

## THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

The River Thames is London's best known natural feature. It twists and turns through London, changing from a large freshwater river at Hampton into a saline estuary in the east. The river forms a continuous wildlife corridor stretching through London, between the countryside and the sea. The nature conservation importance of the linear features of the river channel, mudflats and banks cannot be separated from the land in the river corridor. The stretch between Hampton and Kew has the largest expanse of land designated with Site of Special Scientific Interest status in London.

For centuries, people have been fascinated by the River Thames, and it continues to attract and inspire local residents and visitors from central London and abroad. Part of the great attraction of the river is the accessible experience of tranquil nature among the concrete and asphalt of the city - the flash of a kingfisher, the bright colour of a wildflower or a sudden cloud of butterflies have a special resonance in the urban setting. One of the main aims of the Strategy is to ensure the continued balance between wildlife conservation and public enjoyment.

Over the centuries, the land and the river have been influenced by man's activities. No habitat in London is truly natural which means that we have a particular responsibility to continue to manage the area in ways which conserve a mosaic of attractive habitats and to take special care of rarities.

This section gives an overview of the variety of riverside habitats, providing broad guidelines for their management. It also considers opportunities for creating new green corridors and the involvement of people in the natural landscape.

## THE RIVER

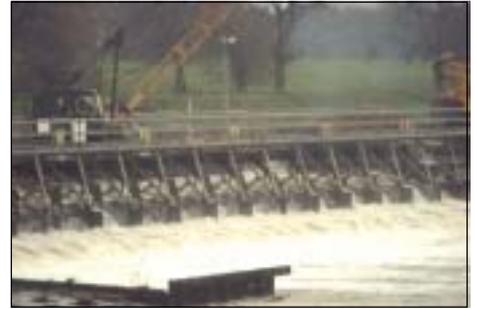
**The river channel** is fed by drainage from an enormous catchment, stretching into Gloucestershire and with a daily rise and fall of the tide as far as Teddington Lock. This hydrologic pattern produces a variety of special habitats. The success in curbing pollution of the Thames in recent years has made the river able to support a great variety of fish, and along its banks a healthier population of plants and invertebrates, which has led to an increase in many visiting and breeding bird species.

The Thames above Teddington Lock is completely non-tidal. The lack of a tidal scour creates many sheltered parts of the river where freshwater fish can breed. Dace, roach, chub and gudgeon are among the commoner species and these are preyed upon by pike, which require relatively slow-flowing and clear waters.

Since the cleaning of the lower Thames, migratory fish have once more been able to colonise. Salmonid fish passes, now built at all the locks and weirs, are especially important for allowing salmon and sea trout to swim upstream to breed. Passes for non-salmonid fish still need to be constructed.

Between Teddington Lock and Richmond Lock the water is only partly tidal, with the water level generally maintained above that of the natural low tide. Generally no saline water penetrates this far upriver but flounders, primarily an estuarine species, have been recorded in this stretch. Over 100 species of fish now use the tidal Thames. The wide range of fish has made the river very important for fish-eating birds. The cormorant has become quite a common sight in the last 10 years, either flying over the water, fishing on the river or perched in trees on the islands. The Thames is fully tidal below Richmond Lock and expanses of mud and gravel are exposed at low tide between Richmond Lock and Kew Bridge. The main source of pollution into the river is the occasional discharge of untreated storm water. Although expensive and logistically extremely difficult, the reduction of contaminated storm water discharge would reduce the polluting impact on river water quality.

***Policy NL 1: Maintain salmonid fish passes through weirs and construct further non-salmonid fish passes to assist fish migration. Seek to minimise the discharge of untreated storm water into the river.***



From Teddington Weir downstream the Thames is tidal

**The islands** in the river are important refuges for both plants and animals. Although some of the aits have been developed for housing, many are partly or wholly covered by native vegetation and provide some of the best semi-natural habitat for animals along the river. The habitats found on each island and their value for wildlife depend on such factors as size, management, age and frequency of inundation by the tide. In the past, many of the islands would have been covered in osier beds, used for supplying London's basket-making trade. Today, most have been colonised by woodland and plans for re-coppicing are in hand.

The most significant islands for nature conservation are Eel Pie Island, Isleworth Ait and Lots and Brentford Aits. All of these have substantial areas of natural vegetation. For example, Isleworth Ait is dominated by mature sycamore woodland with a shrub layer of hawthorn, holly and elder, and a rich ground flora. Brentford Ait, which appears as two islands at high tide when the muddy link is covered over, is flooded during some high tides and consequently consists largely of trees which prefer the very wet conditions, and has little ground flora.

