



Monitoring Dorset's SNCIs

Dorset's SNCIs form a significant proportion of our important wildlife sites across the county, numbering over 1300 and covering nearly 12,400 ha or 4.7% of Dorset's land area.

The vast majority of SNCIs are privately owned and every landowner plays an important role in ensuring that the remaining pockets of wildlife-rich land in Dorset can continue to survive and thrive in the face of global challenges such as climate change, pests and diseases and pollution.

The SNCI project includes a long-term rolling monitoring programme which allows changes across Dorset to be recorded and measured. Sites are surveyed approximately every 6 - 12 years and the data is used to record changes to habitats and sites. It also helps landowners and land managers make management decisions to maintain and enhance their sites.

This monitoring requires a significant amount of time and resources; and over the last few years, Dorset Wildlife Trust have been working to develop the role of volunteers in supporting staff to collect this important data.



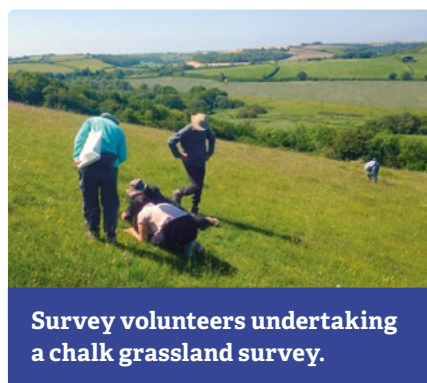
Coppice woodland ground flora.

© Mariko Whyte

In 2023 62 existing SNCIs have been surveyed, comprising 33 grassland sites, 19 woodland sites and 10 sites

supporting other habitats. Of these, approximately 40% were assessed to be maintained in good condition. Just under 30% were assessed to be in fair condition which has been maintained or is improving and unfortunately just over 30% in fair or poor condition and declining.

In addition, 16 potential new SNCI sites have been surveyed across Dorset, many of which are expected to be selected as SNCIs following review



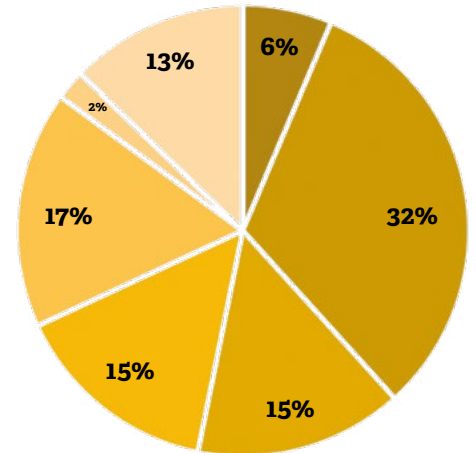
Survey volunteers undertaking a chalk grassland survey.

© Mariko Whyte

by the SNCI panel. We are always happy to survey and advise on other areas of land beyond existing SNCIs, and consider new sites that might be suitable for inclusion.

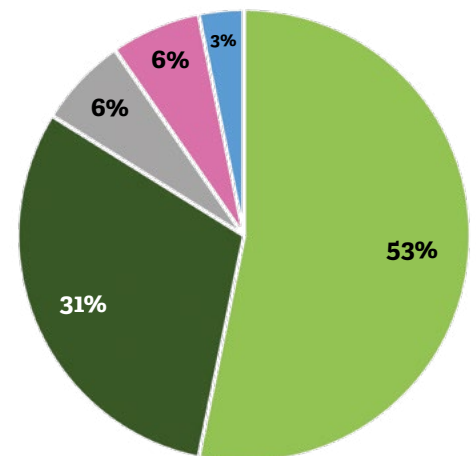
The surveys have been carried out by Dorset Wildlife Trust staff, surveyors from the Dorset Environmental Records Centre and volunteer surveyors, with a significant proportion undertaken by volunteers in 2023.

Thank you to all the landowners who have given permission for or requested surveys on their sites this year, and especially those who have allowed us to bring groups of volunteers for training. The opportunity to undertake surveys on really good quality sites is hugely valuable for volunteers to gain familiarity with the important indicator species for these habitats.



