

History

Countryside Survey's methods have evolved since 1978, making it a world-leader in the study of change in our countryside and its natural resources. Today it represents the forefront of such research. Each time the Survey is repeated, the value of the time series increases. Over the years the number of squares surveyed and the number of different items recorded within each square has varied due to changes in funding. Countryside Survey continues to build trusted evidence of how our plants and soils are changing through time.

Linking to the view from space

In parallel with the field-based surveys, UKCEH has also built Land Cover Map, a comprehensive map of land cover across the UK, based on data from satellites. Taking advantage of innovations in mapping methods and an ever increasing amount of satellite data, we are beginning to combine the field and satellite observations to produce a much more integrated and cost-effective picture of how habitats, plants and soils are changing across Great Britain.

Reporting results

Overleaf you'll find some of the headline results from the survey. For good scientific reasons, we cannot provide detailed results for the exact locations that we visit on your land. This is because the places we visit must remain representative of similar land in the rest of Britain. If, as a result of receiving detailed information about specific locations, you were to change management then we would have influenced the very results whose objectivity we rely on when conveying the broader picture. For this reason we provide summary data only and hope you understand that this approach is key to maintaining the integrity of the data.

To find out more

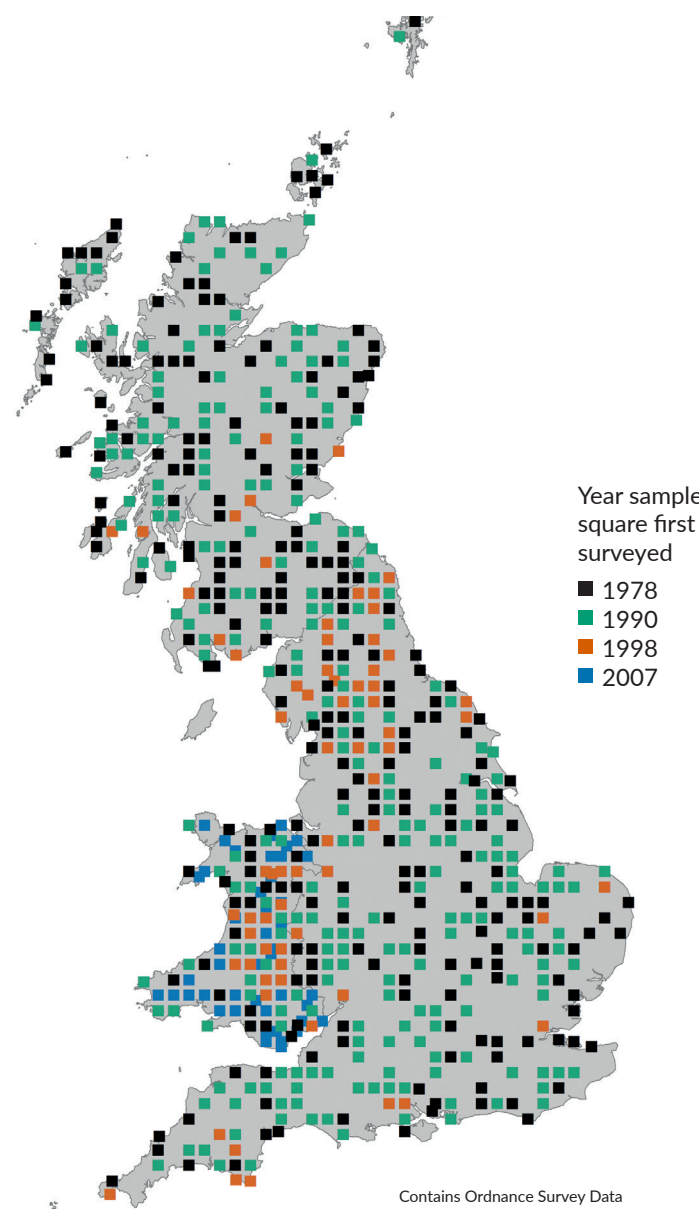
Visit countrysidesurvey.org.uk. If you have any questions that the website does not answer, please use the contact form on the website or contact us via:

Email: countrysidesurvey@ceh.ac.uk

Post: UKCEH Countryside Survey
UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
Environment Centre Wales
Deiniol Rd, Bangor UK, LL57 2UW

Message to landowners

Our most important message is to say a big thank you for allowing us to access your land. If you have taken over land management since the last survey in 2007 then this is the first time you will have heard from us. Otherwise you may have allowed our surveyors to access your land on multiple occasions. Either way we thank you. We also hope you will be pleased to be a part of this globally unique survey and to have contributed to an ongoing body of evidence about how plants and soils across Britain have changed.



Countryside Survey is now part of a NERC funded research platform that utilises an annual rolling programme to measure soils and vegetation that will repeat approximately every five years. This makes the programme more resilient to annual weather events such as flood and drought. NERC funding for Countryside Survey is delivered via UKCEH's UK-SCAPE programme.



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Surveying the countryside

UKCEH Countryside Survey has been monitoring the countryside of Great Britain since 1978, making it the country's longest running ecological survey programme. The results provide a unique insight into how our plants, soils, habitats and small water bodies have changed over time.

What?

UKCEH Countryside Survey is a structured repeat survey of soil and vegetation from a random sample of 1 km squares across Great Britain. Surveys were carried out in 1978, 1990, 1998 and 2007. Since 2019 we have surveyed a subset of squares each year.

Topsoil measurements (0-15cm) include soil carbon, pH and nutrients, while we also identify all plants in a fixed area around the soil sample and estimate their cover.

Why?

Plants and soils keep us alive. Plants fix carbon from the atmosphere which ends up forming the soil we rely on for our food. They also release oxygen making the air we breathe. So our soils and plants underpin the way our ecosystems work and the benefits that society receives from healthy ecosystems. Sadly our plant and soil communities are less healthy than they should be, and to address this we need accurate data that show how they are changing over time. Early warning of detrimental changes enables more rapid intervention to support our ecosystems.

Countryside Survey data has been used to...



Measure changes in soil carbon, the largest terrestrial carbon store



Provide a baseline for ash tree distribution before the arrival of dieback disease



Measure the abundance of grasses that cause hay fever across Britain over the past 33 years



Quantify the abundance of nectar plants for pollinating insects

Our changing countryside

SOIL CARBON

2% ↑

increase in improved
grassland soils from
1978 to 2007



SOIL CARBON

11% ↓

lost in arable
soils between
1978 & 2007



VEGETATION

Top 10 most frequently recorded plant
species in Britain in 2007

1. Yorkshire-fog
2. Bramble
3. Common Nettle
4. Cock's-foot
5. Creeping Bent
6. Hawthorn
7. Creeping Buttercup
8. Common Bent
9. Perennial Rye-grass
10. Red Fescue



BIODIVERSITY

8% ↓

decrease in
plant diversity
since 1978



HEDGEROWS

19% ↓

lost between
1984 & 1990



STREAMS

60%

of small streams
in good or very
good condition



These results are from the last full Countryside Survey in 2007. They will be updated once the data from the current five year rolling programme have been analysed.