



NATURE RESERVES; GENERAL POLICY

London Wildlife Trust manages a portfolio of staffed and unstaffed nature reserves across London it has acquired since its inception. These are managed as a means to directly conserve habitats and species, to engage people with nature through direct experience, volunteering and outdoor education, and as a way to demonstrate best practice in order to influence land-owners and others. Our nature reserves are also the key public face of the Trust, by acting as 'shop windows' and consequently what happens on them will reflect upon our profile and reputation.

The rationale underpinning our land-holdings and the principles by which we determine and carry out the practices that take place on them are therefore central to furthering our objectives. This policy identifies the purposes of our reserves, and highlights the principles of practice that may take place on them and the activities we encourage. It complements the suite of reserves' priorities for work and investment set out in the Nature Reserves Strategy (2015) in line with the Strategic Plan (2015-20).

I. Policy

- London Wildlife Trust manages nature reserves in London to:
 - further the conservation of habitats, species and other natural features;
 - enable people to have access to, engagement with, and benefit from direct contact with the natural world;
 - undertake research on wildlife and the natural environment;
 - demonstrate the role of natural habitats as part of the city's green infrastructure and the ecosystem services they provide;
 - provide opportunities for voluntary activities to further nature conservation;
 - carry out and provide opportunities for outdoor education and training to further nature conservation;
 - promote and market membership and the work of the Trust;
 - demonstrate best practice on all of the above;
- We will maintain our reserves according to their individual management plans and implement practices carried out on them are in accordance with existing policy (see 2, and detailed in the *Nature Reserves Management Policy (2015)*);
- We will manage our reserves to help meet the objectives of the London and local Biodiversity Action Plans, green space and green infrastructure strategies, catchment plans, and other relevant programmes to conserve London's natural environment, and complement and support the work of others through partnership and information sharing as appropriate;
- We will endeavour to protect our reserves from damaging planning proposals and interventions. However, if permission is granted for such works we will seek appropriate mitigation and/or compensation for all unavoidable direct and/or indirect adverse impacts to benefit the respective reserve;

- We will provide information on our reserves portfolio, and make this readily available to encourage public awareness of the Trust;
- We will seek to manage land for nature conservation by arrangements and tenures that are most conducive to the Trust's available resources;
- Subject to prior agreement, we will encourage the positive use of our nature reserves by third parties as long as they are consistent with – or further – the above objectives (see 3);
- We will actively discourage inappropriate use of our nature reserves, or those that conflict with the above objectives, and will seek to enforce the appropriate legal instruments for unlicensed, illegal and/or criminal activities that take place on them (see 3);
- We will regularly review our portfolio of reserves to ensure that they meet our objectives, and amend this according to the Reserves Strategy;

The Trust will review this policy and amend it following any changes to legislation, planning guidance or scientific evidence, as appropriate.

2. Reserve management practices and activities

A range of activities and practices take place on London Wildlife Trust nature reserves, some as a means to further our objectives. They include:

- *Ecological issues*, such as: recording, surveying and monitoring; species introductions; ivy; tree management; and conserving soils and geological features;
- *Visitor and amenity issues*, such as: boundaries, entrances and other infrastructure; vandalism and anti-social behaviour; fires; memorials, ashes and burials; and hunting and foraging;
- *Management practices*, such as: Clothing and PPE; working in and by water; burning; pesticides and herbicides; grazing; and management plan reviews
- *Education, community and events issues*, such as: children's activities; food growing; exhibiting animals; corporate volunteering; and sale & consumption of alcohol

These are set out in more detail in the *Nature Reserves Management Policy (2015)*, and each will also be addressed, where appropriate, within each reserve management plan. Our approaches to each issue are informed by prescriptive legislation, policy, guidance and/or existing best practice.

3. Additional uses

Inevitably, nature reserves can and will be used for a range of purposes by visitors, as well as actions by third parties on land in London which may affect our reserves, including those set out below. Many of these are largely benign, some may help to further the Trust's objectives, and others will be deemed inappropriate.

Appropriate activities

Research (e.g. ecological, geographical)
 Educational and training work
 Photography and filming (with caveats)
 TV and radio broadcasts
 Fashion shoots and art installations
 Corporate volunteering & team-building
 Press launches
 Sponsored walks, guided walks and talks

Inappropriate activities

Filming of inappropriate subjects
 Hunting and shooting of wildlife
 Commercial collecting
 Celebratory fires and beacons
 Fireworks

As above our responses to these are set out in more detail in the *Nature Reserves Management Policy (2015)*, but each will also be addressed where appropriate within each reserve management plan.

For example, the Trust carries out a range of activities to further its objectives, especially to engage people who may otherwise never visit a nature reserve. These activities (e.g. bushcraft, birthday parties, wild camping, music events) are carried out with due control and by arrangement with any appropriate

authorities. We are mindful that similar but uncontrolled activities undertaken by third parties on Trust land-holdings without prior consent may cause problems or give erroneous impressions of the way our reserves are managed.

