

IW Biodiversity Action Plan Newsletter

Autumn 2004

Welcome to the 6th edition of the IW Biodiversity Action Plan Newsletter.



'Go Wild on Wight' a celebration of the Island's natural heritage takes place at Dinosaur Isle in Sandown on 30th/31st October. This event will bring together many groups involved in wildlife and conservation, and will enable everyone to see the enormous range of activities going on here. It is linked to the new BBC 1 series *British Isles: A Natural History*. More details of the TV series can be found at

http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/britishisles/prog_summary.shtml

or for the local events at

http://www.iwight.com/living_here/planning/Countryside/Go_Wild_on_Wight/

The Steering Group is working towards a Community Action Plan for Biodiversity at the moment and we are launching the draft plan to the wider public at this event. It will follow a similar format to the other action plans but aims to draw together information on the habitats which the general public have contact with, such as back gardens, school grounds and local green spaces. The actions

Plans are available at http://www.iwight.com/living_here/planning/Countryside/Ecology/Habitats/. For paper copies, please contact the Countryside Section of the Isle of Wight Council on 01983 823893.

SEAVIEW DUVER – A NEW PLACE TO WATCH WILDLIFE.

In August of this year, the Duke of Edinburgh opened a major new Isle of Wight Council coastal engineering scheme. Seaview Duver Coast Protection Scheme provides enhanced coastal protection for properties along The Duver road and for the services through to Seaview. It has also provided an enhanced wildlife reserve and facilities for public

viewing of the marshland behind the road. This is the Hersey Nature Reserve and, if you haven't already been there, I would recommend a visit.

will centre on communicating the value and importance of wildlife to us all, as individuals and as a community. We will also be producing information sheets aimed at the wider public during next year.

We would very much like to receive comments on this plan from the wider partnership. Many, if not all of you, are already greatly involved in looking after the environment in many ways and involving the community in the process. Copies of the plan will be available on the Ecology pages of the Isle of Wight Council web site from the middle of October, or from the address below. The consultation period will run for six weeks until the end of November. The Steering Group will then finalise the plan in the light of comments received.

All the Habitat Action Plans written since the Biodiversity Action Plan partnership was launched are also available on the IW Council website or from the Countryside Section of the Council.



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There is a circular walk from the road around part of the reserve through reedbeds, where reed and sedge warblers, dragonflies, common lizards and foxes can be seen. The Hersey Nature Reserve hide offers spectacular views over the low-lying

marshland behind. There are splendid opportunities to watch wetland birds at close quarters. Regular species have included herons, little egrets, cormorants, common sandpipers, mute swans, kingfisher, Mediterranean gull and little grebe. Flocks of swallows and martins feed over the water during the summer and autumn. Water levels on the marsh fluctuate with the tides and, when muddy edges are exposed, the reserve becomes attractive to wading birds such as greenshank, oyster catcher and dunlin. Feral ducks and geese from the adjoining Flamingo Park sometimes feed on the reserve; most spectacular of these are the flock of several hundred free-winged barnacle geese.

The reserve is also of value for other species including a range of dragonflies and damselflies, water voles and scarce plants such as divided sedge and chamomile.

The construction of the new seawall had the potential to adversely impact upon the foreshore, which is part of a site of European nature conservation importance. The design and construction works had to be carried out with great care so as to minimise these impacts. During the design stage, it was felt to be important that the engineering project should provide benefits for wildlife, particularly for wading birds using the foreshore and it was felt that this could be

best achieved on the marshland behind. The proposals were drawn up with the involvement of English Nature, Environment Agency, RSPB and the Countryside Section of the Council, and taken forward with Simon Colenutt, an experienced ecological consultant. The habitat on the Duver was improved by engineering muddy edges to the ditches, creating open marshy areas and controlling water flowing into and out of the site. This has created suitable conditions for wading birds to feed and to shelter, which were not previously present and, from the outset, the site has become well used by wetland birds which previously were only present sporadically.



Coot

The reserve has been greatly appreciated by local people and the hide is well used. It provides possibly the best viewing conditions for watching wild birds at close quarters currently available on the Island.

Colin Pope, Ecology Officer

Fishy business

The Environment Agency carries out a full programme of fish population surveys on Island streams on a five year schedule. The data is put into the National Fisheries Population Database. However, at a local level the Agency felt that there was a need for other surveys on the streams that the main programme doesn't cover, such as the Caul Bourne, Thorley Brook and the chine streams along the southwest coast. To date, there has been only anecdotal evidence of the fish present in these streams. Additional surveys will be taking place at the earliest opportunity in 2005. The information gained will help inform decisions with abstraction and discharge issues, as well as planning and general biodiversity concerns.

Dom Longley, EA Fisheries

How does that grab you? - Part 2



Photo R. Holt

Most Mantis shrimps are Mediterranean species but a population of *Rissoides desmerati* has been known in the Solent for 150 years. Last winter, fishermen trawling in the Solent were asked to report sightings in their catches. 41 mantis shrimps were seen and recorded between October 2003 and February 2004, doubling previous records. A summary of the results are now available on the Internet at

http://www.medinavalleycentre.org.uk/mantis_shrimp.htm.

The project will be continuing for a further year, so keep looking!