Condition of sites monitored in 2023

- Good (improving)
- Good (maintained)
- Fair (improving)
- Fair (maintained)
- Fair (declining)
- Poor (maintained)
- Poor (declining)



SNCI habitats surveyed in 2023

- Grassland
- Woodland
- Other
- Heathland
- Fen

If your site has been surveyed this year, you will receive a report of the results once they have been processed. If you would like your site to be surveyed next year or would like any of the previous survey information about your site please get in touch!

Mariko Whyte
Conservation Officer: mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

How can Dorset Wildlife Trust's Wilder Landscapes Team help you?

As we all know, the landscape of funding how we look after our land is changing. Dorset Wildlife Trust have long worked with farmers and landowners to support access to, and advise on available agri-environment schemes and other funds designed to give more space for nature. This is a crucial part of our work, as supporting and influencing land outside our own land holdings gives us the largest opportunity to restore nature. Since leaving the EU the funding mechanisms that have been in place for decades are disappearing and are being replaced by new schemes, funds and markets designed to reward public goods with public and private money. This change presents challenges and opportunities and Dorset Wildlife Trust have been working with farmers and landowners to try to shape, trial and better understand these emerging funding channels.

I have the pleasure to lead a team of experts within Dorset Wildlife Trust who are out throughout Dorset advising landowners on improving their land for nature using the newly emerging Environmental Land Management schemes and supporting farming clusters to work together on a landscape scale. Others in the team are delivering ecological baselines for emerging green finance such as Biodiversity Net Gain and gathering data and experience in trialling nutrient neutrality schemes and Landscape Recovery.

More and more landowners are becoming increasingly interested in changing how they manage the least agriculturally productive areas of their land, instead seeing these areas as



Rob Farrington
Head of Wilder Landscapes

opportunities to clean and store water, sequester carbon to help tackle climate change and make space for nature or communities.

In 2021 Dorset Wildlife Trust acquired Wild Woodbury, a 170 ha site that is being used to trial a more natural processes-led approach (some people might call it rewilding) and importantly gather data to share with others. We use the site to demonstrate the challenges and benefits of this approach to others and can then help create bespoke plans for private sites.

If you would like to speak with the team about how we might be able to help you please do get in touch. Contact us on enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

“Supporting and influencing land outside our own land holdings gives us the largest opportunity to restore nature.”



Environmental Land Management (ELM) update

How government will pay for land-based environment and climate goods and services.



Corn bunting © Alta Oosthuizen | Adobe Stock

This year Defra launched the much-anticipated updated detail on the 2023 Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) Scheme. The 2023 SFI contains 23 Actions whereby farmers will get paid to; reduce the use of pesticides, manage nutrients to reduce pollution, manage hedgerows to support wildlife, and provide habitat for birds and pollinators.

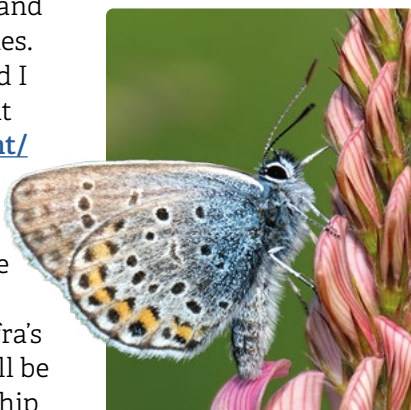
The SFI is effectively the first and lowest tier of ELM and is the broad and shallow option for these new schemes. There is something for everyone and I would encourage you to look at what is on offer. www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfi-handbook-for-the-sfi-2023-offer

The SFI supports good farm practice but more is needed to deliver real benefits for wildlife and nature. Defra's ambition is that gains for nature will be delivered via Countryside Stewardship Plus, the second tier of ELM, due to be launched in late 2024 and Landscape



Horseshoe Vetch

© ChrWeiss | Adobe Stock



Silver-studded blue

© Kati Moth | Adobe Stock

Recovery (currently being trialled), these schemes will deliver regional gains for nature and climate and pay for more bespoke projects to enhance the natural environment.

