

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan

STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the eighth Steering Group meeting held on 17th May 2001 10.30am IWC Seaclose Offices, Newport

Present: Matthew Chatfield, Senior Countryside Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Ian Boyd, Island 2000 Trust
Sarah Dawkins, Conservation Officer, RSPB
Andy Gordon, Conservation Officer, English Nature
Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife Officer
David Langford, Regional Director, Country Landowners Association
Anne Marston, Assistant Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Colin Pope, Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Joe Stevens, Environment Agency
Debbie Wicks, Conservation Officer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Apologies: Paul Airey, Policy and Environment Manager, Isle of Wight Council
Angela Mawle, Local Agenda 21 Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Tony Tutton, Property Manager, National Trust

In attendance: Jonathan Cox, Consultant

SG01/32 Minutes of the last meeting. RG requested that the contribution of Wight Wildlife to the Grazing Animals Project should be recorded. The minutes were then agreed and signed.

SG01/33 Matters arising from the minutes, other than Agenda items

a) Financial contribution in April from the Environment Agency of £ 3525 was acknowledged with thanks.

b) Education and awareness - report of progress to date

1 Contact with Hampshire: their plan was produced at a cost of £4000, by Jacklyn Johnstone. David Pape indicated that he would have no problem with their plan being used as a basis for a similar document for the Island. AEM is drafting a series of points which could form the basis for an action plan for each of the sectors previously identified, and is discussing them with appropriate persons. Objective is to produce a realistic and workable plan and each section will need to be agreed with those who will take it forward ie formal education with representatives of schools etc. Business and Tourism with IW Partnership, Sustainable Tourism Forum etc

2 Environmental Education Providers' Forum have indicated a willingness to be involved in production of education and awareness plan, but they only have limited resources. (Formal, Community groups, Individual)

3 Wight Green Centre willing to contribute the process generally and specifically to

Biodiversity Month events next March (Formal, Community groups, Individual)

4 IWC Education Centre have suggested a number of useful leads. They have an interest in a number of biodiversity related schemes such as Learning through Landscapes and Eco-schools, and would be prepared to use their curriculum groups to raise the profile of biodiversity in schools. They are developing a link with Ventnor Botanic Gardens. They would want a practical scheme/document which would be useful to schools.

John Paton, Wight Conservation PR and Education Officer has developed a schools pack related to the Downs with West Wight Middle School

Jane Goodall recently visited the Island; a number of Roots and Shoots groups are expected to be started. These groups take on local environmental projects.

5 Possibility of canvassing the Partnership to gauge the current level of activity in practical projects, expertise, awareness raising etc via questionnaire in next newsletter and provide opportunities to become involved in developing a plan.

The use of current projects as teaching resources eg the Lukely Brook was discussed. The need for appropriate materials which fit into the National Curriculum was emphasised.

It was agreed to promote events for Biodiversity Month in March 2001. The objective is to generally raise public awareness of biodiversity, using a national scheme as a stimulus and as a possible vehicle for publicity. The degree of success of the month can be assessed and following year's event can then be modified as appropriate. The Countryside Section Walks leaflet can be used to publicise the events and Wight Insight may also be appropriate. The Environment Agency may be able to finance some material for schools.

Action: AEM to approach organisations to ask them to offer events; offers from Steering Group members welcome.

It was also agreed that there should be an audit of the Partnership's activities, interests and expertise to gauge the level of potential assistance available to produce practical actions for an action plan

Action: AEM to draft a simple audit form/questionnaire to be included in the next newsletter

c) English Nature funding has been guaranteed up to the end of 2003; carry over to the next financial year will have to be confirmed later.

SG01/34 Progress with Habitat Action Plans

a) Maritime Cliffs meeting IWC officers plus Jonathan Cox

Notes of the meeting held at the end of April will be circulated with the minutes of this meeting. JC reported that the most significant outcome was that a public seminar was not now thought to be the best way forward with the plan. Consensus is likely to be reached on 90% of the coastline but the remaining 10% will present much greater difficulties.

It was suggested that a draft Habitat Action Plan be produced by refining the scoping

document further and putting this out to public consultation. Use will be made of existing documents (shoreline management plan, coastal strategies) but these do not cover all issues such as recreational pressure, vegetation management, monitoring of populations.

