



Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership

Progress Summary: April 2004 – March 2005

Over the last year, the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership has continued to be involved in a wide range of activities, designed to:

Support the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

- Practical conservation action has been undertaken on the ground for many BAP habitats and species
- Special projects have been launched to look at: options for improving water quality for biodiversity in the Brograve catchment; the biodiversity implications of flood control in the Broads National Park; and the feasibility of creating an ecological network for Norfolk
- The successful Wensum mink control project has been continued and expanded, as part of the county's efforts to conserve the water vole
- New action plans have been prepared for some of the county's most vulnerable habitats and species, and many other plans have been updated to reflect new developments and priorities.

Improve biodiversity information

- Ecological surveys have been initiated to improve our understanding of the status of a number of key BAP habitats, including fens, heathlands and traditional orchards
- The first phase of a study has been completed to assess the status of five species of rare and threatened molluscs in Norfolk.

Promote understanding and engagement

- Supplementary Planning Guidance on Biodiversity has been produced and has now been adopted by seven local authorities in Norfolk
- Assistance was provided to Earthwatch with the development of a set of guidelines for engaging businesses with biodiversity. These are now available on the Internet, at: http://www.businessandbiodiversity.org/lbp_guidelines.html
- The third Annual Biodiversity Forum was held in October 2004, and was attended by over 80 people.

Monitor and report on Norfolk BAP progress

- Final arrangements have been made to enter the Norfolk BAP onto the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS). This web-based system has now gone "live" and is accessible via the UK BAP website (www.ukbap.org.uk).

Moving On, Moving In

In October 2004, Paul Wilkinson left Norfolk to take up a new position as Head of Regional Conservation Policy (East of England) with the Wildlife Trusts. Paul served as the Norfolk Biodiversity Co-ordinator for over three years, and supported the Biodiversity Action Plan through a critical phase in its development and implementation. The members of the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership would like to thank Paul for the dedication, creativity and energy that he brought to his post. Paul will continue to act as the Chairman of the Regional Biodiversity Forum, and in this capacity, will remain involved with Norfolk as well as the other counties in the East of England.

Scott Perkin took up the post of Biodiversity Co-ordinator in January 2005. He brings with him some 20 years of experience in the conservation field, gained primarily through his work with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and IUCN - The World Conservation Union. Much of Scott's work has been in East Africa and Asia, where he was involved in a range of programmes and activities dealing with protected area management, the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the preparation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans. Although Canadian by birth, Scott has spent many years in Norfolk and looks forward to assisting with the county's BAP process.

Annual Biodiversity Forum 2004

The third Norfolk Biodiversity Forum was held at Barnham Broom on 13 October 2004, and brought together some 80 participants from a wide variety of government bodies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and community groups. The Forum is now a regular annual event, and has become an increasingly important venue at which the members of the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership can review the progress that has been achieved to date, exchange ideas and identify priorities for the future.

At the heart of the Forum were presentations from the eight BAP Topic Groups. The other feature of the day was an “exchange fair”, where participants had an opportunity to meet and hold discussions with the members of the Topic Groups and a diverse range of other conservation organisations and agencies. This was the first Forum to experiment with such an approach, and the idea proved to be very popular.



Keith McNaught (English Nature) and Paul Wilkinson (formerly Norfolk Biodiversity Co-ordinator) at the Annual Biodiversity Forum.

Photo Credit: Dominic Allen

Focus on a BAP Habitat – Heathlands

Norfolk's heathlands have declined by a dramatic 84 per cent over the last 200 years. Today, it is estimated that just over 4,500 ha remain in the county. Of this amount, approximately 2,000 ha are found within the Stanford Training Area, 1,000 ha in Breckland, and 1,500 ha spread across a range of other sites, including the Holt-Cromer Ridge in North Norfolk and Mousehold Heath in Norwich.

Agricultural intensification, afforestation and development have all contributed to the loss of heathlands. An additional factor leading to decline is encroachment by trees, shrubs and bracken once traditional management activities have been abandoned (e.g., livestock grazing, fuelwood gathering and controlled burning).

Despite their severe decline, Norfolk's heathlands continue to support a diverse array of UK-BAP species, including plants such as tower mustard, insects such as silver-studded blue butterfly, and birds such as nightjar, woodlark, red-backed shrike, stone curlew and skylark. Heathlands are also a vital refuge for the natterjack toad.

As part of the Norfolk BAP process, a revised heathland action plan has now been prepared by the Heathland Topic Group. The action plan provides a clear framework for conserving – and expanding – this important BAP habitat, and also seeks to promote greater co-ordination among the many different players involved in heathland restoration, creation and management.



