

Kent Downs Land Managers' Pack

The Backdrop

The Kent Downs cover nearly a quarter of Kent, stretching from the White Cliffs of Dover to the Surrey and London Borders. The Downs offer a diverse and vibrant landscape with dramatic chalk cliffs, secluded dry valleys, ancient woodlands, traditional orchards and locally distinct villages. Within these landscapes lies a range of habitats, each supporting its typical and important wildlife. The Kent Downs is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural beauty (AONB) in recognition of its national landscape value. For landowners in the AONB (and beyond), whether they own a garden, a parcel of land or even a farm, this Pack will help them understand the conservation value of that land and provide practical guidance regarding management and enhancement. It has been created in an easy to use, on-line format, where information specific to the landscape character area can be accessed and downloaded for free. Habitat management topics covered include woodland management, hedges, ponds, grasslands and orchards. Information provided is suitable for the layperson and the more experienced land manager. Guidance extends to which species of plant and animal are appropriate to each character area. Contacts for organisations that can help with more specialist advice are also given.

Developing a Good Idea

This Pack stemmed originally, from work done by the North West Kent Countryside Partnership, covering land management advice for the habitats commonly found in their area. With funding from the Kent Downs AONB Unit, the approach has been greatly expanded to cover the whole of the AONB. This has transformed the pack from a hard copy document to a web based resource, where land managers can access and download as little or as much information as they need. <http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/landmanagerspack.html>

The Pack has been put together with the 13 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) of the Kent Downs AONB as its focus, but could easily be used more widely, as much of the advice is sufficiently generic to be valuable in other areas. Each LCA has its own identity and the pack focuses on typical landscape features and flora and fauna that contribute to local distinctiveness. In this way, the Pack can inform, advise and educate, to help land managers choose the most appropriate, representative and hopefully, successful management for their land.

How to use the Pack

The Kent Downs is divided into 13 Landscape Character Areas, based on their local distinctiveness, on a clickable map. For example the Mid Kent Downs are characterised by orchards, hop gardens and parkland. Clicking on the map or on the 'contents page' headings downloads guidance sheets for each area.

Guidance is available for the following:

- Ponds
- Rivers and riverside land
- Woodlands
- Hedgerows
- Chalk grasslands
- Meadow grasslands
- Orchards
- Marshes
- Heathlands

Each guidance sheet is concise, yet contains a multitude of useful information, ranging from practical management tips to plant and animal species characteristic of the area. Below is a sample of the type and range of information and advice for managing aquatic vegetation in rivers.

Of course, no one guide can be totally comprehensive. However, by adopting a Landscape Character Area based approach, this Land Managers' Pack provides valuable pointers to landowners to help them target the typical features of their area and the habitats and species that thrive there. Armed with these insights landowners can then make better educated decisions when maintaining their small part of the world in a sensitive, healthy and ecologically friendly way.

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