

WILDLIFE ESTATES ENGLAND – Accreditation at Level Two

The STANDARD and how it is assessed

August 2023



Under the ELO Wildlife Estates scheme, Level Two accreditation rewards a farm, estate, or cluster for being a ‘stand-out example’ of all that it does for wildlife and biodiversity, in all its activities and in whichever country it is located. It follows from an acceptance of the commitments laid out in the Charter (also called Level One)

This document outlines what is expected of estates which aspire to attain Level Two accreditation under the Wildlife Farms & Estates scheme as administered in England and Wales. The application will be checked and evaluated through a process of independent professional (ISO backed) assessment and audit.

The document is structured in four columns, namely:

- (i) **Management sector.** Management for the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and biodiversity will be a principal feature across all sectors and themes of a farms or estate’s (or cluster’s) activities. Some overlap between the sectors is inevitable and is to be expected.
- (ii) **Requirements.** These are the fundamental standards for attaining Level Two, exceeding the commitments given in Level One (the Wildlife Estates Charter). The estate may already have them in place, or they may be the declared aspiration. Either way, they form the basis of ‘the journey’ that leads to the estate being recognised as an example of best practice in managing biodiversity across all its sectors, and ‘ahead of the pack’.
- (iii) **Examples of Verification or Evidence** which the evaluator will look for. The examples given are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive; each estate will have its own set of circumstances depending on (e.g.) its location, type, size and the range of activities carried out. The evaluator will look for documented evidence where possible.
- (iv) **Guidance** on how these can be achieved or shown. In general, the Examples of Verification or Evidence in the previous column will suggest where improvements might be made, if indeed they are not already in place. This column suggests some other practical (‘on-the-ground’) ways in which an estate might improve and/or demonstrate best practice in discharging, and showcasing, its **duty of care** towards biodiversity.

Management Sector	The word 'estate' also implies a farm, cluster or other land holding		
	Requirement	Examples of Verification or Evidence	Guidance
<p>Basic data</p> <p>The Basic Data merely provides essential information about the individual estate. It is submitted at the first stage of the application to Level Two and is not scored.</p>	<p>To state the legal identity of the owner/manager, along with basic data for the estate and its location re.:</p> <p>The area, land type, water assets, extent of designated areas (AONB, SSSI, SPA, SAC, County Sites etc.), public access (rights of way, CRoW land), common grazing, public roads etc., and the population living within a 60-minute drive radius*.</p>	<p>RPA details</p> <p>Maps / plans</p> <p>Land registry records, licences etc.</p> <p>Where an estate has tenanted land, an understanding of the structures in operation, and evidence of how an agreed strategy and cooperation are addressed.</p>	<p>Having good maps and GIS data is essential</p> <p>Consider the degree of direct control that the estate has under its current legal and management structures.</p> <p>Guidance on surrounding populations can be found at www.freemaptools.com.</p> <p>This data reveals the potential pressures that an estate is under when considering the management of its biodiversity and wildlife in practice]</p>
<p>1. Land usage and engagement</p>	<p>The estate commits to above-average and clearly auditable standards in the overall management of wildlife and biodiversity across all its activities.</p> <p>The owner(s) / manager(s) has (have) in place long-term policy and management objectives that have biodiversity as an essential focus in environmental and wildlife management.</p> <p>The policy and objectives, or summaries thereof, are proactively communicated to staff (or cluster members) consistent with their roles and responsibilities, and are shared with agencies.</p>	<p>Written plans, maps and other documents in which these policies and objectives are set out. [It is acceptable to use plans drawn up by external organisations.]</p> <p>Evidence of leadership through regular engagement with staff and principal contractors</p> <p>Engagement/collaboration with tenants, external bodies (statutory, NGO and voluntary), and neighbours.</p> <p>Management plans on paper / file</p> <p>Good recording and robust baseline data is in place.</p>	<p>Being pro-active personally in communicating how the estate in general is run, and in particular the importance of good biodiversity management;</p> <p>Explaining to others how (and why) the aims and objectives and the day-to-day work of the estate are planned and monitored;</p> <p>Where appropriate, having a strong message about biodiversity on the estate's website – but ensuring that it is translated 'on the ground';</p> <p>If land use change is envisaged, plans and documents should show how this will be implemented and monitored, and what the impact will be.</p>

