

❖ Hedgerows in the Rusland area

This guide highlights why hedgerows are so valuable to inspire people to care about them.

Hedges in the Rusland Valley

In 2016 and 2017, staff and volunteers from Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Rusland Horizons mapped all of the hedges within the project area.

Following this, **203 hedgerows** covering over 28.2km were surveyed in detail and the data was analysed by Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre.

So, what was found?

85% of hedges are **species-rich** – that's four or more woody species per 30m surveyed

The average hedge has six woody species in it, whilst the most species-rich has 11 tree and shrub species

78% of hedges are **shrubby hedges**

8% of hedges surveyed **are a line of trees**



110 hedges surveyed were associated with a hedgebank

❖ Benefits of hedges

Hedgerows are much more than a line of shrubs or trees between two fields; they help and benefit wildlife and people in so many ways.

Hedgerows for wildlife

Hedgerows are an essential nesting habitat for birds such as wren, bullfinch and willow warbler.



Photo: Andrew Parkinson / 2020Vision

They provide a refuge for pollinating insects and are a source of food for birds, small mammals, butterflies, amphibians and reptiles.

Hedges provide cover for small mammals like red squirrels and hares. They are also 'green links' for bats, which use them as routes to navigate around the countryside in search of food and roosting sites.

Hedgerows for people

Hedgerows can date back to prehistoric times and help to tell the history of human interactions with the land. They often mark out the boundaries between parishes and create a quintessential English landscape with a patchwork of small fields.



Hedgerows offer opportunities for people to learn a range of skills, including the identification of trees and plants, as well as traditional hedgerow management techniques.

In autumn hedgerows are dripping with fruit and nuts such as sloe, hazelnut, blackberry, rowan and elderberry, which can be sustainably harvested and made into jams, syrups and liqueurs.

Hedgerows for livestock and farmers

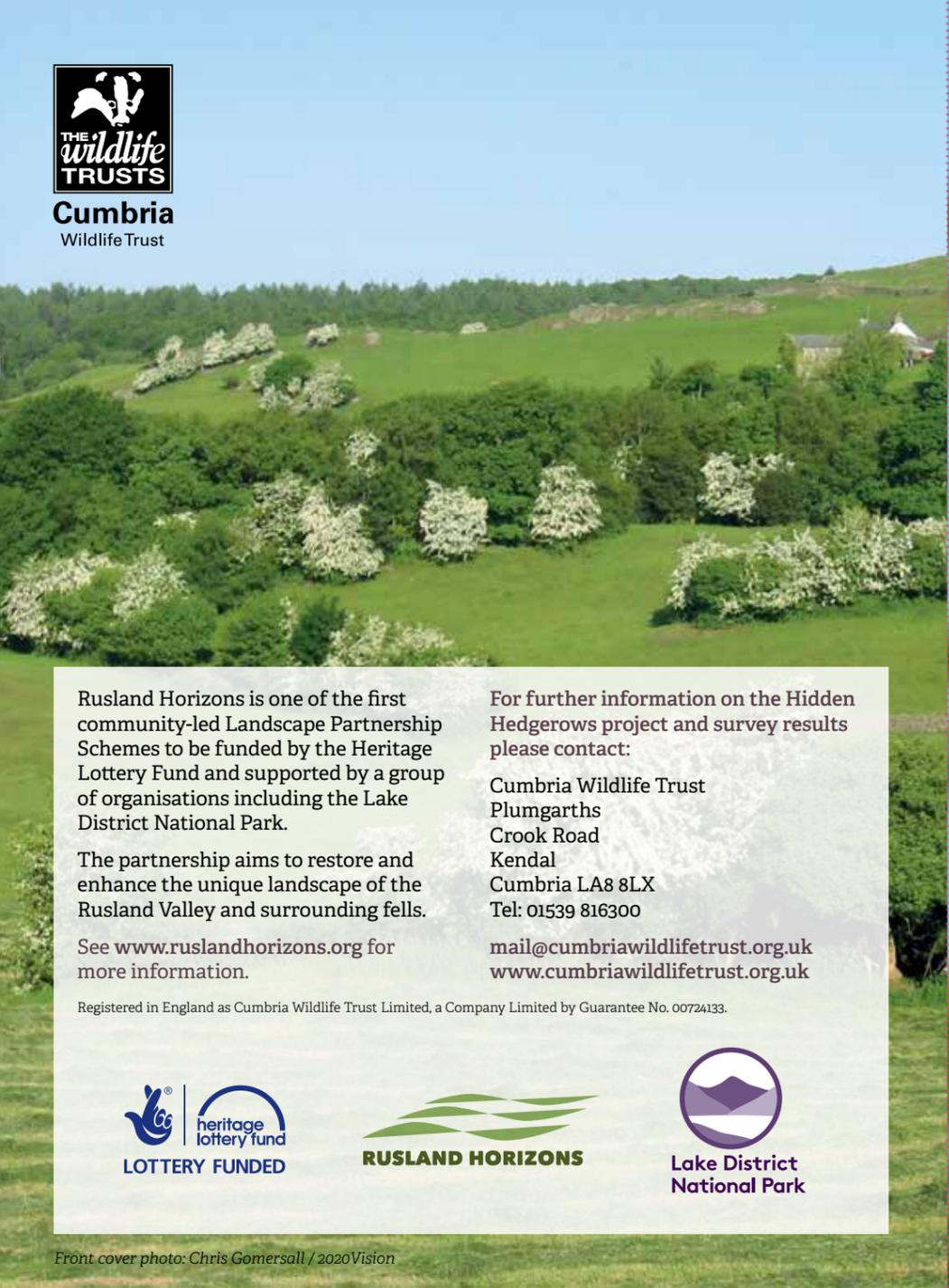
Well managed hedgerows act as stock-proof boundaries between fields. This is the reason why so many hedgerows are dominated by hawthorn (quickthorn) and blackthorn as these thorny bushes deter stock from pushing through.



