

Although we have a responsibility to conserve local cultural heritage, the British also have a responsibility to the world to help protect habitats and species that are in global decline and are globally rare. We therefore qualify Dr Rackham's proposition regarding specialisation. Countries should also foster that part of threatened global biodiversity which they have the greatest potential to help. Otherwise, fragile species will continue to be constrained to existing habitat fragments and ranges, and be more at risk. We are fortunate in Britain in having the resources to begin farsighted restoration and re-introduction. (Taking our global responsibility further, it may be a minor breach of the Rio convention on climate change to release the carbon stored in neglected coppice.)

It will not be easy to conserve the diversity of native species in Britain, and we are strongly opposed to any dogmatic attitudes which are not reviewed in the light of new theories and data. However, some theories are more robust than others, as are some species! There are of course exceptions to the generalities that woodland gap species are relatively tough, good dispersers, but we should not be unduly swayed by such exceptions and conserve them at all costs.

What of history, of landscape, and of aesthetics? The debate is a minefield of subjectivity. People have complained to us about the loss of aesthetic interest in Ambley Wood in Kent, and Brasenose and Little Wittenham woods in Oxfordshire because they are being coppiced. Although some of us appreciate cultural landscapes, there is also a deep and substantial interest in the experience of perceived "wilderness" – which is all too hard to find in Britain. Since we are part of the history of our descendants, we can assume that some of what we create or restore will be appreciated as historical. Further, will slash-and-burn agriculture come to be valued as a cultural asset in the tropical forests? How do we select those landscapes, timeframes and managements that are permanently culturally valuable? In contrast, if we wish to reduce extinctions, the value of biological conservation of certain habitats can be relatively objectively quantified using the Red Data books.

We have never argued for complete abandonment of traditions such as coppicing (particularly where it has not been interrupted), nor for blanket coniferisation, nor for some single management panacea. We have sought to make people think before acting, and the changes in attitudes and practice we have observed since presenting our data and philosophy to the British Ecological Society in 1986 indicate that, to their credit, English Nature and others are prepared to do so.

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**T**o advocate a philosophy of restoration of parts of the landscape is not to seek miracles, nor to seek to destroy heritage. Pristine "wildwood", arguably to the shame of humanity, is of course gone forever through most of the world. It is indeed sobering to recall how traditional peoples irreversibly change landscapes and extinguish sensitive species. We agree with many of Oliver Rackham's points – although what we actually advocate is the restoration of "naturalness" as far as possible.

Restoration will be easiest on and near sites which currently most resemble the general habitat that would have been there but for people; we do not need to know all the details of the species mix that might have been. We can be fairly confident that we will reduce overall extinction rates of native species, and encourage recovery, if more habitat is more natural (Hambler & Speight, in press: Extinction rates in British non-marine invertebrates since 1900. Conservation Biology). However, a general restoration ideal need not be at the expense of all semi-natural habitat.