



UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions

Upland Oakwood

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The definition of this habitat remains unchanged from the pre-existing Habitat Action Plan (<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110303145955/http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=1>), a summary of which appears below.

Upland oakwoods are characterised by a predominance of oak (most commonly sessile, but locally pedunculate) and birch in the canopy, with varying amounts of holly, rowan and hazel as the main understorey species. The amount of birch in the woods tends to increase in north-west Scotland. The range of plants found in the ground layer varies according to the underlying soil type and degree of grazing from bluebell-bramble-fern communities through grass and bracken dominated ones to healthy moss-dominated areas. Most oakwoods also contain areas of more alkaline soils, often along streams or towards the base of slopes where much richer communities occur, with ash and elm in the canopy, more hazel in the understorey and ground plants such as dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, Enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, and tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Elsewhere small alder stands may occur or peaty hollows covered by bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. These elements are an important part of the upland oakwood system. The ferns, mosses and liverworts found in the most oceanic of these woods are particularly rich; many also hold very diverse lichen communities and the woods have a distinctive breeding bird assemblage, with redstarts *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, wood warblers *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, and pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* being associated with them throughout much of their range. In Wales the woods are also the main breeding areas for red kites *Milvus milvus*. The invertebrate communities are not particularly well-studied compared to those in some other woodland types but support a range of notable species including for example the chequered skipper butterfly *Carterocephalus palaemon* in some Scottish sites.

There are no precise figures for the total extent of this woodland type, but it is believed to be between about 70,000 and 100,000ha in the UK. It is found throughout the north and west of the UK with major concentrations in Argyll and Lochaber, Cumbria, Gwynedd, Devon and Cornwall. Related woodland does occur on the continent, particularly in the more oceanic areas but the British and Irish examples are recognised internationally as important because of their extent and distinctive plant and animal communities. For some of these species Britain and Ireland hold a substantial part of the world/European population.