

## Guidance Notes for Writing Site Descriptions and Target Notes in Community Woodlands

Making effective descriptions of study/survey sites is an essential skill. Unfortunately this is easier said than done and descriptions can vary especially when the rationale for each study/survey differs. One effective way of describing habitats quickly and concisely is to describe them in the form of a Target Note. Target Notes usually form part of a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and are used to describe a single habitat, in this case a woodland.

The aim of a Target Note is to describe (to someone who has not been to the site) the woodland, any features of interest and list the **tree and shrub species** assigning a DAFOR rating.

The following are some examples of what can be included. There is an example of a completed form overleaf [[Click here for web version](#)]

<b>Site Name:</b>	Local name or other form of site identification
<b>Survey Title:</b>	Gives some idea of what the survey/research is about.
<b>Surveyor:</b>	Remember to identify yourself so any information can be validated.
<b>Date:</b>	Extremely important to know when your visit takes place as seasonal timing affects the distribution of species.
<b>Map Details:</b>	Must identify to others where the survey is so it can be checked or repeated, include 6 figure grid reference at least, or latitude and longitude and the scale of the map used.
<b>Vice County Number:</b>	Required for most plant records, as distribution maps are based on Vice Counties (see the back of Stace for a map of Vice Counties). You may find that your site is split between 2 (or more) counties. Use a new recording sheet for each Vice County.
<b>Area (ha) of site/habitats:</b>	An approximation of area can be estimated from a map (1 ha = 100 m x 100 m). Large sites can be split into sections and surveyed separately using a new recording sheet for each area.
<b>Location of records:</b>	Where all details can be accessed and site of any herbarium or invertebrate collections.
<b>Target Note/ Site description (may be accompanied by sketches, maps or photographs):</b>	Describe the site as precisely (e.g. north side of burn) and concisely as possible in terms of biological, geological and topographical features. Include slope, aspect and any apparent management. If the site is a mosaic, record the percentage cover of habitats or the proportion of broadleaves to conifers. Note locally rare species and known indicators of soil type or previous land use. Include records of non-vascular plants, vertebrates and invertebrates if you can. It may also be important to record whether access is open to the public.
<b>Notes:</b>	Include details of areas that could not be accessed, any other problems/difficulties (spp you could not I.D.) and any species/habitats/communities of conservation interest. Also make suggestions if any on how the site may be improved.
<b>Overleaf</b>	Complete the details of the tree and shrub species you can identify and assign a DAFOR rating to each (see below). This should always include the canopy tree species but the list should also include tree saplings and seedlings,

### The DAFOR scale of recording plant cover

Traditionally the use of DAFOR has been extremely subjective with one surveyor's Dominant being someone else's Abundant. However, there has been more of a move to decrease subjectivity by offering a more standardised approach. The following table is taken from guidance notes given to surveyors by the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

D	Dominant	50-100%
A	Abundant	30-50%
F	Frequent	15-30%
O	Occasional	5-15%
R	Rare	<5%

*(Adapted from: Nature Conservancy Council (1990) Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: a technique for environmental audit; a field manual. Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough)*

## Community Woodland Recording Sheet

### Botanical Society of Scotland Survey 2006 – 2010

Return completed forms to: Barbra Harvie, CECS, School of GeoSciences,  
The University of Edinburgh, Crew Building, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH9 3JN

Site Name:	Lochend Wood		
Survey Title:	Pilot Survey for Community Woodland Project		
Surveyor:	Barbara Sumner, Barbra Harvie and Maria Chamberlain	Date:	22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2006
Map Details:	NT 675 779 (centroid)	Vice County Number:	81
Location of records:	BSS c/o address above	Area (ha) of site/habitats:	1.2 ha

**Target Note/ Site description:** This community woodland is part of the old Lochend estate (house now demolished). The main east coast railway line from Edinburgh to London runs parallel to the northern edge. The site is mainly flat and divided into two sections by a large wall running approximately north/south (these could have been surveyed separately if there were major differences in the woodland between the two sections). The woodland area is predominantly naturalised sycamore and Scots pine plantation with a large group of yews (possibly indicating the location of a chapel known to be in the grounds) and rhododendron. There is evidence of extensive past management. The scots pine seems to have been planted for timber (evenly spaced straight lines) and is about 150 years old. There are similarly aged exotic conifers planted alongside paths and rides (Douglas fir, hemlock and larch). The sycamore has self-seeded between the planted species and there are individuals of various ages from around 150 years to saplings. There are also occasional oak and ash trees (all less than 150 years old) plus numerous seedlings and saplings of both species (ash predominant). Ivy grows up the trunks of many of the Scots pine and across the woodland floor. The size of some of the stems (up to 25 cm at the base) suggests that the ivy was present when the trees were planted. There are also numerous very old holly trees, plus younger trees and seedlings. These observations indicate that an existing oak/ash woodland was felled to make way for the plantation. There is sufficient dead wood, both as brash and fallen trees, to provide habitats for a wide range of invertebrates and fungi. The presence of both enchanter's nightshade and hart's tongue fern indicates basic soils.

*(now record tree and shrub species information overleaf)*

**Notes:** In addition to the species recorded overleaf there were several mature Hemlock (*Tsuga* sp) trees and clusters of a fern (*Asplenium* sp) growing on and beside rotten logs but we were unable to identify these to species.

The site will probably benefit from the removal of the rhododendron but, other than that, it should only be managed to ensure the safety of the public. This does not require the removal of dead wood and fallen trees.

*(To record all species present please use the Community Woodland ground vegetation recording sheet)*