Although logistically difficult, management of the island habitat would increase wildlife diversity. Some open areas should be retained or created for nesting waterfowl. Native trees should generally be favoured over those exotic species of little value to nature conservation when thinning or coppicing the woodland; but woodland management on the islands should be minimal, allowing the trees to grow old and die in place. Where possible, natural regeneration should be encouraged rather than new planting. Where osier beds remain, the re-cutting and subsequent re-growth of the willow will provide thicket conditions favoured by many birds. The habitat could be further enhanced by creating reed beds on the river edge.

***Policy NL 2: Prevent the loss of any further island habitat to development. Maintain islands as quiet refuges, particularly for nesting birds. Where appropriate, encourage natural woodland regeneration and enhance river edges for habitat diversity.***

**The intertidal zone** or foreshore, the area exposed at low tide below Richmond Lock, provides a rich feeding ground for water birds. The intertidal mudflats, formed by the accumulation of silt, have a high density of small invertebrates. For example, around Lots Ait, the mud contains flatworms, freshwater shrimps, and six species of leech. At high tide the birds roost on adjacent high ground while fish take their turn at feeding on these rich areas.

Intertidal vegetation is also vitally important for supporting large numbers of invertebrates and birds. Areas of semi-natural river edge are very scarce in London, and the most important one upstream of central London is the Syon Park meadows and muds. Designated as an SSSI, it is a unique area of flood meadow and wet woodland dissected by tidal creeks which open onto the Thames. There is a large reedbed with a variety of characteristic plant species and rare species of snail. The site is well used by a variety of birds, including herons and cormorants.

The littoral gravel areas provide an important habitat, being used as refugia, feeding, spawning and nursery grounds by many fish species, notably bass, sand-smelt and flounder.

***Policy NL 3: Take opportunities, now that the Thames Barrier has reduced the risk of serious flooding, to adapt the artificial embankment to allow the foreshore and a more natural edge to evolve, providing this does not prejudice recreation potential. Prevent built development from encroaching into the river channel. Conduct a comprehensive ecological evaluation of intertidal areas to determine management procedures and potential for public access.***



Low tide at Brentford. The intertidal mudflats are an important nature conservation resource

Although **the river banks** are now largely artificial embankments, they can still provide a valuable habitat.

Vertical cliffs of sterile wall, notably the solid concrete constructions at Kew Gardens, provide little value to wildlife. But on more gently sloping walls, and on those which are loosely constructed or crumbling, plants are able to colonise and consequently provide areas for invertebrates to feed. Mute swans, mallard, coot, and moorhens feed on the invertebrates and also the green algae on the walls.

Jetties, docks and barges provide roosts for a variety of birds above the water, while below the surface, wooden structures are valuable for crustaceans, the shipworm and other bivalves.

There is a valuable range of plants on the banks, some preferring the lower, wet situation, and others the drier bank top. In some places, trees and scrub have gained a root hold on the bank and provide shelter, shade and roosting places. However, the shade of the trees has a direct effect on the underlying ground flora, reducing the variety of plants which mature to produce seed and hence gradually changing the flora to a limited number of shade-bearing species. The introduction of a rotational management regime on a 10-15 year cycle would allow plant colonisation between repair programmes.

***Policy NL 4: Construct the banks with materials which accommodate plants. Actively manage the plant and tree growth on a rotational basis to provide both a mosaic of sun and shade for plants, roosting and breeding places for birds, and attractive river banks for people enjoying the river.***

**The towpath** runs along one or both sides of the river all the way from Hampton to Kew. Though the width of the towpath varies considerably. The vegetation on the edges of the path creates an important linear green corridor. The wild flowers, quite a number of which are rare in London, attract many invertebrates to feed. The purple hairstreak butterfly, for example, can be seen feeding on the bramble flowers along the edge of the towpath beside Kew Gardens. While trees provide some shelter from wind, the shade they cast may reduce the floristic interest of the towpath edges.

***Policy NL 5: Manage the towpath edges to ensure a variety of valuable habitats. Where appropriate, manage encroaching scrub on a rotational basis to maintain open areas, cutting grass and other low vegetation annually and removing all the cut material.***

There are no fewer than six **tributaries and channels** entering the Thames between Hampton and Kew. These tributaries extend the river habitat beyond the Thames, providing a corridor visibly used by birds, including even kingfishers. These tributary creeks are also important for fish as they provide valuable refuges, feeding grounds, spawning areas and access routes to less disturbed freshwater reaches. The River Crane is tidal for 800 metres and the river channel has considerable ecological value. On the muddy banks aquatic plants include celery-leaved crowfoot, water-pepper, gypsy-wort and hemlock water dropwort.