Although many farmers across the UK look after their hedges, changes in the nature of farming have been one of the major causes of the disappearance of hedgerows across the countryside.



Cumbria Wildlife Trust



Rusland Horizons is one of the first community-led Landscape Partnership Schemes to be funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and supported by a group of organisations including the Lake District National Park.

The partnership aims to restore and enhance the unique landscape of the Rusland Valley and surrounding fells.

See www.ruslandhorizons.org for more information.

For further information on the Hidden Hedgerows project and survey results please contact:

Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Plumgarths
Crook Road
Kendal
Cumbria LA8 8LX
Tel: 01539 816300

mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

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Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Hidden Hedgerows

❖ Hedgerows management



40% Trimmed and dense

Hedgerows that have obviously been trimmed in the fairly recent past (2-3 years).



8% Untrimmed with outgrowth

Overgrown, usually very wide, hedgerows that no longer retain any clear evidence of their original shape.



1% Recently coppiced

A hedgerow that has recently been coppiced (probably within the last five years).



28% Untrimmed

Hedgerows that have not been recently trimmed (in the past 2-3 years).



5% Recently laid

A hedgerow that has obviously been recently laid (probably within the last 2-3 years).



11% Tall and leggy

A hedgerow that has not been trimmed for many years (probably at least eight years). The hedgerow lacks any significant foliage in the lower parts.



4% Intensively managed

Hedgerows that have been closely and frequently flailed and/or browsed by high densities of livestock, especially sheep. These hedgerows are usually low and narrow, and characteristically lack branches and foliage in the lower parts of the hedgerow.

© Defra (2007) Hedgerow Survey Handbook. A standard procedure for local surveys in the UK. Defra, London. Published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

❖ The current condition of hedgerows in the Rusland Valley

Hedgerows are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitat, which means they are a national priority for conservation.