Salthouse Heath, on the North Norfolk coast.

Photo credit: Graeme Cresswell



Silver-studded blue butterfly – a BAP species associated with heathlands.

Photo credit: Graeme Cresswell

Focus on a Project in the Upper Thurne Broads and Marshes: Development of a Long-Term Strategy for the Brograve Catchment

In recognition of their rich biological diversity, the Upper Thurne broads and marshes – including the well-known and popular Horsey Mere - have been designated as a nationally and internationally important wildlife site. Within such a large site, there are a number of issues that can impact on wildlife interests. One such issue is water quality.

In 2001, an assessment of water quality in the catchment area showed that salinisation and acidification are acute problems which are likely to be having a significant negative impact on the area's biodiversity. One of the most visible signs of these problems is the presence of ochre in many water channels and ditches, and in the discharges from the Brograve pump into Horsey Mere. Ochre is a reddish-brown precipitate of iron, which is formed as a result of complex chemical and biological processes within the soil.

In order to address these concerns, efforts are now underway to develop a long-term strategy for the Brograve catchment. A special partnership has been established to guide the process, involving the King's Lynn Consortium of Internal Drainage Boards, numerous government agencies, several non-governmental groups and landowners. As one of its first steps, the partnership has commissioned a feasibility study to examine options for promoting the wise and sustainable use of land and water resources in the catchment, within the context of long-term planning for both agriculture and biodiversity conservation. The feasibility study has been funded by the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership, Defra, the Broads Authority and the National Trust; its recommendations are expected by mid-2005.

For more information about this project, please contact:

Lou Mayer, Conservation Officer, King's Lynn Consortium of Internal Drainage Boards, Kettlewell House, Austin Fields Industrial Estate, King's Lynn PE30 1PH. Tel: 01553-669500



Ochre entering the Horsey Mere.

Photo Credit: Mike Page

News from the BAP Topic Groups

Coastal

This Topic Group has continued to focus on the habitat and species action plans which fall under its “umbrella”, including saline lagoons, seagrass beds, littoral chalk and the starlet sea anemone. With funding from the Biodiversity Partnership, a successful “North Norfolk Lagoon Workshop” was held at Cley in October 2004, under the guidance of Dr. R.N. Bamber, one of the country’s leading experts on saline lagoons.

Communities and Nature

The members of this group once again played a key role in organising “Wild in your Garden”, which was held in Norwich in May 2004. This popular event was primarily designed to highlight ways of enhancing the biodiversity value of urban gardens. The Communities and Nature Topic Group was also actively involved in the “Biodiversity in School Yards Project”, which received support from the Heritage Lottery Fund for work at 17 local schools.

Farmland

In an important new development, this Topic Group forged strategic linkages with a number of Norfolk’s key agronomists. Through their work on farms throughout the county, agronomists are particularly well placed to deliver advice on the implementation of BAP activities. Significant progress was also achieved on the Group’s habitat and species action plans, including updated versions of the plans for cereal field margins and ancient/species-rich hedgerows.

Heathlands

Under the auspices of this Topic Group, and with funding support from the Biodiversity Partnership, a desk-top audit of heathlands on County Wildlife Sites was carried out by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The audit has provided valuable new information on the status of this priority BAP habitat in Norfolk, and will now be followed up by field surveys at selected sites. The Heathlands Topic Group has also made substantial headway with its habitat and species action plans.

Large Areas for Wildlife (Ecological Networks)

This Topic Group played an important role in ensuring that Norfolk’s perspectives were incorporated into the development of the regional biodiversity opportunity map for the East of England. With funding from the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership and in-kind contributions from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the Group has also recently launched a new project aimed at promoting the establishment of an ecological network in Norfolk.

Waterbodies

The Waterbodies Topic Group continued to oversee the successful Wensum mink control project, which has now expanded its network to include over 50 trappers; the possibility of building on these achievements and of replicating the pilot project in other areas is now being considered. The Group also helped design and co-ordinate the first phase of a survey to assess the status of several BAP mollusc species, and continued with the development and review of a range of habitat and species action plans.

Wetlands

Under the auspices of the Wetlands Topic Group, an innovative study was initiated to look at the biodiversity implications of flood alleviation plans in the Broads. Preliminary work was also started on the development of a local biodiversity action plan for the Broads National Park. The Group was also actively involved in helping to launch the ochre/salinity project in the Brograve catchment as well as the first phase of a county-wide audit of Norfolk’s fens.