Apart from the Longford River, most of these rivers pass through built up areas, before entering the Thames, with little natural vegetation or open space alongside. The main Thames channel is therefore the principal corridor.

***Policy NL 6: Create new habitats along the Thames tributaries and channels to provide an improved wildlife corridor. Build fish passes into the weirs on the tributaries to assist fish to reach quieter stretches.***



**The harsh concrete revetments at Kew are hostile to people and wildlife. More sensitive treatments might be considered now that the Thames Barrier is in position**

## HABITATS IN THE RIVER CORRIDOR

The natural landscape reflects, through the plants which cloak it, the underlying geology and man's influence upon it. The Thames landscape has been formed over millions of years. As already described under Historical and Cultural Landscape, some 70 million years ago much of the London area was covered by the sea, which resulted in a deposition of **London Clay**. There are now only a few places where London Clay is found at the surface, mainly within the valleys of the Rivers Crane and Brent where it has been re-exposed by erosion, and also where it is exposed over parts of Richmond Park. Because of its poor drainage qualities, the clay has marshy habitats associated with it, often damp woodland.

In contrast to the clay, the gravels are free draining and support dry acidic grassland. Today, Richmond Park and Hampton Court Park are the main areas where acid-loving plants indicate the underlying acidic gravels. The gravels also make a good substrate for building and have largely been covered by urban development. Apart from Richmond Park, it is therefore only where there has been a risk of flooding close to the rivers that gravels are now seen near to the surface. There are river terrace gravels near the Thames at Isleworth and Syon. The gravel under Ham Lands was excavated in the first half of the 20th century and has been infilled. Elsewhere flanking parts of the Thames, Crane and Brent, there is often a superficial layer of **alluvium** deposited in relatively recent years by the rivers, making the land more fertile and less acidic. Some important meadows survive, such as the Syon tide meadows, but more often a lack of management has led to the development of woodland on the alluvium.

The land in the river corridor between Hampton and Kew supports a remarkably rich mosaic of woodland, scrub, grassland and wetland habitats. In many places, all of these habitats are found together. There is a great diversity of plants and animals, including numerous species which are rare in London<sup>25</sup>.

### Grassland

Due to the history of the area, significant grasslands still survive, never having been treated with chemicals or fertilisers. Richmond Park's acidic grasslands are the most extensive in London and because of this, together with the importance of the Park's ancient trees and wetland habitats, it has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest by English Nature. Bushy Park and Hampton Court Park (or Home Park) also have large expanses of acid grassland, with sheep's fescue and common bent-grass dominating the sward over much of Bushy Park. Many areas turn red in early summer with an abundance of sheep's sorrel while other typical wildflowers of dry acid grasslands which are common here include cat's ear, sand spurrey, sticky mouse-ear chickweed and harebell. Other areas of acid grassland include the roughs at both Sudbrook Park and the Royal Mid-Surrey golf courses.

