks (Lewisham) and Friern Barnet Sewage Works (Haringey). Further examples are given in the London Biodiversity Audit.

The current status of wasteland constantly changes due to the rapid rate of development in some areas and sites designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) continue to be damaged and destroyed.

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Habitat

4.1 Rate of creation and loss of wasteland

Many typical factors that contributed to the existence of large wasteland sites have now slowed down or ceased. Current policy set out in '*Towards an Urban Renaissance'* (the report of the government's Urban Task Force) targets brownfield development. The policy encourages rapid recycling of all vacant land with little regard for current wildlife value; hence a projected decline in the number of wasteland sites.

4.2 Natural succession

The natural process towards a more closed tree/scrub habitat threatens the biodiversity value of early successional wasteland communities. The substrates themselves can slow the process of succession, as can a certain level of disturbance from human and

animal activities. Nevertheless, active site management may be required to maintain the conditions that favour wildlife on wasteland sites.

4.3 Public perception

The image of industrial decline and anti-social activity targeted at brownfield land has created a negative public image of these wasteland habitats. This poor image also exists within the conservation sector and consequently, ecological research and evaluation of wasteland has lagged behind that of more conventional habitats.

Wasteland sites of high biodiversity value that have been set aside for public access, are often managed inappropriately, with the introduction of amenity grassland and tree planting.

It is therefore a major challenge to raise awareness of the value of wasteland among decision-makers, land managers and the general public and to promote their management both for biodiversity and for safe, enjoyable access.

5 Current Action

5.1 Legal status

There are no wasteland sites with statutory site protection. A number of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in London contain elements of wasteland habitat and several sites which are almost entirely composed of wasteland habitat have been identified as SINCs. However, only a handful of these have received protection through appropriate planning policies.

Several protected species are commonly associated with wasteland sites. Common lizard and slow-worm enjoy partial protection, whilst the breeding sites of black redstart and little ringed plover, which occasionally breeds on wasteland, are fully protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended).

5.2 Mechanisms targeting the habitat

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

The London Brownfields Forum has been set up to discuss issues concerning wasteland. It is intended that the work of the Forum should be developed to promote the social and ecological value of these habitats.

6. Flagship Species

These special plants and animals are characteristic of wasteland in London.

Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	A red-tailed, robin-sized bird of the thrush family. One of Britain's rarest birds. Known as the 'power-station' bird, associated with wasteland and industrial sites.
Linnet	*Carduelis cannabina*	Brownfield land with areas of scrub and grassland provide essential feeding and breeding grounds for

		these birds throughout the year. Summer males sport striking splashes of carmine red.
Common lizard	*Lacerta vivipara*	These cold-blooded animals like quiet sites with open ground that retain the heat.
The 'humble bumble'	*Bombus humilis*	This nationally rare bee has no widely-accepted English name. Its stronghold is on the open ground of flower-rich brownfield land in the Thames Gateway.
White Mullein	*Verbascum lychnitis*	A nationally scarce plant of disturbed chalk grassland that can be found on chalky or artificial substrates.
London rocket	*Sisymbrium irio*	A common weed in Mediterranean countries, this relative of salad rocket is an introduced plant that sprang up in East London after the Great Fire of 1666. It now has a very localised distribution.
False London rocket	*Sisymbrium loeselii*	A later introduction to London, false rocket is less heat demanding than London rocket, and is found widely scattered across London wasteland sites.
Rosebay willowherb	*Chamerion angustifolium*	'Fireweed' is a classic plant of disturbed ground. It is historically associated in London with the bombsites of the second world war and springs up in areas where there have been fires.
Teasel	*Dipsacus fullonum*	Teasel is often found in the rough grassland of some wasteland sites. It is named after the use of its spiny heads to tease wool before spinning. Goldfinches are often seen in the winter feeding on the seedheads.
Viper's bugloss	*Echium vulgare*	A member of the borage family, this plant has vivid blue and purple flowers. Linnaeus, who invented our system of biological classification, said it 'surpassed in splendour anything that can be imagined'.

7. Objectives, Actions and Targets

*Most of these actions are specific to this habitat. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in a separate '*Generic Action*' section which should be read in conjunction with this document. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Ecological Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.*

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.

Objective 1 To map the distribution of wasteland in London and identify key locations and sites

Target: To input relevant data onto a Geographical Information System (GIS) by end of 2001

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Collate existing data on wasteland sites from habitat survey data and local authority Unitary Development Plans	2001	LWT	GLA, LA

Objective 2 To develop the London Brownfields Forum to provide a mechanism for collating and disseminating examples of best practice on wasteland conservation.

Target: To increase the membership of the Forum to include representatives from developer and landscape planning organisations by summer 2001

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Organise conference on wasteland ecology and creation of wasteland habitat features to raise awareness among developers and landscape planners and encourage them to take part in the Forum	2001	London Brownfields Forum	

Objective 3 To raise awareness of the social and wildlife values of wasteland.

Target: To produce a range of published material, and encourage ecological study of wasteland habitats.

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Publish report highlighting the wildlife value of brownfield land	2001	LWT	London Brownfields Forum
Develop a proposal for a research project to develop methodology for the evaluation of wasteland sites	2001	London Brownfields Forum	

Objective 4 To maintain a continuous supply of suitable land for colonisation by wasteland species.

Target: Establish policy and appropriate mechanisms for ensuring appropriate management of temporarily vacant land by 2002

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Establish dialogue with planning authorities to identify potential policy mechanisms for ensuring management of temporarily vacant land for wasteland wildlife	2002	London Brownfields Forum	LA, LWT, LLP

Objective 5 To promote the retention of wasteland habitats in suitable areas within new or existing public open space, and the enabling of wasteland communities on existing structures and open space of low ecological value throughout London.

Target: Enable five publicly-accessible wasteland sites (each 1 ha or greater in extent) by 2005.

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Identify 2 key sites with the potential for wasteland habitat creation or retention within new development proposals and develop demonstration project by 2002.	2002	London Brownfields Forum	LA
Enable 3 further wasteland sites	2005	London Brownfields Forum	LA

Relevant Action Plans

London Plans

Woodland, Tidal Thames, Canals, Railway Linesides, London's Exotic Flora.

Black redstart, 'Humble Bumble' (*Bombus humilis*).

National Plans

Urban habitats, a long-tongued bumblebee (*Bombus humilis*).

Key References

Mabey, R. (1998 edition). *The Unofficial Countryside* (William Collins and Sons Ltd).

The Urban Task Force (1999). *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (E&FN Spon, London).

The London Ecology Unit (1986). *Nature Conservation Strategy for London: 4: Wasteland, Woodland, The Tidal Thames, Barnet and Lewisham* (London Ecology Unit).

Weightman, G., and Birkhead (1986). *City Safari: Wildlife in London* (Sidgewick and Jackson Ltd. in association with London Weekend Television).

Abbreviations

EN – English Nature
GLA – Greater London Authority
LA – Local Authority
LLP – Lower Lea Project
LWT – London Wildlife Trust

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