The Trust will encourage third parties to arrange activities and events in advance, and these will be addressed on an individual site basis with the relevant staff or volunteer contacts. Inevitably there will be 'grey' areas, such as trapping of wildlife for research, pest control, small acoustic musical events, seasonal foraging (e.g. holly), and consumption of alcohol for which the Trust will make a relevant judgement according to the circumstances. Some activities may be subject to local bye-laws and/or licensing arrangements, for which the relevant authority will need to be involved.

There will also be the potential for unlicensed, illegal or criminal activities to take place, such as fly-tipping, dog-fighting, illegal grazing, shooting and badger-baiting. The history of these on Trust nature reserves has been largely infrequent (fly-tipping being the most frequent), although a few sites do have persistent problems (e.g. illegal grazing). The Trust will need to be alert to and take the necessary measures with relevant partners, to prevent or prosecute such activities.

4. Context

History

London Wildlife Trust first acquired land to be managed as nature reserves through the activities of its founding local groups in their efforts to save sites from development threat, such as Sydenham Hill Wood (1982) and Gunnersbury Triangle (1983). During the 1980s over 40 sites came under the Trust's management, largely helped by the growth of staff in 1985-6 enabling further volunteer activity to take place. At that time many local authorities were keen to dispose of land, or offer cheaper management arrangements through the impacts of government funding cuts. The Trust was therefore largely opportunistic in the acquisition of sites. Consequently depending on what was offered, the sites ranged in character from derelict pocket spaces and railside woodland, to ancient meadows and parts of larger parks. During the 1990s greater consideration was given to the land under the Trust's management, following issues arising from the costs and potential liabilities previously incurred.

Tenure

Most of the Trust's nature reserves are managed under lease or licence predominantly on land owned by local authorities or utility companies. We own very few; Plough Lane Pond (purchased for £1 in 1987; since divested), Saltbox Hill (1999), Riddlesdown (2000) and Crane Meadows (2001) are the only London Wildlife Trust sites acquired with freehold. Some additional reserves are managed under a service level agreement or contract.

The Trust aims to ensure we have long-term security on the nature reserves we don't own through leases, which enables us to fund-raise for them. The majority of leases we hold are for 25 years.

5. Portfolio management and governance

The Trust will, from time to time, review its nature reserves to ensure that they meet the organisation's objectives. New sites may be acquired and others may be disposed of. The large number of sites acquired during the 1980s posed constraints on resources; following a review in 2005, a number were identified for potential divestment to new managers. Over 12 reserves once managed by the Trust have since been returned to their owners or passed on to new managers.

The Trust's Nature Reserves Strategy (2015) sets out priorities for conservation activities, infrastructure replacement, and for investment, in line with the Strategic Plan through to 2020. It also identifies key risks and their management, and opportunities for acquisition and potential divestment. The Strategy is overseen by the Reserves Manager, and is reviewed annually.

The Trust's Board is ultimately responsible for the condition, acquisition and disposal of our nature reserves. However, day-to-day management is delegated to staff, principally via the Reserves Manager

and Director of Conservation. Relevant Committees and advisory groups help to develop policy and advise the Trust on matters of concern or help to reconcile conflicts as and when they arise.

6. FAQs

Are London Wildlife Trust reserves accessible to the public?

- Yes, the Trust's intention is to make every nature reserve it manages freely accessible to the public during daylight hours, although there may be constraints at certain times of the week/year where staff presence is required, or where we are bound by the lease or licence to keep areas closed.
- Some reserves contain habitats or areas which are sensitive to human presence. The Trust will help ensure these are respected through appropriate management, information dissemination and signage.

Does the Trust need nature reserves?

- The Trust believes that nature reserves present the best opportunity for demonstrating biodiversity conservation in London, providing people with the opportunity to directly experience nature close to hand;

Why does the Trust own so few nature reserves?

- Land in London is amongst the most expensive in the UK. Land not identified for potential development is usually under existing management (e.g. agriculture, golf courses, public parks), and may already be managed well for biodiversity; opportunities for sites for sale with nature conservation interest or potential are rare and costly. The Trust believes that whilst land ownership brings with it a range of benefits, it also incurs responsibilities with resource implications, and potential site acquisition is considered through a range of criteria. A range of management models, of which freehold is but one, will always be considered for the Trust's nature reserves.

Why aren't there larger nature reserves managed by the Trust?

- The Trust's nature reserves range in size from a few hundred square metres to over 30 hectares. Although the quality of a particular site is as important, we recognise that larger nature reserves generally provide a better basis for biodiversity conservation, but the opportunities to acquire large sites in London are rare. Decisions on potential site acquisition are made against a range of criteria, of which size is a key consideration.

Why does the Trust consider disposing of nature reserves?

- If sites no longer meet the Trust's objectives, then the Trust will seek to divest its responsibilities to another manager. In many cases this will be out of the Trust's control (e.g. the owner wishes to change its arrangements). However, the Trust always endeavours to ensure that the nature conservation interests of the site are secure for the future.

7. Links

London Wildlife Trust reserves:

<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/wildlife/reserves>