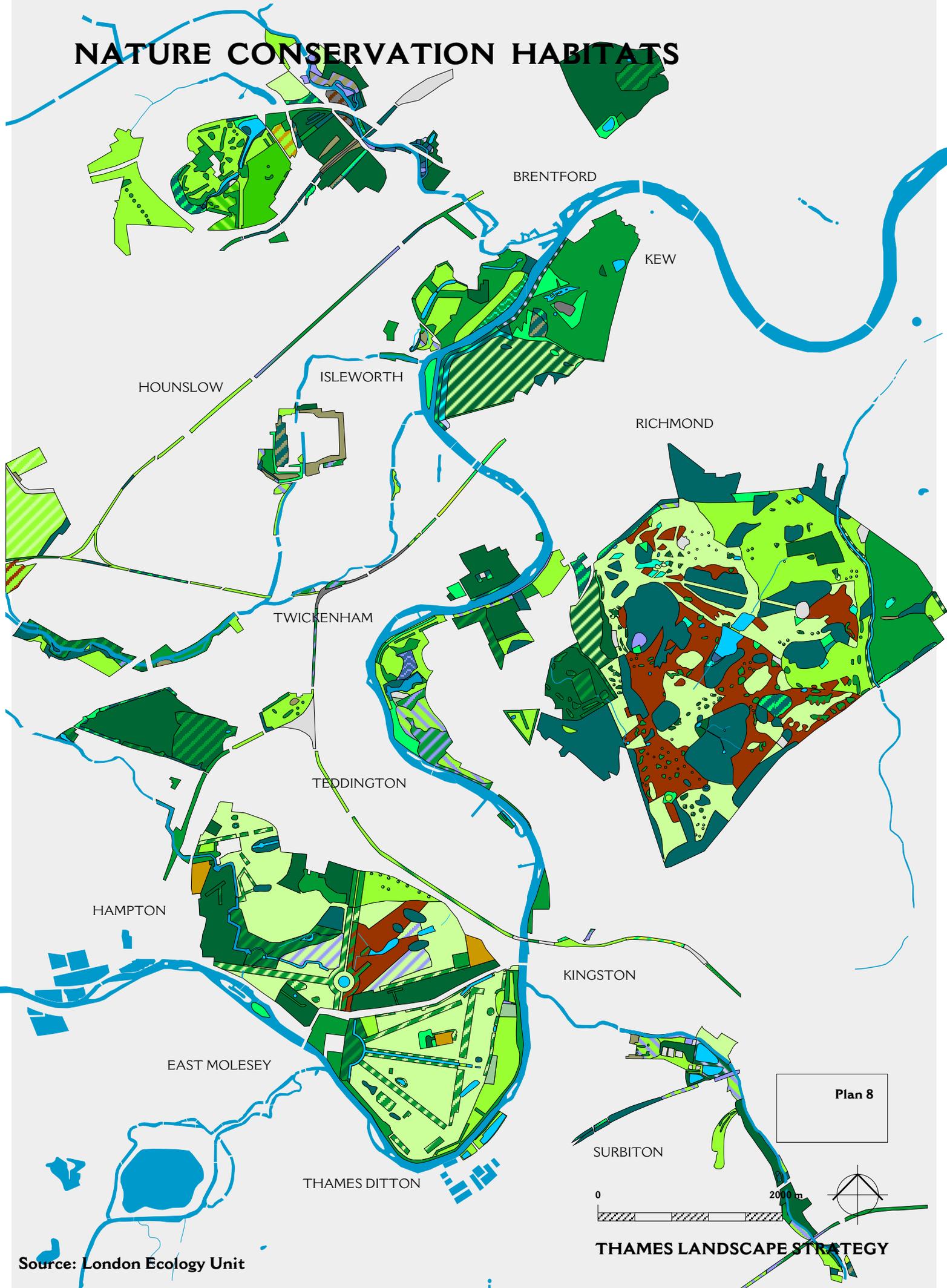
Other notable grasslands include the riverside Petersham meadows and Ham Lands. Although flooding occurs only rarely, the damper areas provide diversity. Petersham Meadows give us a feeling of the way much of London's riverside must have looked in the past, with cattle grazing contentedly on the lush grass and wild flowers. In comparison, Ham Lands is a young site, apart from the line of the old avenue and the flood meadow to its west, being an area of infilled gravel workings. The colonisation of the land fill has seen a fantastic array of unusual plants succeeding each other. For example, the nationally scarce Nottingham catchfly grew close to the towpath until it was overgrown by scrub. It will be important to hold back the natural succession to scrub and woodland over much of the meadows to ensure a continuing floral diversity. Seething Wells is another most unusual riverside site, the banks around the storage reservoirs having developed a calcareous grassland, rich in species.



The ancient oaks and acid grassland of the Richmond Park Site of Special Scientific Interest

Broadleaved woodland - native	
Broadleaved woodland - non-native	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland	
Parkland	
Scrub	
Woodland Park	
Un- or semi-improved acid grassland	
Bare artificial habitat	
Parkland + Species-rich herbaceous fen	
Parkland + Un- or semi-improved acid grassland	
Broadleaved woodland - native + Species-rich herbaceous fen	
Broadleaved woodland - native + Scrub	
Broadleaved woodland - native & non-native	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland + Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Parkland + Woodland Park	
Parkland + Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Wet marginal vegetation	
Ruderal/ephemeral communities + Bare artificial habitat	
Ruderal/ephemeral communities	
Scrub + Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Standing water	
Other perennial, rhizomatous + Species-rich herbaceous fen	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland + Species-rich herbaceous fen	
Wet marginal vegetation + Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Woodland park + Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Un- or semi-improved basic grassland	
Other	
Woodland park + Un- or semi-improved acid grassland	
Arable, intensive livestock paddocks etc.	
Acid grass + Other perennial, rhizomatous species	
Bracken	
Woodland Park + Bracken	
Coniferous woodland	
Species-rich herbaceous fen	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland + Woodland Park	
Broadleaved woodland - non-native + Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland + Arable, intensive livestock paddocks etc.	
Improved/reseeded grassland	
Improved/reseeded grassland + Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland + Un- or semi-improved acid grassland	
Un- or semi-improved neutral grassland + Bracken	