Woodlands

With funding from the Biodiversity Partnership, this Topic Group has initiated a biodiversity survey of five traditional orchards in Norfolk. The sites have been carefully selected to represent a range of different conditions and management regimes, and are located in the Fens, mid-Norfolk, north Norfolk (two sites) and the south-east corner of the county. The surveys will be carried out by the East of England Apples and Orchards Project, which is recruiting county-based experts to look at mosses, lichens, molluscs and invertebrates. The Woodlands Topic Group has also overseen the rapid development of five new habitat and species action plans over the last year.

Focus on a BAP Species - Nightjar

Norfolk supports a significant, summer-time population of the nightjar, a national BAP species that has been the focus of considerable conservation attention in recent years. Thetford Forest and Breckland are particularly important nightjar breeding areas.

For much of the last century, the nightjar has suffered sharp declines in both its numbers and range. In 1981, it was estimated that only 2,100 males remained in the UK. The major factor leading to the decline of the nightjar has been the dramatic reduction in its favoured habitat – open, wooded areas on heathland. Nightjars are also vulnerable to disturbance (e.g., from dogs).

Although past trends have been alarming, there is some evidence to suggest that the nightjar has now begun to experience a partial recovery. In 1992, some 2,400 males were recorded (including 223 in Norfolk) – representing an increase of over 14 per cent from the low point in 1981. It is hoped that the results of the national nightjar survey carried out in 2004 will reveal even further increases.

As part of the Norfolk BAP, a Species Action Plan for the nightjar has now been drafted by the Heathland Topic Group. Amongst other activities, the plan identifies the need to incorporate nightjar requirements in the design of forestry schemes, notify new protected areas on heathland sites, and promote heathland conservation and re-creation. The implementation of the activities and recommendations contained in the nightjar action plan should help to ensure that Norfolk remains a stronghold for this attractive but threatened species.



The nightjar - a summer-time resident of Norfolk.

Photo credit: RSPB

Priorities for 2005 – 2006

Over the coming year, the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership will seek to build on the successes outlined above, by:

- **Implementing the BAP habitat and species action plans**

The Partnership will continue to drive forward the implementation of the many different recommendations contained in the habitat and species action plans. Through the BAP Topic Groups, the Partnership will also continue to develop and seek resources for high priority projects aimed at addressing the most urgent and important biodiversity needs.

- **Integrating biodiversity into local development planning**

The Partnership will continue to work with local authorities to promote the use of the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Biodiversity and to encourage the incorporation of biodiversity in community strategies and Local Development Frameworks.

- **Using the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS)**

Considerable attention will be accorded to entering the Norfolk BAP onto the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System. This should not only help to ensure wider recognition of Norfolk's biodiversity achievements, but should also prove to be a useful tool for monitoring the implementation of the BAP at the county level, identifying gaps, and enhancing the targeting of conservation action.

- **Promoting the development of an ecological network for Norfolk**

In collaboration with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the Partnership has recently launched a new initiative to promote the creation of an ecological network for Norfolk. In the initial stages, priority will be accorded to building awareness among a wide range of stakeholders, and to identifying the possible components of the network. These activities will be complemented by the preparation of a county biodiversity map, which will seek to identify areas of strategic opportunity for habitat creation and enhancement.

Regional Update – The East of England Biodiversity Forum

The Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership has continued to be actively involved with the East of England Biodiversity Forum. Among its other achievements in 2004/05, the Forum:

- Agreed a set of regional habitat targets for lowland grass and heath, freshwater habitats, hedges, semi-natural woodland, coastal habitats, arable cereal margins, and reed beds and fens. These regional targets provide an important link between the work of the Local Biodiversity Partnerships and the national BAP targets
- Commissioned the development of a “regional biodiversity opportunity map”, which identifies strategic opportunities for habitat enhancement, creation and linkage. The map will be formally submitted as a contribution to the consultation on the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England.

For more information about these initiatives, please visit: www.eastspace.net/biodiversity.

Coming up in 2005

Wet Woodlands

17 July, Brundall Local Nature Reserve

Wash Week

7-14 August (many different events, at localities around the Wash)

Deer in Woods and Biodiversity

5 September, Easton

Norfolk Biodiversity Forum

30 September, Norwich

Apple Days

2 October, Stow Hall, near Downham Market

23 October, Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall

Wild About Norfolk

15 October – Charles Burrell High School, Thetford

Scott Perkin

Biodiversity Co-ordinator
Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership
c/o Norfolk County Council
Planning & Transportation Department
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk NR1 2SG

Tel: 01603 222112

Email: environment@norfolk.gov.uk

Website: www.norfolkbiodiversity.org



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