	The estate has in place plans and strategies (preferably written), including maps, for land use change and/or ongoing sustainability	Evidence of plans for (or consideration of) land use change Evidence that contracts with external contractors include environmental clauses/addendums to reflect the estate's policies	
2. Species and habitats	<p>The estate commits to prioritising biodiversity at every opportunity</p> <p>The estate commits to producing and maintaining baseline survey information and the ongoing recording of key species, habitats and habitat condition across its land, including commercial farmland</p> <p>The estate commits to the restoration of habitats and habitat features on nationally or locally designated conservation areas, in particular where these are damaged or in unfavourable condition.</p> <p>The estate commits to recovery programmes and/or to programmes that seek to reverse declining populations, where these are not in conflict with other management objectives.</p>	<p>A recognition that each estate has a different set of circumstances; through no fault of their own, some may not yet be able to provide much evidence.</p> <p>Citations / documentation for SSSIs and other designated sites illustrate familiarity with (and presence of) rare habitats and species across the landholding.</p> <p>Evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of species, referring to <i>Species and Habitats of Principal Importance</i> under the NERC Act 2006; • Rising/falling population trends and how these are monitored; • Site condition assessments; • Plans for improvement or extension; • Fixed point photographic records • Insect and bird decibel monitoring • Plans for habitat restoration and recovery 	<p>Having (or arranging) scientific programmes or projects in collaboration with (e.g.) the BTO, Wildlife Trusts, Butterfly Conservation Trust, RSPB, Bat Conservation Trust; and/or projects which make use of local recorders and 'citizen science'. Also, the EpiCollect app from GWCT.</p> <p>These might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular surveys of taxa, whether common or threatened; • Decibel monitoring of insects and bird sounds – an innovative means of ascertaining insect and bird abundance. <p>How is this information collected and stored? Is it repeatable? How far back does it go?</p> <p>Show how managing the estate's biodiversity (and drafting plans to enhance it) might conflict with other legitimate management objectives</p> <p>Measures which favour specific species (e.g. dormice) or nesting opportunities (e.g. owl boxes)</p> <p>How issues such as <i>Chalara</i>, heather beetle etc. are managed</p>

		Participation in species recovery plans and (where relevant) species reintroduction.	
3. 'Whole Estate' conservation measures	<p>The commitments at Level One should be reinforced at Level Two, to show measures 'above and beyond'</p> <p>The estate commits to above-average and clearly auditable standards in the overall management of wildlife and biodiversity across all its activities.</p> <p>The estate commits to a coherent wildlife/conservation management plan across the estate and can provide evidence of implementation.</p>	<p>Existence of strategies and/or plans that cover the entire estate/holding for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The farmed landscape • Forestry and woodland areas • SSSI and other designated wildlife areas • Ponds and water features <p>Plans to extend habitat, or create new areas, should show how these will be implemented and monitored, and what the impact might be.</p> <p>Plans for rewilding</p> <p>What are the key conservation initiatives, and programmes/plans for specific species across the whole estate?</p> <p>Evidence of a whole-estate animal and plant health strategy, and how it works in practice</p> <p>Evidence of shelters/refuges for wildlife, or secure food supply</p> <p>On upland estates, the presence of mire and hydrological restoration plans, especially where heather and native grasses management is undertaken.</p>	<p>Plans should be consistent with the location and character of the estate.</p> <p>They should focus on the local circumstances of the estate but might also include comment on how they fit with the work of neighbouring estates.</p> <p>Consider the ways in which the estate can demonstrate and earn recognition for its work to integrate beneficial management for wildlife and biodiversity 'pan-estate' (i.e. across all aspects of its activity) rather than in separate sectors. What are the stand-out aspects?</p> <p>When planning an operation, what measures are taken so that there is interaction between the estate's different departments? Are all relevant staff (and contractors and advisors) engaged? Are they obliged to acknowledge the estate's requirements?</p> <p>Ensuring tranquillity and avoiding unnecessary disturbance during the breeding season</p> <p>Controlling non-native species which are prejudicial to the estate/holding, with species identified</p> <p>On an upland estate, is there mapping of peatland depth?</p>

