

Isle of Wight

Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership

Newsletter Number 2 June 2000

A year ago, a meeting was held to launch the Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership. Since then a lot of work has been undertaken by local experts, and representatives of the Steering Group organisations and we are able to announce that the publication of the Species and Habitat Audit is now imminent.

The 64 page booklet, 'The Wildlife of the Isle of Wight' is illustrated by maps and line drawings and has a foreword by Professor David Bellamy. It describes in some detail the nature and extent of the Island's habitats and assesses the threats to their continued survival.

There is also a list of 690 species of judged to be of conservation concern on the Island. Twenty-nine of these are also national priority species, with a further 211 being of national significance. For each species, an indication of their abundance is given, and where known, their population trend. However, it has become increasingly obvious that there are still many gaps in our knowledge and it will be an ongoing process to collect more data.

This booklet not only gives us a snapshot in time regarding our wildlife and its habitats; it also serves as a springboard for the next stage of the process. Over the next two years, the Steering Group is intending to call together different interest groups and organisations to work together to develop Action Plans, which aim to provide long-term protection and enhancement of biodiversity

**Available
soon !**

The Wildlife of the Isle of Wight

- An Audit and Assessment

to be published in mid -July 2000

Special Offer for BAP
partnership members - £2 per
copy, from Countryside Section,
Isle of Wight Council Offices,
Seaclose, Newport

Obtaining copies of

The Wildlife of the Isle of Wight

Each organisation of the Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership is being offered the opportunity to purchase up to two copies of **The Wildlife of the Isle of Wight** at the special rate of £2 per copy from the Council Offices at Seaclose. Copies will be

Wall Lizards in Ventnor - Biodiversity in Action

Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife Officer reports on a scheme to safeguard this species

Wight Wildlife, the Island 2000 Trust and Ventnor Regeneration Forum have formed a partnership to help raise awareness of the population of wall lizards around Ventnor. These small reptiles are relatively common around the gardens and walls above Ventnor Esplanade, where the sheltered conditions provide a warm environment. These animals evoke the Mediterranean atmosphere of Ventnor, re-enforced by the ambience of the Botanic Gardens and the special Undercliff climate.

These lizards are not common in Europe and are protected under the Bern Convention. This is an agreement to protect certain native species where they occur. It has always been assumed that the wall lizards in Ventnor are not native and therefore are not protected. However they are the longest established colony of wall lizards in Britain, having first been noted in the middle of the 19th century. They have been on the Isle of Wight longer than some of our more familiar wildlife, such as green woodpeckers, little owls, collared doves and badgers.

These animals are true urban wildlife, and are almost always associated with walls or buildings. They feed on invertebrates such as spiders. In turn, they are predated upon by kestrels, and more significantly, cats. They require walls that have both holes and vegetation, in which they feed, shelter,

available from 12th July 2000; cheques should be made payable to 'Isle of Wight Council'. Please complete the form on the back of the newsletter and hand in at Reception at the Seaclose Offices or post to the Countryside Section Seaclose Offices, Fairlee Rd, Newport, Isle of Wight. (The booklet will also be on sale to the general public from various bookshops at £5 per copy)

lay eggs and in the winter, hibernate. The main peril resulting directly from human activity is development which results in the "tidying" of walls by re-pointing or removal of vegetation.

The partnership has produced a leaflet explaining the needs of the lizards, together with suggestions on how they can be helped. We are also looking to create suitable habitat in the Ventnor Botanic Gardens and raise awareness amongst the visitors to, and residents of, Ventnor with funding from 'Gift to Nature' and other initiatives.

We believe this is a good example of Biodiversity in Action, where several organisations have co-operated to help the conservation of a rare species that is special to the community in which it lives.

Action for biodiversity - The National Trust is a member of the BAP Steering Group and has been active on the Island for more than 75 years. It now protects about 1600 hectares (4000 acres) of the Island's best countryside.

Here, Robin Lang, the Head Warden, discusses the importance of scrub for wildlife, and the methods used to manage it.

Landscape and Wildlife importance of scrub

Much of the National Trust land is coastline and downland in the Island's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are wide open chalk downs with patches of gorse on the tops, and more thickly-clad north-facing slopes; scrub-filled chines; and landslips which tumble into the sea.

The areas of chalk grassland which are not covered by scrub are important for a wide range of wildlife, including **early gentian**, and a variety of other plants; lichens; and insects such as **adonis blue** and dark green fritillary butterflies, which survive on shallow, dry and low-nutrient soils.

Gorse in its taller state provides shelter for

insects and nesting habitat for **dartford warblers**, **linnets**, **stonechats** and **yellowhammers**. When it is shorter, it forms a mosaic with pockets of grassland, such as on Brook Down, and provides nesting habitat for **skylarks** and **meadow pipits**, feeding habitat for **dartford warbler** and shelter for dark green fritillaries. Thorn scrub is important for both insects and birds such as **whitethroat**.

The nature and distribution of scrub

Scrub is part of the natural development of open grassland to woodland, and consists of woody species such as gorse, hawthorn, blackthorn, elder, bramble and clematis. Some of the more exposed parts of the West Wight Downs such as Tennyson and Afton Down have hardly any scrub and have probably developed as open chalk grassland since the end of the last Ice Age. On all other Downs, scrub is a natural feature. Gorse often grows on the tops where there is a more acid flint gravel; thorn and elder scrub is a particular feature of the north side of the downs. Holm oak, an evergreen Mediterranean tree introduced in the early 19th century, has spread on to the Ventnor Downs and developed into climax woodland. Areas of coastal landslip, such as St Catherine's Point have important scrub habitats which cling to the mobile slopes.

Management of scrub

For thousands of years, scrub has been cleared and burnt on the Downs for grazing, and gorse cut for animal feed. It is thought that chalk grassland species have spread out from the open downs into these cleared areas

since the end of the Ice Age. The National Trust has sought to continue these traditions to encourage the range of plants and animals which live there.

Where it is threatening to take over prime chalk grassland habitats, scrub is cleared by

chainsaw or machinery. It is burnt up on the site of large gorse bushes to reduce the amount of enrichment of the grassland. In these areas, regrowth is prevented with the careful application of selective herbicides.

Where scrub has a value in its own right for wildlife, for example on Tapnell Down and Wroxall Down, it is coppiced or swiped with a tractor in a two to four year rotation to suit the various needs of insects and birds.

Gorse is burnt and cut in rotation, as is the traditional practice, to create a variety of age structures. Fritillary butterflies and skylarks thrive in one to two year old gorse, which sprouts after it is cut or burnt. Birds feed in one to four year old gorse, and nest in 10 to 15 year old gorse before it becomes too "leggy". Managing gorse like this also prevents it from spreading out into important areas of grassland and, coupled with grazing, maintains the gorse/grassland mosaic.

Grazing is probably the single most important "tool" for the management of the Downs, and it is usually not worth spending large amounts of money on scrub clearance without it. A variety of animals is used in different situations and at different times of year. Holm oak regrowth on Bonchurch Down is controlled by feral goats. New Forest ponies are used to graze heathland on Luccombe Down and Mottistone Common. Galloway cattle are on Brook Down all year round to maintain the gorse/grassland mosaic and sheep graze the short turf of West High Down, along with the rabbits! Some areas are self-managing, as at St Catherine's Point, where the landslips create a natural system of regeneration.

Species in **bold** are national BAP species

The Wildlife of the Isle of Wight Partnership Order Form

Applies ONLY at the Seaclose Offices of the Isle of Wight Council

Please supply.....copies of **The Wildlife of the Isle of Wight** at the special Partnership rate of £2 per copy (Maximum 2 copies per organisation)

Organisation.....

Tick box: I will collect or Please send by post

Please call in at reception or post to **Countryside Section, Seaclose Offices, Fairlee Rd Newport Isle of Wight PO30 2QS**