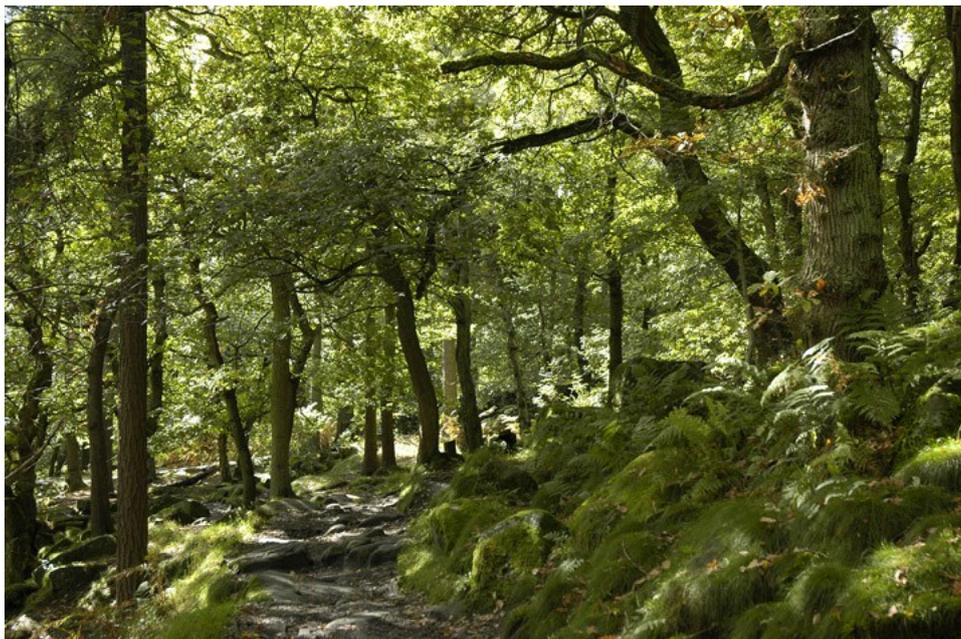


UPLAND OAKWOODS

Nationally

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*.



Oak Woodland © PDNPA

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.

This woodland type 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.

Extent in UK:
137,397 ha

In the Peak District

Semi-natural woodland dominated by oak and/or birch was probably one of the most common habitats over much of the Peak District, including the limestone plateau of the White Peak, prior to woodland clearance by prehistoric people. Today it is largely confined to Dark Peak cloughs and valley-sides where it is the main woodland type, with particular concentrations along the valley of the River Derwent. Smaller areas occur in similar situations in the South West Peak, with a handful of remnants on the White Peak Plateau and upper dalesides. Many oakwood sites contain small fragments of wet or ash woodland along flushes and on the lower slopes and clough bottoms. Such features are an integral part of the woods and contribute significantly to their wildlife value.

Nationally, upland semi-natural woods have declined by about 30 - 40% over the last 60 years. The historical decline in the economic value of coppice for charcoal production and oak bark for tanning has probably been an important factor in the deterioration of clough woodlands locally. This has led to a decline in sustainable management and consequent woodland loss and deterioration through livestock grazing. Up until 1985 forestry policy also encouraged replacement with productive conifers on some sites. Rates of woodland loss in the Peak District between 1909 and 1974 range between 8 and 68% in different areas. Many of the original clough woodlands are now little more than a handful of relic scattered trees and shrubs, though often still supporting important species.



Bluebells © Karen Shelley-Jones

Upland oak/birchwoods are at the south-eastern edge of their British range in the Peak District. They often support irreplaceable ancient woodland communities with notable species such as hazel, aspen, wood-sorrel, wood anemone, wood sage, bird cherry, common cow-wheat, bluebell, and upland birds, such as pied flycatcher and wood warbler. A considerable number of notable invertebrates including northern wood ant, ash-grey slug and the locally increasing purple hairstreak are also characteristic. The interface between woodland and moorland is of particular wildlife and landscape value, providing an important habitat for birds such as nightjar, tree pipit and, formerly, black grouse. In addition to their wildlife value, oak/birchwoods are often of considerable landscape importance and ancient woodland sites in particular may show features of archaeological/historical significance such as charcoal pits.

Particularly good examples of upland oak/birch woodland are Yarncliffe Wood (Padley), Abney & Bretton Clough and the Shell Brook Valley (Wincle).

**Extent in PD:
approx. 1,688 ha**

Current Factors Affecting the Habitat & Habitat Condition

- Overgrazing, particularly by deer and sheep, leading to altered woodland structure, impoverished ground flora and lack of regeneration.
- Changes in woodland and forestry management, in particular cessation of traditional management practices, such as coppicing and pollarding; and neglect, leading to successional changes in woods that were formerly managed.
- Inappropriate development including housing, quarrying, and tourist and recreational facilities, leading to increased trampling, disturbance and pollution.
- Widespread impacts of air pollution (nitrogen deposition), climate change and agricultural changes on adjacent land (nutrient enrichment), especially on lichen and bryophyte communities.
- Invasion by species such as rhododendron, which shades out the ground layers and eliminates much of the conservation interest
- Pollution of streams, including from mines and quarries.

Recent Work

Recently efforts have gone into creating new areas of oak-dominated woodland in the upland areas of the Peak District, through the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme. United Utilities have planted trees close to their reservoirs in the Longdendale and Chew valleys as part of wider habitat restoration and creation schemes linked with enhancing land management to improve water quality.

The future focus for upland oakwoods is likely to be on restoring relic ancient woodlands and linking these to other fragments to create larger wooded areas, both in the moorland cloughs and in valley bottoms of the Dark Peak and South West Peak.

Associated BAP Species in the Peak District

Noctule bat	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>
Pine marten?	<i>Martes martes</i>
Spotted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>

Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Shining Guest Ant	<i>Formicoxenus nitidulus</i>
Argent and sable	<i>Rheumaptera hastata</i>

NVC Communities

The principal vegetation types (and their associated sub-communities) included in this habitat are:

W11 - *Quercus petraea* - *Betula pubescens* - *Oxalis acetosella* woodland

W16 - *Quercus* - *Betula* - *Deschampsia* woodland