

RATCLIFFE CRITERIA

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING NATURE CONSERVATION VALUE	
Size	In lowland Britain, semi-natural habitats tend to be highly fragmented and the value of a site usually increases with its size.
Diversity	The variety in number of both communities and species depends largely on the diversity of habitat. Diversity is also related to area and the number of both plant and animal species shows a marked tendency to increase with the size of the area.
Naturalness	Truly natural habitats, unmodified by man, are rare in Britain, and nature conservation deals largely with semi-natural habitats. Semi-natural habitats must nevertheless exhibit a level of quality marked by a lack of features which indicate gross or recent human modification. This criterion has to take into account the fact that some habitats, (e.g. grasslands, heathlands) are anthropogenic in origin.
Rarity	One of the most important purposes of nature conservation is to protect rare or local species and communities. The general principle is that the rarer the species or community, the greater the value for nature conservation. Rarity is related to the frequency of occurrence at national or county level.
Fragility	Fragility reflects the degree of sensitivity of habitats, communities and species to environmental change and involves a consideration of intrinsic and extrinsic factors.
Typicalness	It is necessary to represent the typical and commonplace within a field of ecological variation as well as the best examples of particular ecosystems.
Recorded History	The extent to which a site has been used for scientific study and research is a factor of some importance.
Position in an ecological/geographical unit	The relationship of a site to adjacent areas of nature conservation value. It is important to recognise the important and characteristic formations, communities and species of a district.
Potential Value	Certain sites could, through appropriate management or natural change, develop a greater nature conservation interest.
Intrinsic Appeal	The knowledge of the distribution and numbers of popular groups of species, such as birds, is greater than for obscure groups. Similarly, colourful wild flowers and rare orchids arouse more enthusiasm than liverworts. It is pragmatic to give more weight to some groups than to others.
Criteria are based on Ratcliffe, D.A. (1977) <i>A Nature Conservation Review</i> , Cambridge University Press	