AG informed the meeting that English Nature are looking at notifying further sections of the coastline between St Catherine's Point and Shanklin Chine. The Luccombe Chine to Shanklin Chine area is included in the Sandown Bay Strategy area. Also the Hanover Point to St Catherine's SSSI may need some modification as a result of cliff falls. There will be habitat survey work involved.

The timetable for production will need to be revised. The draft document will be circulated electronically to the Steering Group in July for comment. If any outstanding problems cannot be resolved a further Steering Group meeting will be required. When any revisions have been incorporated it will be made available to a wider audience. A summary is to be published in the BAP newsletter, and CLA and NFU newsletter. An exhibition is also to be mounted at the Coastal Centre in Ventnor. Copies of the draft will be available on request both in paper format and via the IWC web site. After consultation, the document will be produced in its final form and published by the end of the year.

Action: JC to make draft Maritime Cliffs Action Plan available to SG by mid July 2001

b) Chalk Grassland and Wetland HAPs

Originally 3 HAPs were due for completion in 2001. However for wetlands and calcareous grasslands, the key issue is grazing as a management tool. Therefore JC considers that it would be more beneficial to produce a topic paper on grazing systems, which would include other habitats. In practice, grazing systems use different habitats at different times of year. An integrated approach would be achieved by considering issues common to all of the habitats. The issues raised by the Grazing Paper can then be progressed by a Grazing Forum, which would operate in a similar way to the Woodland Forum.

A scoping paper for a Grassland Topic had been previously circulated, which gave a revised schedule for production of the documents. The main difference which would result from this approach would be a delay in producing HAPs initially, but there would be the potential to produce subsequent ones more efficiently..

Discussion of the paper covered the following topics:

What sort of habitats are being included in terms of designation?

What condition are the habitats in?

What are the potential gains for biodiversity - what could be achieved?

- where could it be achieved?

It may be necessary to concentrate on the better quality sites before starting on the less good sites

AG is looking at commissioning a survey of the condition of grazing land; a list of SINCs is being compiled. It was suggested by JC that other sites might also need to be looked at. RG suggested that the NVC classification of land should not be the only criterion for inclusion of a site as nationally important species such as bats and hares are found on some of the less botanically rich fields.

AG had produced and circulated a paper relating to a Grazing Project for the Island which has been based on the Chiltern Project. It is aiming to link into a Lottery application, as the money available through Stewardship will not be sufficient. It requires specific branding as a conservation grazing product, to be sold locally at a premium. Therefore it needs to produce premium meat. There are problems with using hardier animals on poor quality grazing, as they produce the least return. The provision of local slaughtering facilities is being actively pursued, but the throughput of such a facility is limited. A flying herd needs to be investigated; there is already a flying flock of sheep in the West Wight. Marketing schemes with hoteliers, butchers and supermarkets are being worked on by CLA.

The place of other related habitats eg wood pasture was discussed. There is a large amount of relic wood pasture in Parkhurst Forest, but no actively managed wood pasture survives on the Island. This habitat needs to be linked to one of the five grassland habitats, as grassland can be grazed with the adjacent woodland. A condition assessment of Parkhurst Forest SSSI is being done in respect of the forest design statement. A plan to restore heathland, acid grassland and wood pasture to Parkhurst may be required.

A meeting to take things forward will be called by AG in the next few weeks, to include representatives from CLA, NFU, Countryside Agency, AONB, Isle of Wight Partnership (Joanna Richards) and the BAP Steering Group. He would like to let the contract by August, with the first draft due in December and the final report by February 2002. He asked the IWC to explore the possibilities of managing and accommodating a Grazing Officer.

c) Timetable. The intention would be to produce the Maritime Cliffs HAP and the Grazing Topic report by the end of the year; it should also be possible to produce the Calcareous Grassland report by the end of the year also. The remaining HAPs which cover grazing habitats should then be able to be produced fairly rapidly. Grazing marsh for example would be part of a Wetlands HAP, which would also cover water resources etc. AG confirmed that English Nature would be prepared to accept this time schedule

SG01/35 Any other business

SD reported that there have been developments in relation to the Farmland Birds scheme and Arable Stewardship, which would be open for applications from Autumn 2001. The payment rates are not yet known.

SG01/36 Date of next meeting **Monday 10th September 2001 at 2pm**