		Evidence of a strategy to minimise the effect of extreme weather events on wildlife Evidence of seasonal species management	
4. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Farming practices	<p>The estate commits to an environmentally sustainable system of farming and land use across the holding. [Where land is tenanted, the estate commits to engage with tenants and to consider any appropriate support.]</p> <p>A minimum of 15% (or thereabouts) of the farmed land area across the estate (including cover crops) is committed to conservation management and biodiversity enhancement regimes</p> <p>The estate commits to soil recovery as a basic requirement of biodiversity.</p> <p>Soil carbon monitoring is under active consideration across all arable and grassland areas across the landholding.</p>	<p>Existence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> integrated pest management plan soil management plan optimisation plans for nitrogen, pesticides, insecticides, fungicides etc. other wildlife-enhancing measures/plans relevant to farming participation in agri-environment schemes <p>Arable soil condition surveys</p> <p>Soil sampling</p> <p>Management of arable margins and crop residues</p> <p>Plans for (and understanding of the principles of) regenerative or restorative aspects of agriculture across farmed land (including pastures). Grassland management (inputs, grazing regimes, floristically enhanced meadows, protection of disturbance by livestock) etc.</p>	<p>Consider arable margins and meadow/grass strips, areas of regenerating scrub, ponds and areas of wetland, wider hedgerow footprint and new woodland.</p> <p>Consider to what extent single species crops (whether field-scale monocultures or maize strips planted solely for gamebird management) contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, or how they mitigate against biodiversity loss.</p> <p>Measures in field cultivations to support nesting birds (e.g. lapwing in meadows),</p> <p>Where land is tenanted, how can conservation plans and soil conservation strategies be considered and implemented over time?</p> <p>Do contracts with external contractors include environmental clauses/addendums, or codes of good practice, that reflect the estate's policies?</p> <p>Consider how loss of soil organic matter is addressed. [Reference to the Soil Association may provide guidance.] Is there a strategy for the management of bare soils?</p>

		<p>Water quality control measures (slurry/manure management, mitigation of diffuse pollution, irrigation)</p> <p>Awareness of Greenhouse Gas Emissions (at source) and strategy to control these</p> <p>Evidence of a carbon audit across farm enterprises (e.g. on grass-fed beef)</p>	
5. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Forestry	<p>[An estate is not always at fault for the forestry system that it has inherited.]</p> <p>The estate commits to a principle that 15% (or thereabouts) of its woodland area should not be planted</p> <p>The estate commits to sustainable forestry and woodland management across the holding, with mixed stocks.</p> <p>The estate commits to a strategy for conserving / improving soil structure within woods; prevention of compaction; attention to drainage and culverts</p> <p>Deer and grey squirrel management measures are implemented to avoid damage to woods and tree regeneration.</p> <p>Ancient and Veteran Trees are mapped, and management actions taken to ensure their conservation and future replacement</p>	<p>The existence of a forestry management plan (incl. reference / integration to overall animal and plant health strategy)</p> <p>Evidence that the estate goes beyond the requirements of a recognised assurance or certification scheme (UK Forestry Standard, UKWAS)</p> <p>A restocking policy (natural regen., standards, exotics)</p> <p>Plans for mitigating deer/squirrel damage;</p> <p>Fire risk management plans</p> <p>Maps of veteran and ancient trees, with conservation operations recorded</p> <p>Ancient Woodland restoration plans.</p> <p>On-site evidence of managing rides, glades, roadways, streamside zones, etc.</p>	<p>The UKWAS Standard provides an excellent resource for identifying sustainable forest management actions compatible with the Standard.</p> <p>If there are plans to extend forest and woodland habitat, these should show how this will be implemented and monitored, and what the impacts will be.</p> <p>Consider how the examples in the previous column may be introduced or developed across the estate.</p> <p>Are forestry contractors made aware of the estate's policies towards biodiversity? What measures are taken to ensure this? Do contracts with external contractors include environmental clauses / addendums that reflect the estate's policies?</p> <p>How comprehensive is the estate's forest inventory (e.g. species mix; balance of 'age and stage'; % hardwood/softwood; % native/exotic; standing deadwood; standing volume of timber)?</p> <p>Work in woodland to support vulnerable woodland species (e.g. red squirrels, wild Service trees)</p>