# NATURE CONSERVATION HABITATS



Plan 8



THAMES LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

Source: London Ecology Unit

There are many other areas of grassland within the river corridor which could be managed more sympathetically to provide a diverse sward which would attract butterflies and other invertebrates and hence support more animals such as bats and birds.

**Policy NL 7: Manage significant grassland habitats with a traditional regime of grazing or hay cut, with no fertilisers or herbicides, to maintain or improve their diversity. Control the spread of scrub and bracken to conserve and enhance the nature conservation interest of the habitat.**

### Trees, Woodland and Scrub

Broadleaved woodland would once have covered almost all of the Thames valley, but clearance and management which started in Neolithic times, has produced the grasslands and the subsequent scrub and secondary woodland, on managed grasslands.

While sadly there is no ancient (pre-1600) woodland in the area, there are many individual trees of great age, especially in the ancient wood pasture of Richmond Park, which has almost 500 oaks pre-dating the enclosure of the park nearly 350 years ago. The trees were pollarded in the past for firewood and poles and to allow the tree to re-grow out of reach of browsing cattle and deer. The practice of pollarding has extended the life of the trees, and these ancient trees now support an unusually large number of animals, including over 200 types of beetle, as well as hole-nesting birds rare in London, such as the little owl and more recently the mandarin duck.

Dead and decaying wood is an important habitat in the regeneration cycle, which supports specialised plants and animals. All forms of dead wood, both standing or rotting on the ground, contribute to this habitat.

The secondary woodlands which have developed on abandoned farmland or common land, are influenced by the underlying soils; silver birch, elm, sycamore and oak have colonised the acidic grasslands. Close to the river and on the islands, where there is more fertile alluvium, damp willow woodland grows, sheltering wetland plants such as wild angelica.

Where tree planting takes place in appropriate 'natural' areas, local tree stock should be used when possible, or even better, natural regeneration should be encouraged to ensure the local genetic link is kept.

Scrub occurs as a transitional stage in the succession from grassland to woodland. Although scrub invasion into herb-rich grassland can often be detrimental to nature conservation, greatly reducing floral diversity, scrub in itself is an important habitat, especially for birds, providing food, shelter and nest sites. To prevent scrub developing into woodland it needs to be held in the transitional stage by cutting areas every 10 years or so. Indeed some parts of the secondary woodlands in the area could be similarly managed on a short coppice rotation to provide dense thickets which are so attractive to nesting birds.

**Policy NL 8: Create new pollards and manage the woodlands and scrub to provide diversity of age and structure, conserving and enhancing nature conservation interest. Where practical, conserve dead/dying standing and fallen trees as dead wood habitat.**

### Wetlands

Apart from the River Thames and tributaries, there are a number of small streams and ditches, ponds, marshy vegetation and wet grassland.

The most important wetland for nature conservation is the Syon Park flood meadows, designated by English Nature as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The meadows are particularly unusual because part of the land is inundated twice daily by the freshwater tide. As a consequence there are some very rare species such as the German hairy snail and the two-lipped door snail. The riverside muds have been colonised by willows and a shrub layer of mostly elder. While the trees are valuable for roosting birds, it is the wet grassland and creeks which need to be given priority in future management.



Petersham Meadow links the Thames to Richmond Park up the wooded escarpment



The Syon tide meadow Site of Special Scientific Interest - gradually being covered by scrub growth



A heron watches impassively as scullers pass by at Brentford Ait

Other wetlands in the area include the wet ditch running down the north-western side of the Old Deer Park, the ponds at Richmond Park and Bushy Park and also small ponds on the golf courses. The well-managed wetlands are a riot of colour in the summer months with flowering water plants and dragonflies, but many of the ponds and the ditch have been neglected in recent years and have become overgrown and dark, and in places stagnant. The London Borough of Richmond is planning a clearance programme around the ha-ha over the next couple of years.

