



# UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions

## Native Pine Woodlands

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The definition of this habitat remains unchanged from the pre-existing Habitat Action Plan (<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110303150026/http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPIans.aspx?ID=6>), a summary of which appears below.

Native pine woodlands are relict indigenous forests dominated by self-sown Scots *Pinus sylvestris* which occur throughout the central and north-eastern Grampians and in the northern and western Highlands of Scotland. They are an important western representative of the European boreal forests in which structure and succession was probably determined naturally by storms and natural fires caused by lightning.

Native pinewoods occur on infertile, strongly leached, podsollic soils. They do not support a large diversity of plants and animals compared with some more fertile habitats. However, there is a characteristic plant and animal community which includes many rare and uncommon species. The main tree species is Scots pine although birches *Betula* spp., rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, alder *Alnus glutinosa*, willows *Salix* spp., bird cherry *Prunus padus* are also found. Sessile oak *Quercus petraea* also occurs infrequently, mainly in the north-east of Scotland. A shrub understorey, where browsing levels are low, includes common juniper *Juniperus communis*, aspen *Populus tremula*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. Old or dead trees and rotting wood supports significant beetle and bryophyte communities. The field layer is characterised by acid-tolerant plants like bell heather *Erica cinerea*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*. Many uncommon and rare species are found in this habitat including the specialist hoverfly *Callicera rufa* and the distinctive bird species capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*. Britain's only endemic bird species the Scottish crossbill *Loxia scotica*, and rare species such as twinflower *Linnaea borealis* and one-flowered wintergreen *Moneses uniflora* are also found mainly in the native pinewoods.

In pre-historic times native mixed forests dominated by pine may have covered over 1.5 million hectares in the Scottish Highlands about 4,000 years ago. Now they occupy around 1% of this former range, some 16,000ha, which is spread over 77 separate areas across the Highlands. Much of the areas are sparsely wooded, and regeneration is being prevented in many areas by heavy browsing by deer and sheep. However, recent regeneration schemes have started to increase the area again. Genetically distinct populations have been identified in different regions, particularly in the north-western and south-western Highlands.