

Policy Statement

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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 (detailed in the *Nature Reserves; Management Policies*) that may take place on them and the activities we encourage.

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;
 - provide opportunities for voluntary activities to further nature conservation;
 - carry out and provide opportunities for outdoor education, training and research to further nature conservation;
 - to demonstrate best practice on all of the above;
- We will maintain our reserves according to their individual management plans and that practices carried out on them are in accordance with existing policy (see 2);
- We will manage our reserves to help meet the objectives of the London and local Biodiversity Action Plans, green space strategies, 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 provide information on our reserves portfolio, and make this readily available to encourage public awareness of the Trust;
- 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 seek to manage land for nature conservation by arrangements and tenures that are most conducive to the Trust's available resources;
- We will regularly review our portfolio of reserves to ensure that they meet our objectives, and amend this according to the Reserves Retention & Acquisition 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

The following activities and practices take place on London Wildlife Trust nature reserves as a means to further our objectives. Some of these are subject to prescriptive policy and/or legislation, others to guidance, set out in more detail in the *Nature Reserves; Management Policies*, but each will be addressed where appropriate within each reserve management plan. The list below is not exhaustive.

Ecological issues

- Continuity of habitat and community assemblages
- Prevention of accidental local extinctions
- Recording, surveying and monitoring
- Invasive species control and management
- Hybridisation
- Species introductions (inc. planting)
- Ivy management
- Tree management
- Deadwood
- Wood extraction
- Bird and bat boxes
- Historical features

Management practices

- Health and safety and risk assessment
- Clothing and PPE
- Inclement weather
- Working in and by water
- Hand tools
- Power tools
- Pesticides and herbicides
- Disposal of cut materials (arisings)
- Tree felling, and movement of felled trees
- Grazing
- Burning
- Volunteers; support, management, training
- Mapping and recording
- Management plan reviews

Amenity issues

- General maintenance and safety
- Access, Rights of Way and footpaths
- Boundaries, entrances and other infrastructure
- Information and interpretation
- Vehicles, bicycles and horses
- Litter, fly-tipping and garden refuse
- Vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- Hunting and foraging
- Dogs
- Captive birds of prey
- Fires
- Firearms
- Metal detectors and archaeological investigation
- Commercial advertising
- Wardening
- Bye-laws

Education and community issues

- Environmental education
- Children's activities
- Community engagement
- Special events
- Corporate volunteering
- Food growing
- Exhibiting animals

3. Additional uses

Inevitably, nature reserves can and will be used for a range of purposes by third parties additional to those undertaken by the Trust, 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 work
- Training
- Photography and filming (with caveats)
- TV and radio broadcasts
- Fashion shoots
- Art installations
- Corporate volunteering & team-building
- Press launches
- Sponsored walks, guided walks and talks
- Fetes and open days

Inappropriate activities

- Filming of inappropriate subjects
- Shooting of wildlife
- Commercial collecting
- Celebratory fires and beacons
- Fireworks

The Trust carries out a range of activities (e.g. bushcraft, barbecues, birthday parties, wild camping, music events) to further its objectives, especially to engage people who may otherwise never visit a nature reserve. These activities 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), 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.

Portfolio management

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 has posed constraints on resources; following a review in 2005, a number have been identified for potential divestment to new managers, as set out in the Reserves Retention & Acquisition Strategy. Over 12 reserves once managed by the Trust have been returned to their owners or passed on to new managers.

5. 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.

6. Links

London Wildlife Trust reserves:

<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/Naturereserves/tabid/91/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>