**Policy NL 9: Manage the wetlands by keeping trees and scrub to a minimum to allow sunlight on to the water and edges, and where appropriate, maintain by grazing or cutting the wet grassland. Restore old wetland systems and take opportunities to create new wetlands where appropriate, with the aim of conserving and enhancing the nature conservation interest of the habitat.**

### Green Links

Green links are relatively continuous areas of open space leading through the built environment. The links work most effectively if they connect green places to each other and to the Green Belt, preventing individual sites from becoming isolated.

Watercourses are important links, especially the Thames, Crane and other rivers. The Thames connects Hampton Court and Bushy Parks with Ham Lands and Petersham Meadows and from there it links to the Old Deer Park, Syon and Kew. The extensive open area of Richmond Park is connected to the river via Petersham Meadows.

Opportunities which arise to make links more effective by establishing a semi-natural habitat should be grasped, particularly connecting the Old Deer Park to the north of Richmond Park, and Ham Lands across to and through several sports pitches in Teddington and Bushy Park. The tributaries which link with green spaces further upstream could also be improved.

The historic avenues of trees connecting parks are also important links in this area. A continuous length, preferably with traditionally managed grassland below the trees, provides a valuable connecting habitat, as well as a visual link for people.

**Policy NL 10: Conserve, improve and create green links for the benefit of nature conservation, making existing green areas such as sports pitches more attractive to wildlife.**



Grebes breed blithely on rafts near Marble Hill

## WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

Since Neolithic times, wildlife has been adapting to and taking advantage of man's modifications to the natural environment. Through the centuries, man has not only relied on wildlife for his own survival but drawn on it for entertainment and inspiration.

Between Hampton and Kew there are a remarkable number of open spaces, including the River Thames, which bring wildlife close to people. Within the area virtually the whole population is within one kilometre of accessible places, recognised as high quality wildlife areas.

Although housing and workplaces usually take priority within built up areas, the pleasure of seeing grebes nesting on the river or dragonflies over a flooded ha-ha brings a richness to human life which is difficult to define in quality of life surveys. The Thames landscape offers a particularly good opportunity to demonstrate and explain the wildlife still flourishing within our city.



Resting dragonfly

## **Access to the Natural Landscape**

The Thames Path and the Royal Parks offer some of the best access to areas of nature conservation interest. Although it is necessary to restrict access to some sensitive sites, many are still visually accessible. The Syon flood meadows and wooded aits, for example, can be enjoyed from the towpath opposite. Recent development of scrub and woodland has however significantly reduced the visual access from the towpath to places like Syon and Ham Lands.

On the tidal part of the river, the foreshore offers a fascinating area for public access. Where access to the intertidal zone would not damage nature conservation interests, additional steps and stairs could open up long stretches of the river at low tide.

Maintaining traditional management of grassland and other habitats needs little modification to accommodate visitors. Examples of work that might be needed include regular cutting of paths through hay meadows, and coppicing wide rides through woodland both of which increase the habitat diversity for wildlife.

***Policy NL 11: Assist people in enjoying places of nature conservation importance by providing appropriate visual or physical access arrangements, except where it would prove detrimental to the nature conservation interest.***

## **Community Involvement**

The more each of us knows about our local environment the more we care about it. Involvement in caring for the environment develops our sense of stewardship and commitment.

Active involvement in conserving the natural landscape can take many forms, such as physical work, monitoring species, acting as a warden, and campaigning. There are many voluntary groups which have formed to meet a perceived need not fulfilled by the statutory or private sectors. One of the advantages of these groups is their freedom to express views and carry out campaigns on sensitive matters without the need to take account of an official statutory or corporate position. This enables them to raise public awareness of issues, put pressure on local and national government and to offer advice to the statutory and private sectors.

Between Hampton and Kew, a number of voluntary organisations take an active interest in nature conservation and the environment; some are specific to one place and others have a regional or national concern. Groups which have been formed through concern for one place, to campaign for its protection and to lobby for or assist with its good management include the formally constituted Friends of Bushy and Home Parks, Friends of the Old Deer Park, and Friends of Richmond Park, and also informal groups such as the group of residents which cares for Kew Pond.

Regional and national organisations have active local groups. The London Wildlife Trust has an active group in Kingston which manages three small nature reserves, the Hounslow group manages Isleworth Ait, and the Richmond group runs a regular programme of walks, talks, and conservation work days. The Surrey Wildlife Trust also has a Kingston group.

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) specialises in involving people in practical conservation management work. The BTCV employs a Richmond Project Officer who encourages volunteers, including youth groups and people with special needs to take part.