	Release pens are not located within recognised Ancient Woodland or woodland which the estate identifies as a priority area in its work to enhance biodiversity.	Evidence of a policy on managing the understorey Knowledge of the balance between annual increment and harvesting in last ten years Knowledge of the carbon sequestration calculations	In upland areas, do not plant on peat. Low density planting can be beneficial for biodiversity (e.g., black grouse)
6. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Deer Management	The estate commits to responsible and planned deer management so as to maintain an appropriate population. The estate commits to the use of non-toxic ammunition.	Deer Management Plan Understanding how deer management operates in practice and what its main objectives are Evidence of training and certification in all aspects of deer management	Ensure that staff or tenants have the necessary full training and certification Collaboration with neighbours to address the vacuum effect of deer management
7. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Game Management	In addition to upholding the commitments contained in the WE Level One Charter, the estate demonstrates sustainable shooting management (game shooting, recreational shooting, pest control) across the holding. In particular the estate commits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sustainable harvest of wild game and the sensitive release of reared game A transition plan (in line with national legislation) towards the full adoption of non-toxic ammunition for game shooting and stalking. 	Clear evidence and a clear understanding of the main objectives of the estate in managing game alongside the management of biodiversity Clear evidence of the structures under which game shooting takes place (in-hand/family, let), the role of any shooting agent. Clear evidence too of the terms of agreements or contracts with agents or shooting tenants Whether game shooting is of wild birds of a naturally occurring population, or of released birds, or a mix Participation in a national scheme (GWCT, Code of Good Shooting)	Ensure that full records are maintained of all quarry shot or trapped, whether on shoot days or by staff / contractors Ensure that gamekeepers and shoot staff are fully trained and reflect the estate's policy in their daily work and their relationship with shooting guests. On upland/moorland, burn strictly in accordance with codes for heather and native grass management. Consider the current position statement of Natural England. Cease rotational burning, and consider cutting; use restoration burning only where applicable Sensitive positioning of release pens for all game bird species; reasons for choosing the sites; ensuring no site is within 500m of a SSSI