Farming and wildlife - recent developments at Cridmore Bog

At Cridmore Farm a soaring buzzard was harassed by an agitated flock of crows. To the side, a dozen or so ducks took to the air in noisy protest. And down at ground level, four pairs of gumboots squelched through the boggy landscape. One set of wellies belonged to farmer Chris Clarke, the other three to colleagues from various arms of government.— Martin Froment, Countryside Stewardship adviser from Defra; Andy Gordon, conservation officer with English Nature; and the Environment Agency's Karen McHugh, an expert on flood defence.

The visitors were there as part of efforts to help safeguard a precious area of farmland and to preserve and enhance its delicate mix of animal and plant life, all the while recognising that the owner has a business to run and a living to earn - a fine balance to be struck in every sense. Yet, in partnership, the four are turning the situation around to each other's advantage.

A long, thin strip of nearly 15 acres was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1985. It supports three main communities:

- swamp, dominated by bottle sedge, rare in southern England;
- marshy grassland, dominated by purple moor grass; and
- rush pasture, dominated by soft rush and sharp-flowered rush.

There is also archaeological interest, as evidence of a Bronze Age cooking hearth was discovered there several years ago.

Cridmore Bog is one of the last remaining acid peatland habitats on the Isle of Wight. Others have dried out and the peat sold, and for years it looked as if Cridmore Bog was heading the same way. A canal dug across the site by Italian prisoners of war was gradually draining the land, lowering water levels and causing the carpet of vegetation to disappear. Other problems included the canalising and deepening of nearby River Medina, and encroachment by sediment and chemicals, part of it run-off of silt and nutrients from a pig farm on higher ground. The decline was noted with concern by,

among others, the island's natural history society, English Nature and the Environment Agency. However by 1998, the outlook was distinctly brighter. Part of the Medina was redirected back along its original course at the northern edge of the site and a series of temporary wooden sluices helped to raise water levels and restore the important raft of floating vegetation.

In 2001 the first land at Cridmore Farm came under stewardship with Defra and today 35 hectares is in the Scheme. The production of an integrated management plan for the site by the Environment Agency involving further realignment of the river further helped to return the site to conditions as they were 60-70 years ago.

Chris Clarke farms 1,500 acres, mostly arable and he is a former chairman of the Island branch of the NFU. He is one of the most influential industry figures locally and his views on – and support for – initiatives such as stewardship carry considerable weight. “Martin Froment and his colleagues have a sound practical knowledge and understanding of what can and can't be achieved and what is sensible,” says Chris. “I find it's far more productive when we work together.”

Martin is also pleased with how the relationship with Chris has evolved. “People like Andy, Karen and I are aware that these are very challenging times for farmers. Nobody seems very sure in which direction CAP reform is going to take them, a project such as this helps us to think about the wider issues of sustainability. While we do have a number of powers for getting things done, in practice we tend not to use them because we always prefer to take people along with us.”

Andy Gordon describes the relationship as “positive, friendly, and with a greater collective benefit“. He adds “When budgets are tight, far more can be achieved by pulling together. The main thing is that we are dealing with a situation in a joined-up way and, as a consequence, bringing benefit not only to the SSSI but also to the surrounding catchment. What's happening at Cridmore Farm could be a model for other nature conservation sites.”

Towngate Pond Restoration Project Newport, Isle of Wight

Introduction

The Towngate Pond Restoration Project was undertaken during the summer of 2003 by the Newport Rivers Group*. The project's aims were to landscape a small area in the middle of Newport through which two of the Island's rivers flow, and to re-instate the historic town pond that had once been on the site.

History of the site

A large pond was here for centuries, but was infilled some thirty years ago. Severe flooding hit Newport in 1960, and the area was redeveloped as part of the flood defence system. A corn mill was built in the 1830s and was only demolished in the late 1990s after standing empty for many years.

The restoration project

The project incorporated design by Richard Vivash at the River Restoration Centre, in consultation with the Environment Agency's Flood Defence team. Advice and input also came from the Local Authority, Wight Wildlife Trust and Island 2000 Trust, a local environmental regeneration charity.



During construction

The concrete channelling has been removed from the rivers, and the beds re-profiled to create slower moving, more natural looking watercourses. The pond has been dug into a shape designed to maintain an effective flow of water, and to create a range of depths of water to sustain a wide variety of plants and wildlife.

**The Newport Rivers Group is a partnership between the Isle of Wight Council, the Environment Agency, Newport Forum, Island 2000 Trust and Wight Wildlife.*

Blocks of Portland stone were placed along the banks in the areas that might be susceptible to erosion because they take the brunt of the water force. The meander stretches of water have been landscaped with gently sloping gravel banks to create riffles, oxygenating the water and providing another stream habitat for aquatic wildlife.

Over 2,000 wild flowers were planted on the site during the project. The plants selected are all native species that are found further upstream. They are laid out to create a natural looking environment, which is attractive to people and wildlife. Some initial planting was carried out by pupils from local schools and volunteers from the Newport Rivers Group met on a hot summer's day to finish the job, once the construction work had been completed.

Benches and Sculpture

The landscaping of the site was completed by the addition of some seating and two sculptures by local artists. The two benches located on the site were designed in a competition run by Island 2000 in local primary schools. The two winning entries were then built by local craftsmen using the children's original designs. The tree trunk seating system was designed and built by a local sixth form student as his A-level Design Technology project.

The reclining figure by local artist Danny Stimson was created as part of Sainsbury's Viaduct Sculpture Garden commissioned by the Isle of Wight Council in 1999. The otter tree sculpture, *The Return of the Native*, was worked in 2003 by local chainsaw sculptor Paul Sivell to coincide with the pond restoration project.



The finished project