Friends of the Earth (FOE) has a very active Richmond and Twickenham group which has successfully campaigned for Richmond to employ an Ecology Officer, and for the banning of anglers' lead weights which were such a danger to swans. FOE has also taken a leading role in the establishment of the Richmond Environmental Information Centre, which is also supported by the London Wildlife Trust, Richmond Tidy Group, Richmond Boat Project and the BTCV. PHAB (Physically handicapped and able-bodied) is involved in the plans for an environmental centre in Richmond Park.

Other organisations which are active in the area include the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust which is to establish a London centre at Barn Elms Reservoirs. The Groundwork Trust, a government initiative, may set up a trust in Richmond with the aim of environmental improvement, and involving local people. Ultimately as many local interest groups as possible should be encouraged to understand and support nature conservation issues.

***Policy NL 12: Encourage community involvement and action for conservation at all levels.***

### **Environmental Education and Promotion**

The growing interest in, and awareness of, the environment has led to an increasing importance being placed on environmental education, both within the school curriculum and for the community at large.

The Thames Landscape Strategy provides a wealth of opportunities for interpreting the landscape, the wildlife and the history, and also for taking action to manage the landscape.

For schools, places to visit for fieldwork are important and within the area there is a wide choice. Nature areas within school grounds are also valuable for children and teachers - and for the wildlife. The Learning through Landscapes Trust is encouraging schools to make more imaginative use of their grounds to ensure that children enjoy their environment.

As well as formal education, people learn about nature conservation through for example, events, leaflets, organised walks and talks, and interpretation on site. The proposed environmental centre in Richmond Park should provide an exciting place to learn about wildlife and history. The Woodland Open Days held in Richmond have been successful, demonstrating woodland management techniques and traditional woodland crafts. Any active management of a habitat is an education and demonstrates to other people that someone is caring for the area.

***Policy NL 13: Encourage schools to make good use of local nature conservation sites and their own school grounds. Promote environmental education, particularly through interpretation of the natural landscape. Provide on- and off-site information about current management initiatives.***



## THE IMPORTANCE AND PROTECTION OF PLACES FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

The following places for nature conservation, shown on Plan 9, are graded according to their importance:

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSIs) are notified by English Nature (under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act) to protect areas of national importance. Syon Park and Richmond Park are the SSSIs in the area.

In Surrey, sites of County importance are designated **Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance**, while in London there are three grades:

- **Sites of Metropolitan Importance** are those sites which contain the best examples of London's habitats, rare species, rare assemblages or are particularly significant within large areas of otherwise heavily built-up London. Sites of Metropolitan Importance in the area include the Rivers Thames and Crane, Bushy and Home Park, Ham Common, Ham Lands, Petersham Common, and Sudbrook Park Golf Course.
- **Sites of Borough Importance** are important from a borough perspective, where loss of the habitat would mean a significant loss to the borough. These include Kew Gardens and the Old Deer Park, the Copse and Holly Hedge Field (formerly part of the grounds of Ham House), Petersham Lodge Woods, Petersham Meadows, Seething Wells Reservoirs, and Syon Park.
- **Sites of Local Importance** are of particular value to nearby residents or schools. These sites may already be used by schools for nature study or be run by management committees mainly composed of local people. They include some cemeteries, the Cassel Hospital, the Hogsmill River in central Kingston, Hampton Court House grounds, Marble Hill Park and Orleans House Gardens, and Kew Pond and Kew Green.