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using antibiotics or anthelmintics in the raising and management of game birds only where worm counts require and where a veterinary report recommends. Stocking of all relevant game species goes beyond best practice as advocated by e.g. GWCT. Pheasant stocking densities are below 700 birds per pen/hectare Red-legged Partridge are penned for no more than three days, and released into game cover only on improved agricultural habitat. All shooting waste (spent cartridges, unused materials, fencing etc) is removed from the landscape at the end of each season; no plastic wads are permitted <p>Game management infrastructure is not located within or near recognised Ancient Woodland or any area which the estate identifies as a priority area in its work to enhance biodiversity.</p>	<p>Practice, BASC, British Game Alliance);</p> <p>GWCT biodiversity audit undergone</p> <p>Game bag records</p> <p>Where release of reared game birds is practised, evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> number of poults released overall bird-per-hectare ratio release date size of pens area over which the birds are released area of game cover provided feeding regime frequency of worm counts records of antibiotics / anthelmintics used <p>Evidence of responsible predator management</p> <p>Conflict management plans for predator control or mitigation, based on risk assessment process</p> <p>Conflict procedures for spill-over of released birds from/to neighbouring land;</p> <p>Evidence of how the estate engages with stakeholder groups (residents, wildlife NGOs etc.) in respect of wildlife management</p>	<p>Control of illegal activities (poachers, hare-coursing); collaboration with appropriate bodies and cooperation with neighbours.</p> <p>Consider how ticks and other insect pests can be controlled so that a healthy biodiversity is not affected.</p> <p>Although a requirement under Level One, make certain of the correct use of appropriate traps; ensure traps are marked up on digital maps; ensure all traps are legal.</p> <p>When burning, ensure it is carefully mapped by year, is within the permitted %age tolerance, is in season and appropriate weather; maximum size of burn is 20m x 300m; aim for a mosaic of heather heights; consider cutting heather and/or native grasses if conditions allow, especially on deep peat.</p> <p>On an upland estate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no burning near watercourses or on steep slopes consider grip-blocking and re-wetting peat consider the 'Let's Learn Moor' scheme (from BASC) <p>Although it has little direct impact on biodiversity, careless disposal of unwanted game or pest carcasses is unsightly, as is old fencing and wire around pheasant pens.</p>
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8. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Fishing and Riparian management	<p>The Estate commits to maintain and where possible improve the water quality of its rivers and streams for wildlife and to provide corridors for the movement of wildlife.</p> <p>The estate commits to sustainable fishing management across the holding.</p> <p>The estate commits to consultation and liaison with its upstream/downstream neighbours (and tenant farmers) over any water issues arising.</p>	<p>Evidence of the structure of river and fisheries on the estate (e.g. relationship with Angling Club or fishing tenants)</p> <p>Information on stocking, where this is practised.</p> <p>An integrated conservation and management plan for rivers and banks</p> <p>Evidence of the estate playing its part in the wider catchment management;</p> <p>Woodland management / restoration as part of floodplain management</p> <p>Evidence of control or prevention of bankside erosion, and improved flood control</p> <p>Evidence of a mix of shade and light on riverbanks to protect fry, stimulate fly life, enhance food sources and maintain water temperatures.</p> <p>Evidence of run-off and controlled access to riverbank by livestock</p>	<p>The location of the estate (particularly whether upstream or downstream of a settlement) will, in practical terms, inform how water quality is (or can be) maintained or improved.</p> <p>Consider projects that monitor water quality and/or wildlife populations along river corridors (e.g. otters, kingfishers)</p> <p>A plan for bank work such as tree planting for shade and/or tree clearing for light</p> <p>Are contractors made aware of the estate's policies towards biodiversity? What measures are taken to ensure this? Do these contracts include environmental clauses / addendums that reflect the estate's policies?</p> <p>Consider what is lacking, or what (and how) these might be addressed (e.g. eels, spawning beds, beavers, lamprey etc.)</p> <p>Are fish counts or spawning surveys conducted?</p> <p>Recognise that flooding of flood-plains is beneficial to e.g. snipe and waders.</p>

<p>9. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Access</p>	<p>Whilst enhancing access to the estate beyond statutory access rights is not a requirement of the WE Level Two accreditation standard, the existing provision should be maintained and sustained. Additional provision (e.g., permissive paths) is commended.</p> <p>Access is both a public good and an ecosystem service. The estate must show how it manages the inherent conflict between access and tranquillity to the ultimate benefit of wildlife and biodiversity</p>	<p>Evidence of how access is managed in practice</p> <p>Maintenance of rights of way.</p> <p>Permissive paths/trails and design / rationale of these</p> <p>Conflict between tranquillity and access. Evidence that the estate has a policy of 'tranquillity trumps access'</p> <p>A policy addressing stresses from surrounding conurbations or high visitor numbers, or from major roads</p> <p>A policy to safeguard against disturbance by dogs</p> <p>How illicit activities are managed (poaching, 4x4s/quadbikes, snowdrop lifting, hare-coursing etc.)</p>	<p>Signage improvements, perhaps also explaining the reasons.</p> <p>Boards and/or maps for walkers.</p> <p>Clear waymarking</p> <p>Use of counters to measure / survey visitor traffic as a base for management plans</p> <p>How are visitors kept away from sensitive areas?</p>
<p>10. Integrating wildlife and the environment with other Commercial Activities</p>	<p>The estate commits to the integration of wildlife conservation measures with commercial activities where possible. In particular the estate commits to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mitigation measures to reduce the impact of infrastructure on flora and fauna The provision of nesting opportunities in built infrastructure. 	<p>Practical measures that reduce impacts from e.g., turbines, quarries, hydro plants, traffic/staff of commercial tenants (delivery vans, customers, noise/lights)</p> <p><i>Measures that ensure tranquillity or minimise disturbance and encourage wildlife to thrive around buildings, quarries, commercial units, wind turbines.</i></p>	<p>Providing nest boxes on buildings for swifts.</p> <p>Measures to reduce roadkill of amphibians at key breeding sites such as ponds.</p> <p>Are commercial tenants made aware of the estate's policies towards biodiversity? What measures are taken to ensure this? Do tenancies or licences include environmental clauses / addendums that reflect the estate's policies?</p>

