

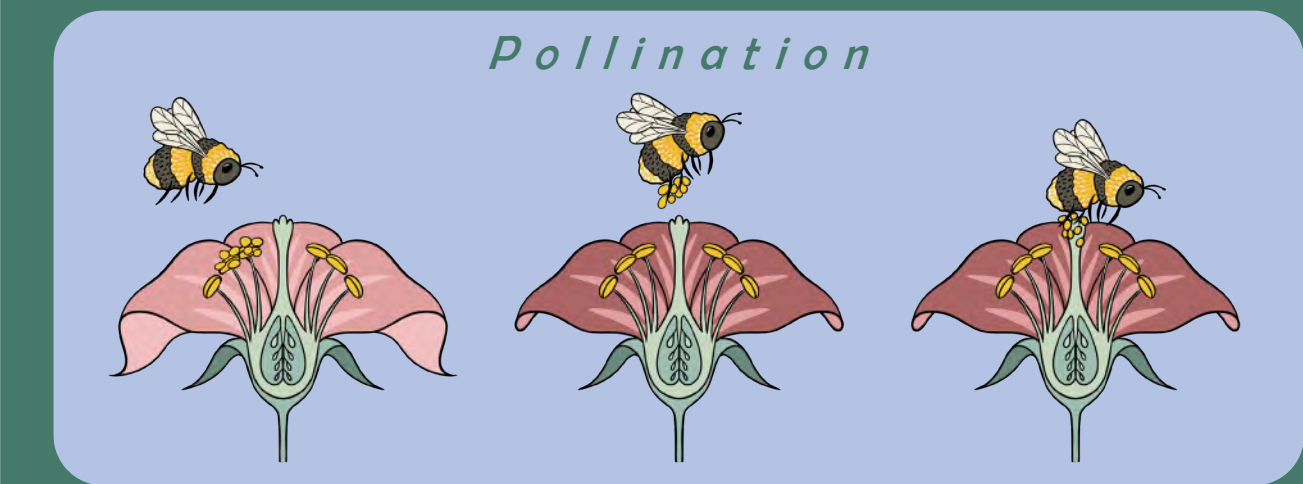
Biodiversity in Morton Stanley Park

What is biodiversity and why does it matter?

Biodiversity is a measure of variety amongst all living things, including the plants, fungi and animals that we can see, as well as things like microscopic bacteria and single-celled organisms.