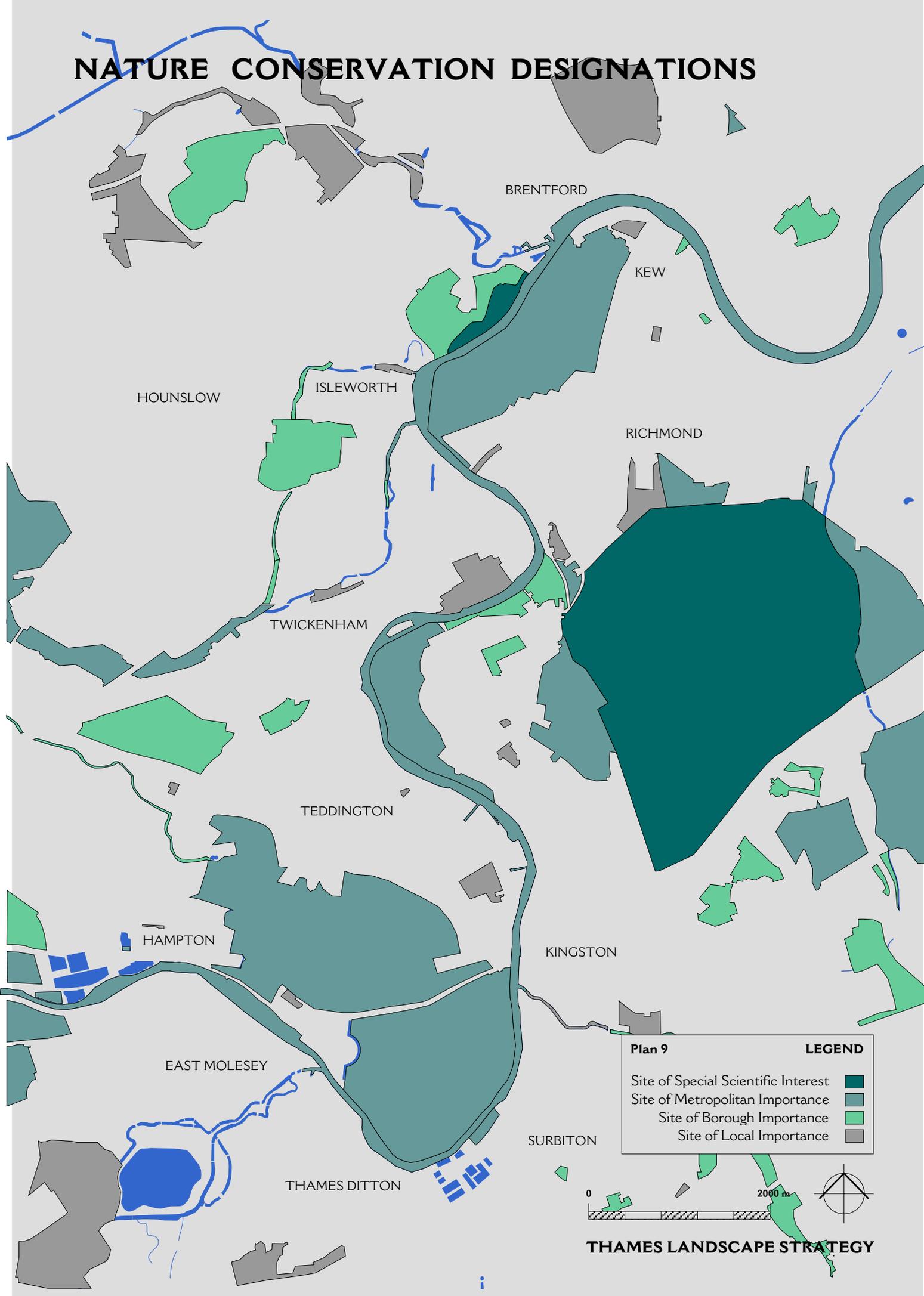
An additional local designation is:

- **Local Nature Reserve** (LNR) status can be declared by a local authority, on land in which it has a legal interest, after consultation with English Nature. Grant aid is available. A management plan places nature conservation as top priority and encourages educational use and community involvement. There are LNRs at Ham Lands and the Hogsmill River Park.

Another form of protection is through sympathetic ownership and this is extensive in the area, with most of the green spaces owned by the boroughs, the Royal Parks, and Crown Commissioners, and the Thames managed by the NRA and PLA, all of which have conservation and recreation as primary aims. Some of the publicly owned land is leased and there will be opportunities in the future to re-negotiate the terms of the leases to specify sympathetic conservation management. The London Wildlife Trust has a licence to manage Isleworth Ait, which is owned by Thames Water but leased to Speyhawk Ltd. The Countryside Commission's 10-year Stewardship Agreement, already covering Syon Park, Ham Lands and Petersham Meadows, provides a useful mechanism for conservation management.

***Policy NL 14: Strongly resist development, management or change of use which could damage or destroy the nature conservation importance of SSSIs, SoMIs, SoBIs, LNRs and other identified Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. Encourage both management which promotes the conservation and enhancement of wildlife wherever possible, and proposals to increase the number, size and diversity of sites of nature conservation importance.***

# NATURE CONSERVATION DESIGNATIONS



**Plan 9**

LEGEND	
Site of Special Scientific Interest	Dark Teal
Site of Metropolitan Importance	Medium Teal
Site of Borough Importance	Light Green
Site of Local Importance	Grey

