

## Narrow-headed Ant (*Formica exsecta*)

The narrow-headed ant is very local in distribution, and in England it is restricted to areas of lowland heathland habitat. It requires relatively open mosaics of heathland and tussocky grassland, in which the heather is not allowed to grow too old and tall and the grassland is not too heavily grazed.

### Current status

#### *National status*

In England, historical records show that this ant was restricted to a limited number of sites: the Dorset heathlands, the New Forest, Isle of Wight and the Bovey Valley in Devon and the north Cornish coast and is now found at only two sites in Devon. The narrow-headed ant is listed as *Rare* on the GB Red List and is a UKBAP Priority Species.

#### *Status on the network*

One of the known sites for this ant is a tussocky grassland/heathland verge on the A38 in Devon. This species is vulnerable to the loss of suitable habitat through scrub and bracken encroachment, and will therefore benefit from sensitive management of road verges.

### Current factors affecting the species

#### *Loss/fragmentation of habitat*

New road developments and road improvement schemes may lead to the loss of suitable heathland habitat and fragmentation of existing habitat leading to potential inbreeding and loss of genetic fitness in isolated populations.

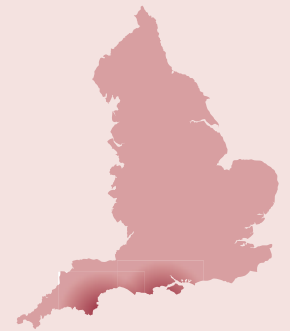
#### *Inappropriate management/deterioration of existing habitat*

Insensitive management of roadside verge habitats, such as afforestation, nutrient enrichment of soils and encroachment by scrub, trees and bracken may lead to shading out of nests and subsequent encouragement of competitive species of ant.

### Current action

Surveys and management have been undertaken by the Highways Agency to enhance the quality of the existing road verge locations of the narrow-headed ant and to improve the chances of further colonisation.

Both main Devon sites are designated as SSSIs and one is a Devon Wildlife Trust reserve. Further survey work is currently being undertaken on the Devon sites with funding from English Nature's Species Recovery Programme.



## Objectives

The aim of the Highways Agency Species Action Plan for the narrow-headed ant is to implement appropriate management where the species

occurs and to ensure that new road developments avoid or adequately mitigate any potential impacts on this species and its habitat.

	Objective	Proposed actions
A	To avoid impacts of new road schemes or improvements on the narrow-headed ant.	5
B	To mitigate unavoidable impacts on the narrow-headed ant and its habitat and to consider options for habitat enhancement.	6, 8
C	To monitor all road verges where this species is known to occur and safeguard through appropriate management.	4, 7, 8
D	To raise the awareness of HA staff, Managing Agents and consultants regarding the significance of the narrow-headed ant on the soft estate.	1, 2, 9
E	To develop a greater knowledge of the distribution of the narrow-headed ant across the soft estate.	1, 2, 3, 4

## Proposed action

The following table lists the actions required to achieve the objectives set out in this Plan. For some of the actions, potential partners have

been assigned as likely sources of cooperation. Targets are provided to give an indication of the timescale for the proposed action.

	Action	Potential partners	Target
	<i>Policy, guidance and advice</i>		
1	Provide detailed information to local area managers within network areas 1 and 3 (and any other areas where this species is found to occur in the future) on the management of roadside verges for the benefit of the narrow-headed ant.	-	2004
2	Liaise with relevant organisations regarding results of recent surveys and any advances in best management practice.	EN, WT Scottish Wildlife Trust	2003
	<i>Surveying</i>		
3	Survey all areas of suitable verge habitat for narrow-headed ant and record results on the Environmental Database.	-	2005
4	The nesting sites of all known road verge populations should be surveyed regularly to monitor its continued survival.	-	Ongoing

	<b>Action (continued)</b>	<b>Potential partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
	<i>Mitigation and Management</i>		
<b>5</b>	For all new road schemes and road improvements in network areas 1 and 3 include search for records of narrow-headed ant in desk study at stage 1 and in surveys at stage 2.	-	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>6</b>	Where impacts of new schemes and road improvements on narrow-headed ant habitat are unavoidable, consider the options for compensatory habitat enhancement, linkage and removal of barriers to dispersal.	<b>Scottish Wildlife Trust</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>7</b>	Ensure that existing sites known to support narrow-headed ant are managed appropriately in terms of their cutting regime to maintain and enhance their value for the species.	-	<b>Ongoing</b>
<b>8</b>	Identify 10 sites for the reintroduction of the narrow-headed ant to new sites near to its existing road verge locations and elsewhere, as appropriate.	<b>EN</b>	<b>2007</b>
	<i>Communication and publicity</i>		
<b>9</b>	Information on narrow-headed ant should be included in environmental training for HA staff and Managing Agents, in particular in network areas 1 and 3.	-	<b>2003</b>

### **Links with other plans**

This plan should be read in conjunction with the HAP for heathland.

The narrow-headed ant is not listed as a Priority Species within any existing LBAPs, although it is referred to in both the Devon and Cornwall BAPs.

### **Lead partners**

The joint lead partners for this species in the UKBAP are Scottish Natural Heritage and the Wildlife Trusts.