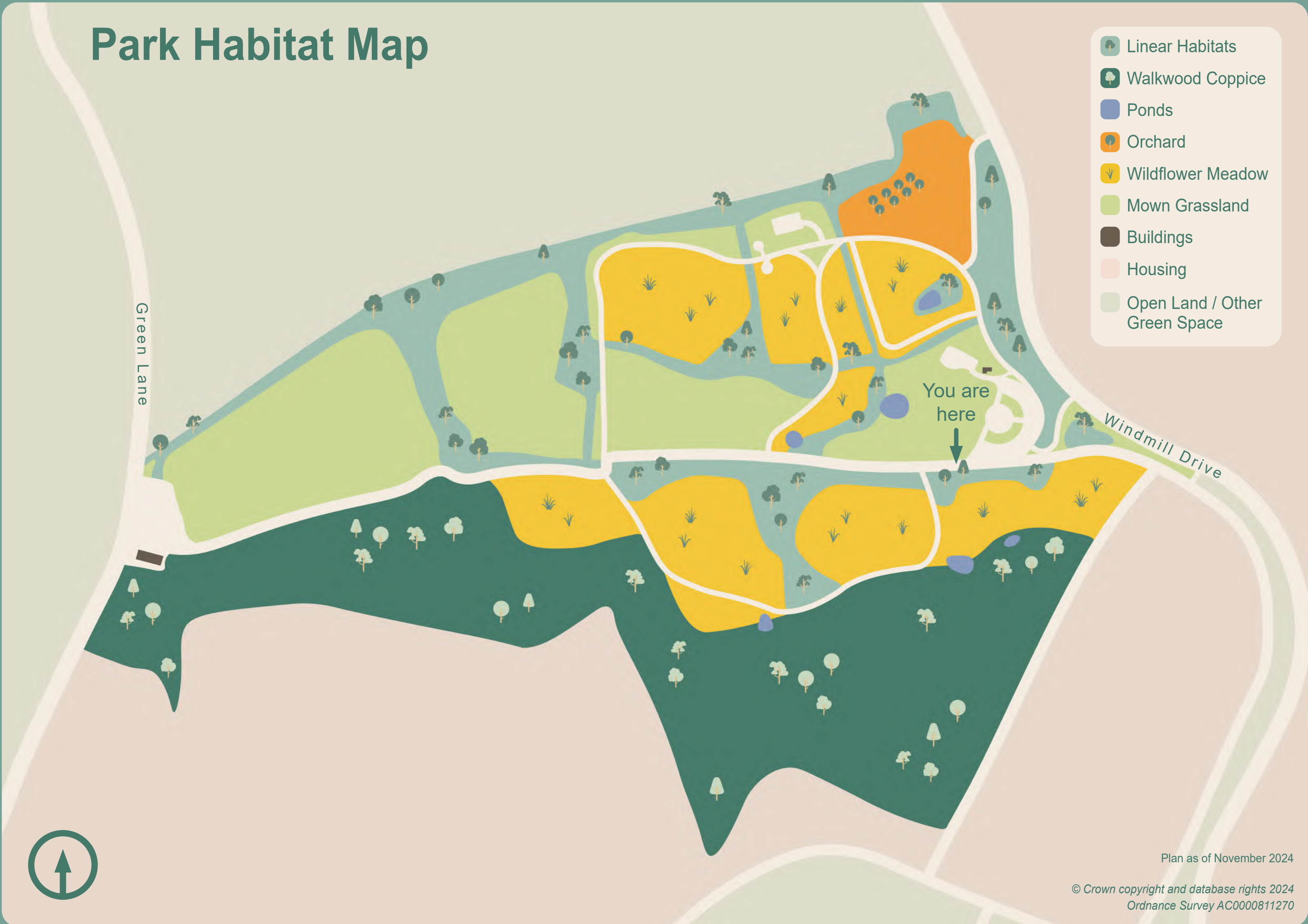
Together, living organisms and their environment form interconnected eco-systems or habitats. They interact with each other in a carefully balanced way and do some really important jobs to help keep life going on earth. These are sometimes referred to as 'eco-system services' - see one example in the diagram below.

Pollination



Through study, we have discovered that these systems work better and are more resilient to changes if they are more biodiverse. The loss of even one or two species from a habitat can put it out of balance.

Biodiversity in the UK has been in decline in the past 60 years as habitats have been lost or broken-up through a combination of built development, industry and changes to farming. However, growing recognition of the importance of biodiversity to our environment and the benefits of nature mean that many of us are increasingly valuing our outdoor spaces and are working to restore and create new habitats.



Brown hairstreak butterfly biodiversity success story

In Morton Stanley Park the population of brown hairstreak butterfly is going from strength to strength!

According to the Butterfly Conservation Trust, the brown hairstreak butterfly is one of Britain's rarest and most elusive butterflies.

It lives along hedgerows and small woods but its population has declined rapidly in recent decades. This has been due to a loss of hedges and the way that most are currently managed by an annual cut or flail. This has impacted the young growth of the native blackthorn shrub that the butterfly needs to lay its eggs on.

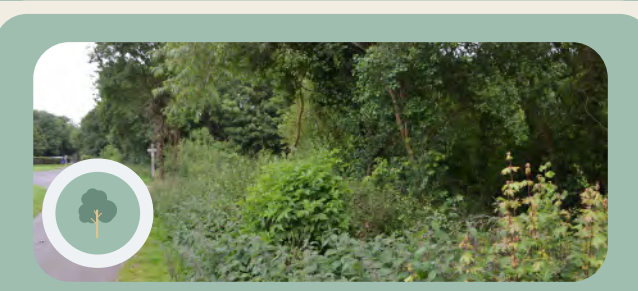


At Morton Stanley Park there is an abundance of blackthorn to the woodland edges and hedgelines and we have changed the way that we are managing these, by a rotational cutting of them every 3-4 years, to provide the young growth the butterfly needs. Annual egg counts have shown that this has made a real difference to the local population.