<p>11. Integrating wildlife and the environment with Heritage and/or Cultural Activities</p>	<p>The estate commits to the integration of wildlife conservation measures with heritage and cultural access where possible. In particular the estate commits to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigation measures to reduce the impact of restoration measures on birds and bats in historic buildings. • The reduction of disturbance to key species on the estate or landholding during sporting or musical events etc 	<p>Use of rare breeds as a conservation management tool.</p> <p>Measures/plans to conserve, interpret or facilitate any heritage/historic features (e.g., hill forts, rare breeds, rigg-and-furrow)</p>	<p>What monitoring is in place to minimise damage to features that are popular and/or sensitive to disturbance?</p>
<p>12. Employment and Training</p>	<p>The estate commits to the training and ongoing continued professional development of staff engaged in the conservation and land management associated with the estate.</p>	<p>Evidence of CPD that leads to better management / integration of wildlife and the environment in the workplace</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p> <p>Link with a High School, College or training provider</p> <p>Care in selecting contractors</p> <p>Evidence of training courses or meetings attended</p> <p>Other evidence of the ethos conveyed by the estate</p>	<p>What % of employees' worktime is devoted to training?</p> <p>How are contractors appraised of the estate's policies towards wildlife and biodiversity?</p> <p>Are the staff fully up-to-date on matters such as trapping or poisoning?</p>
<p>13. Outreach and Engagement</p>	<p>Commitment 9 of the WE Charter covers outreach and education. For Level Two, an estate is pro-active,</p>	<p>Evidence of education on site: signage, interpretation boards, guided walks, school visits</p>	<p>What message is carried by the estate's website?</p> <p>Consider 'adopting' an ecologist</p>

	<p>provides good examples of how to teach, illustrate or highlight the many aspects of integrated delivery of biodiversity and ecosystem services. In particular it focuses as much on engagement with local authorities, agencies of government, policymakers and people of influence as on the general public.</p>	<p>Evidence of education more generally: e.g., presentations; teacher support material; publications; collaboration with universities/scientific research projects etc.</p> <p>Community engagement; using individuals/groups to record data ('citizen science')</p> <p>Certification/Codes of Conduct (quality of facilities, sustainability, visitor care)</p>	<p>Would educational resources be appropriate (e.g. for a specific aspect of the estate, or a specific species or practice)?</p> <p>Consider how the estate could work with academia and research projects, through universities and agencies, to aid knowledge transfer</p> <p>Consider what opportunities the estate has to engage with those who might not be in sympathy with some of its activities</p>
14. Greenhouse Gas (GHG) and Carbon Accounting	<p>The estate has the option of showing that it has undertaken (or is currently undertaking) work on ascertaining greenhouse gas emissions and carbon accounting.</p> <p>When the estate comes to re-accreditation after five years, progress should be demonstrated in this sector, particularly in verifying sequestration from soil samples and measurements of standing volumes of timber.</p>	<p>A simple GHG and carbon account, showing emissions by source (with methane and nitrous oxide converted to CO2 equivalent) and sequestration by sinks, in accordance with IPCC methodology as applied in the UK national inventory</p>	<p>CO2 emissions (kg) from energy (agriculture and forestry) + CO2 emissions (kg) from energy across commercial activities on the estate + Annual CO2 emissions (kg) from Land Use Change (LUC) + N2O emissions as CO2 equivalent + CH4 emissions as CO2 equivalent = Total GHG emissions as CO2 equivalent (kg) [A]</p> <p>Annual additional C sequestration in soils from LUC (kg) + Annual C sequestration in timber [net of extraction] (kg) = Total annual sequestration (kg) as CO2 (C x 3.66) [B] → [A] - [B] = Net Balance (kg)</p>