To be in a 'favourable' condition, the thresholds that need to be met are:

- ❖ At least 2m undisturbed ground and 1m herbaceous vegetation from the centre of the hedge.
- ❖ Less than 20% combined cover of nettles, cleavers and docks within a 2m wide band alongside the hedgerow.
- ❖ Maximum 10% cover of non-native woody species.
- ❖ At least 1m in height, 1.5m width with a cross sectional area of 3m² minimum.
- ❖ Less than 10% gaps present along the hedgerow with no gap greater than 5m wide.
- ❖ Base of canopy less than 0.5m above the ground for shrubby hedgerows.

After analysis of the surveyed hedges, none of them met all of the above targets.

Why?

A number of hedges only failed on one or two points; here are some common reasons why:

Nutrient-enrichment

59% of hedgerows surveyed had **more than 20% cover of nettles, docks and cleavers**, which are an indicator of nutrient-enrichment and can shade out more diverse hedge bottom flora.

Gaps

27% of hedges have gaps of **more than 5m**

44% hedges have **at least 10m gaps**

❖ Why hedgerows have value for local people

I am managing and continuing to reinstate historic hedgerows on my farm because they are important shelter for my sheep and I see a lot of birds using them for foraging. I want to restore it to a traditional Lakeland farm here, for managing the grassland and my stock whilst providing for wildlife.

Carole Dickinson, Abbott Park Farm, Oxen Park

We took on the farm 40 years ago and set about laying our hedges – a big job but worth it to retain the original field boundaries. Since then we've laid them 2-3 times and it's important work – providing shelter for stock and acting as a windbreak. The hedgerows are obviously really useful for birds, we often find old nests whilst we're working and the sloes, rowan berries and hazelnuts provide so much food for wildlife. Hedgelaying is a real skill and it's interesting to see the different local styles even across Cumbria.

Tony Atkinson, Riddingside Farm, Colton

Hedgerow trees in Rusland

Trees found along hedgerows are traditionally part of the UK landscape. Hedgerow trees have been pollarded to provide 'tree hay' for livestock; ancient trees often have cracks and holes, which are important for roosting bats; and trees continue to provide firewood for farmers and commoners.

- ❖ In our surveys, **135 hedge trees** were found.
- ❖ Of these, **44 were deemed to be ancient**. Ancient trees are those which have reached great age in comparison with others of the same species.
- ❖ **Only six** of those hedgerow trees found were **less than 5cm in diameter**, indicating a low level of replacement for the future.

Hedgeline, an organisation that champions hedges and hedgerow trees, has stated that across the country, an estimated 1.8 million hedge trees – nearly a third of all hedge trees – are over 100 years old, and may disappear from the landscape at any time over the next 25 years.

Hedgeline states that:
"Without an immediate effort to establish new hedge trees, there will be significant changes to the UK landscape and its biodiversity."



❖ Reconnecting your hedgerow network

Hidden Hedgerows has identified target hedges which, if managed sensitively or planted up, would reconnect the hedgerow network. This would enable small mammals, insects, butterflies, plants and even birds to travel from one region of the valley to another.

In 2017, 781m of new hedges were planted and 360m were laid with help from Rusland Horizons scheme volunteers and apprentices.



Establish new hedgerow trees

- ❖ Select existing saplings already in the hedgerow.
- ❖ Plant trees beside the hedgerow rather than within it.
- ❖ Plant trees in existing gaps.
- ❖ Earmark saplings in a new hedgerow to become full-grown trees.

Think about overhead powerlines, which may cause future problems.

For further advice and information

- ❖ **Hedgeline:** more detailed advice on management cycle for hedges. www.hedgeline.org.uk
- ❖ **Rusland Horizons:** www.ruslandhorizons.org
- ❖ **Woodland Trust:** offer grants for saplings to schools and community groups. www.woodlandtrust.org.uk
- ❖ **Cumbria Wildlife Trust:** www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk