

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan

Newsletter Number 4

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The story so far....

The IW BAP has slowly been gaining momentum over the last two years. Representatives of various organisations have worked together to establish what is known about the Island, its habitats and wildlife, building on years of expertise, enthusiasm and involvement.

The Maritime Cliffs Habitat Action Plan, a summary of which is given on the following pages, is now at the consultation stage and we hope to have it in its final form by the end of the year. If the Action Plans are to be successful, they will require the co-operation of many people and resources of time, money and specialist skills. Plans which have clear targets and ways of working are more likely to attract the resources to carry them out.

Equally important is communicating with the wider public, to help them to appreciate the natural world and the issues involved in its conservation more fully. As action 'on the ground' comes to the fore, we want to harness the skills and expertise of the enthusiasts in encouraging people to play a part looking after and appreciating the natural world.

If you'd like to be on our mailing list, or change details already on it, please contact Anne Marston on anne.marston@iow.gov.uk

Isle of Wight Grazing Animals Project

Grazing by sheep and cattle is essential for the conservation of a wide range of habitats, and the species they contain, as it prevents the natural succession through to scrub and woodland. We need stock to conserve our wildlife heritage for future generations, but farming must also provide a livelihood for our agricultural communities. The Foot and Mouth outbreak has brought the problems of the livestock industry in Britain into sharp relief. The Isle of Wight has its own problems to add to the national ones, in particular the lack of an Island abattoir and the costs of exporting animals to the mainland.

To increase our understanding of the problems facing farming, two complementary



studies have been commissioned (by English Nature, Wight Wildlife and the Isle of Wight Rural Development Programme) and will be carried out by the Royal Agricultural College. One project is looking at the feasibility of marketing an 'Island brand' which would allow meat products produced by extensive grazing to be sold at a premium.

The other is an investigation into the capability of the livestock industry on the Island to carry out grazing on sites of high nature conservation and landscape value.

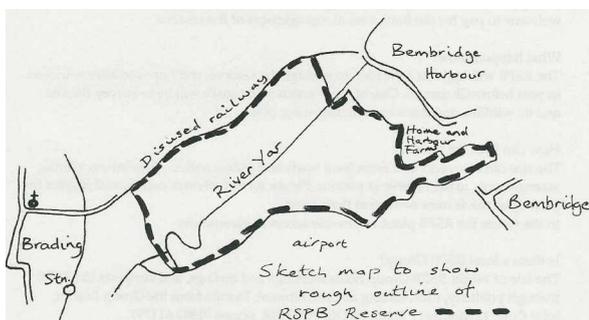
In addition, studies are being carried out by the Rural Development Programme, and its partners, into the sustainability of an Island abattoir and other practical livestock farming issues.

A Grazing Topic report is being prepared at the moment as part of the Biodiversity Action Plans for grassland habitats. This will be presented at a seminar in late November for those involved in livestock farming. The intention is to develop a Grazing Forum, a partnership representing farmers, conservationists and rural communities which will assist in finding solutions to both farming and conservation issues.

RSPB go wading through Brading

Following a brilliant response to the RSPB appeal, enough money has been raised to allow the Society to purchase 170 hectares (422 acres) of freshwater wetland at Brading Marshes in the eastern Yar Valley.

The reserve is a diverse mix of lagoons and ditches, reedbeds and meadows, with a fringe of ancient woodland. The approximate boundaries are shown on the map below.



As well as looking beautiful, it is important for wildlife as it is part of the Brading Marshes to St. Helen's Ledges Site of Special Scientific Interest, and falling within The Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area.

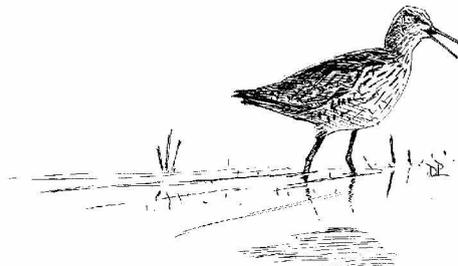
So it merits national and international designation, and contains habitats of high priority under the UK BAP.

The Marshes are also home to a number of priority national BAP species closely tied to the threatened habitats. In particular, bitterns, now one of our rarest breeding species with less than 30 booming males, are a welcome winter visitor to the Marshes' reedbeds. In spring, grey partridges - another priority national BAP species – nest in the meadows.



Lapwings Dan Powell

Redshanks and lapwings also make use of the lightly grazed fields which stay damp through the summer to provide insect food for their chicks. The RSPB's management will aim to build up the numbers of these specialist birds, and maintain the right conditions for them to flourish at Brading.



Redshank Dan Powell

The Society's plans will also take into account the local water voles, the dragonflies and other invertebrates, and the rich diversity of plants. The previous owners have cared for the wildlife here, and the RSPB will continue and develop its conservation.

Grazing at Eaglehead Copse

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust Reserve at Eaglehead Copse near Ashley contains one of the Island's best examples of ancient woodland on the chalk. It includes species such as Toothwort, parasitic on the roots of Hazel, as well as Red Squirrels, Badgers and Dormice. However, there is also a small area of unimproved chalk grassland on the Reserve which is less well-known. The species in this area include Devil's Bit Scabious and Pyramidal Orchids. As it is enclosed by woodland on three sides, scrub invasion, particularly by ash seedlings, has been a constant threat. Grazing has been difficult to achieve for several reasons, particularly because it can only support a few animals



Pyramidal orchid

However the Wildlife Trust, in partnership with the National Trust, has now introduced grazing for the first time in six years. Six Hebridean sheep were transported from Newtown to Eaglehead by Chris Archbold from Wight Wildlife and Paul Davies from the National Trust. Access was made easier with the permission of our neighbour, Mr Morris, who allowed us over his land to the east of the site.

The sheep will spend the winter on the down, grazing the rank grasses and ash scrub, and then taken off for part of the summer to allow plants to flower and set seed.

Wight Wildlife and the Wildlife Trust would like to thank the National Trust for their assistance in the management of an area of chalk

grassland to prevent the loss of the plants and animals found there. It is a small step towards the resolution of the wider problems which the Grazing Animals project described elsewhere in this newsletter, hopes to tackle.

Richard Grogan
Wight Wildlife Officer

Priority BAP Species rediscovered on the Island

The Spring Field Meeting of the British Bryological Society, scheduled to take place during April 2001 had to be postponed as a result of foot-and-mouth restrictions. However, a few delegates were unable to cancel their accommodation and came anyway, including Tom Blockeel. He spent the time recording mosses and liverworts and re-found Triangular Pigmy-moss (*Acaulon triquetrum*) on a grassy knoll on National Trust land, close to Windy Gap car park.

The Triangular Pygmy-moss is extremely rarely recorded in Britain, where it is at the northern edge of its range. It has been seen recently only at one site in East Sussex and two sites in Dorset, and was known previously to grow on south-facing chalky slopes at St Catherine's. The moss is minute (only 1.5mm high) and can only be identified by a few experts, so there were no recent Island records.

Species which are regarded as a National Priority for conservation already have Species Action Plans (SAP) written for them. The SAP for Triangular Pygmy-moss has, as a target"re-establish the plant at its former sites in Dorset and the Isle of Wight by 2005 (if further surveys fail to re-find the species)". This would now seem to be unnecessary. Further, more intensive survey work for this species is another proposed action, and is due to take place in the near future.

Colin Pope

Maritime Cliffs and Slopes HAP

This first Action Plan is now in a draft form, and is being finalised by consultation among the bodies expected to be the lead partners in carrying out the proposed actions

It incorporates information from the audit relating to the characteristic wildlife and special species, as well as considering the particular physical features related to the habitat. The extent of the habitat is discussed together with an indication of current site designations, and initiatives related to the cliffs and their management. The issues facing the conservation of Maritime Cliff Biodiversity are explored, and Objectives and Targets are outlined.



The objectives are related to:

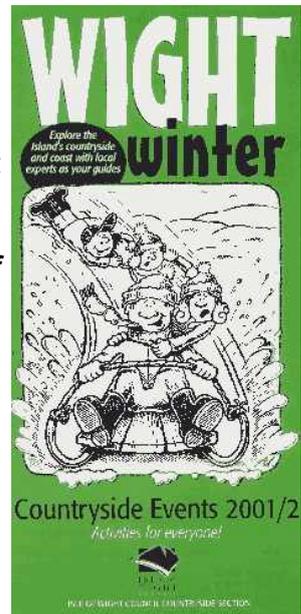
- *Maintaining existing sites of high wildlife and earth science quality*
- *Restoration of degraded or neglected sites into habitat of high quality*
- *Re-creation of sea cliff and slope habitats that have been lost to other land uses*
- *Establishing buffer zone habitats on cliff tops*
- *Ensuring natural coastal processes continue in all areas of conservation interest, with appropriate regard to essential protection of settlements.*
- *Promoting increased awareness and*

understanding of the issues amongst Landowners and managers and the wider public.

The plan is expected to be published in the first part of 2002, and will be available in printed form, from the Countryside Section of the Isle of Wight Council and electronically, via the Isle of Wight Council web site www.iwight.com

Look out for **WOW** month

March 2002 is Biodiversity Month. A number of Isle of Wight BAP Partnership have put together a programme of events for a **Wealth of Wildlife** month on the Island. Details are in the Wight Winter Walks programme, available from libraries, tourist information offices and the Countryside Section of the IW Council - email chris.mills@iow.gov.uk or phone 823893



It's also on line at www.iwight.com/visiting/winter_countryside

This newsletter is produced for the Isle of Wight BAP Partnership by the Countryside Section of the Isle of Wight Council
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