However, the Government's own evidence suggests that even with significantly higher uptake, agri-environmental schemes will not be sufficient to meet the Government's target to halt nature's decline by 2030. It is vital that as landowners you engage with these schemes and other ways of funding wildlife friendly farming to ensure that we create a robust and flourishing environment for Dorset's Wildlife.

Dorset Wildlife Trust Advisors can offer support and advice in these uncertain times please get in touch if you want to know more – **Emily Newton 07770 262334** or **Nick Gray 07824 438974**

Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy

For more information and future opportunities to feed into this work visit: dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/nature-recovery

A new Local Nature Recovery Strategy will identify the best opportunities to enhance nature across the county, in line with the Environment Act 2021.

Dorset Council are leading preparation of this strategy with BCP Council and Natural England. By working with partners and making new connections, the strategy will agree shared priorities for nature's recovery in Dorset and map proposals for practical action.

The first step will map SNCIs and other sites currently recognised for their biodiversity, to celebrate these nature-rich places and their custodians. Landowners and managers can then help identify where best to target future efforts and funding, sharing their local knowledge and existing environmental work.

Do you own or manage woodland that is coppiced or has been historically coppiced? A new study across the south-west needs you!



You can contact me by email (preferred) via: pete.ncfed@gmail.com or by telephone (although I'm often working out of phone signal!) on 07793 275039.

My name is Pete Etheridge. I'm an ecologist, coppice worker & Vice-Chair of Dorset Coppice Group. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce you to the National Coppice Federation's (NCFed) 'More Coppice into Productive Management' Project. More information about the project can be found at: ncfed.org.uk/mapping-project/

The Project aims to improve the understanding of where coppice woodland is located, its condition, and the barriers to coppice management. I've been tasked with surveying coppiced woodlands within Dorset, so if you own coppiced woodland (of any species or condition), it would be great to hear from you! I would then arrange to undertake a survey, so your woodland can be added to the project dataset. Upon completion of the project, you would receive a summary of the survey results that might help inform your future management.

Farming in Protected Landscapes funding continues until 2025

The SNCI project aims to help landowners and managers to manage their land to maintain or improve the condition of their SNCIs and where suitable to manage other land to deliver further benefits and enhance connectivity.

For landowners whose land falls within either the Dorset or Cranborne Chase AONBs the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme may be able to provide grant funding to support management work or other projects which benefit habitats and wildlife on farms. The programme provides funding to farmers and land managers, for projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to engage with the landscape and cultural heritage, or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses.

Since the beginning of the programme in 2021 over 150 projects have been supported within Dorset's protected landscapes. The programme and funding available has now been extended to March 2025 with all projects to be completed by this date so there is still time to apply if you have a project in mind - the sooner the better!

For more information about Farming in Protected Landscapes contact Rachel Janes at Dorset AONB www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/resource/farming-in-protected-landscapes/ or Helena Darragh at Cranborne Chase AONB www.cranbornechase.org.uk/farming-in-protected-landscapes



Duke of Burgundy eggs and adult butterfly found on chalk grassland being managed with FiPL support to deliver habitat improvements for this species.

© Mariko Whyte

Dorset Wildlife Trust may be able to support or facilitate SNCI landowners and managers to connect with nearby landowners or develop opportunities for sharing knowledge or resources when it comes to nature-friendly farming practices and management of special sites and habitats. If you have any ideas for training, events or resources that might be of interest please get in touch. Contact **Mariko Whyte (SNCI Officer)** mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

For further information on SNCIs and resources for landowners visit:

www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/SNCI or contact Mariko Whyte, Conservation Officer: mwhyte@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or 01305 264620

For advice on Countryside Stewardship (DWT):

Nick Gray, West Dorset Conservation Officer: 07824 438974 or ngray@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk
Emily Newton, Landowner Liaison Officer: 07528557685 or enewton@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Forestry Commission:

Roly Boughton (Woodland Officer, West Dorset and Purbeck): roly.boughton@forestrycommission.gov.uk 07442 862772

SW Area Office: 0300 067 4960

FWAGSW: Alex Butler: alex.butler@fwagsw.org.uk

SNCI Project
financially supported by