Supporting biodiversity at Morton Stanley Park

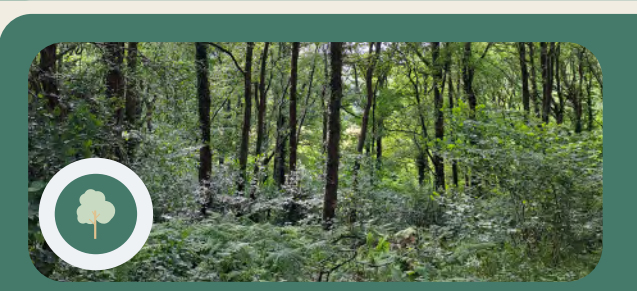
Public green spaces like Morton Stanley Park are very important havens for people and wildlife, and we are continually reviewing the management of different areas with the aim of improving and diversifying habitats.

The map above shows the range of habitats found in the park. Here is some further information on each:



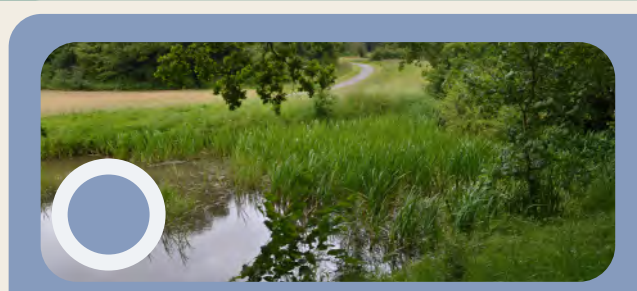
Linear tree belts, ditches and hedgelines

These features form a network of connected movement corridors within and beyond the park that provide important wildlife habitat. They follow the original field boundaries from farmland that was here before the park.



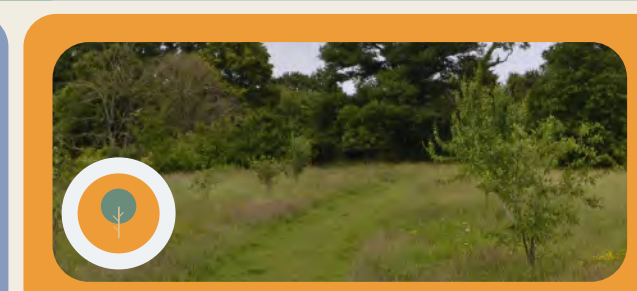
Woodland

Walkwood Coppice, a Local Nature Reserve, is thought to be Ancient Woodland. Ancient Woodland is important habitat as it has special communities of plants and animals not found elsewhere, but covers only 2.5% of the UK (Woodland Trust). In recent times the understorey has been managed in this area to help the native bluebells spread, creating a stunning display when they flower in April.



Ponds

The ponds in Morton Stanley Park are an important and biodiverse habitat. They are used for breeding by frogs, toads and newts, including the endangered great crested newt. Research has shown that UK ponds are home to a greater number of invertebrate species, like dragonflies and snails, than rivers.



Orchard

Traditional orchards have been used to grow food for thousands of years. They provide valuable food for insects, birds and mammals with their mosaic of regularly spaced fruit trees that allow wildflower meadows to grow below. This type of orchard has suffered decline in favour of mass-produced fruit farming. There has been a resurgence of traditional orchard planting in recent years, including the establishment of this orchard area, which has broadened the range of habitats in the park.



Wildflower Meadows

For a number of years, the fields in the southern part of the park have been managed to encourage diverse wildflower meadows. Since the 1930's, changes to farming has resulted in most of UK wildflower meadows being lost, causing a big decline in important pollinating insects. Wildflower meadows thrive on lower nutrient soils that stop grasses taking over. By cutting and removing the hay from these areas annually, it helps reduce the fertility of the soil and increase diversity. Look out for the colony of common spotted-orchids flowering in this area between June and August, which attract bees, butterflies and moths.