

## **Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan**

Minutes of the seventeenth Steering Group meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2003, 10.30am, IWC Seaclose Offices, Newport

**Present:** Ian Boyd Island 2000 Trust  
Brendan Burley, DEFRA  
Andy Gordon English Nature  
Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife  
Rachel Holmes, RSPB  
David Langford, Country Land and Business Association  
Anne Marston, Assistant Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council  
Hugh Milner, Forestry Commission  
Colin Pope, Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council  
Chris Sprackling, NFU

**In attendance:** Jonathan Cox, Consultant

**Apologies:** Matthew Chatfield, Senior Countryside Officer, Isle of Wight Council  
Jackie Mellan, Environment Agency  
Marijke Ransom, AONB Planning and Information Officer  
Lucy Sheffield, Environment Agency  
Tony Tutton, National Trust

**SG03/24 Minutes of the last meeting** were agreed and signed

### **SG03/25 Matters arising from the minutes**

SG03/18b The draft Estuaries HAP, now called the Solent Coastal HAP, is nearing completion and will be circulated in good time before the next Steering Group meeting.

SG03/18c Red Squirrel SAP has been circulated

SG03/18e Newsletter has been circulated

Sg03/19 Visulands Project. A preliminary meeting between the Forestry Commission and IWC has been held, and FC is keen to involve the organisations represented on the BAP Steering Group. Information will be circulated after the next meeting and a meeting will be arranged for early in the New Year.

### **SG03/26 Farmland HAP**

JC reminded the group of the species-led approach adopted in producing this plan. Several national priority habitats are found on farmland. However, farmland use changes, as the land is part of a business enterprise and the policy background to farming is changing. There is a need for more survey information on the occurrence of species, and habitats like farm ponds.

Discussion of the plan followed including the following areas:

- a) **Size of holdings and nature of farming operations.** There has been a noticeable shift in the size of holdings, with a large rise in the number having <5 hectares of land. This was felt to be a consequence of the selling of farmhouses, with large gardens/pony paddocks, and the remainder of the land being managed by contractors. Less than 5 ha is not a viable amount of land to make a living and perhaps these should be considered as smallholdings. Biodiversity is not necessarily being lost as a result of this land use, and it would be interesting to know their total area. The number of dairy

farms was queried – the data came from the Defra website, but in reality there are only 28 dairy farms on the Island. Since the IACS survey in 1991, the amount of cultivated land should not have changed greatly but it may do so once the next phase of CAP has gone through. Also once the current phase of JIGSAW has gone through, 200 ha of arable land will be under trees. Changes occur in cultivation of individual fields but on a holding or landscape scale there has been no major change. Under the new regulations the animal side is likely to get more difficult and the management of some sites may have problems; the arable side is less likely to be affected.

- b) **The local market.** 90% of production goes off the Island, and the Farmers' Market does not make a large contribution overall. Local supermarkets do not stock much local produce directly e.g. tomatoes go off the Island and are then brought back again. The orders are placed a week before the sale and if the produce can be brought more cheaply elsewhere the tomatoes have to be dumped. The issue of an abattoir is still under debate.
- c) **Farm reservoirs** are a habitat that should be given more prominence. They have been installed to catch winter rainfall but they have a significant biodiversity value.
- d) **Shooting** is a method of diversification that brings income to individual farmers and the local economy. Conservation for game birds could have benefits for farmland birds.
- e) **Hunting** has had some spin-offs for biodiversity as a result of the land management techniques used.
- f) **Diversification and planning permission.** The planning system's attitude to the re-use of old barns has not always been helpful and seems to be very different on the Island compared to other southern counties
- g) **Countryside Stewardship.** Are there any details of the success of these schemes? The information may be difficult to extract as the schemes may have several objectives including landscape or archaeology. Also, the reduction in food production was a feature of the scheme. The present schemes precede Biodiversity Action Plans and the new schemes should take account of them.
- h) **Actions** – ought to be something we can influence, rather than general aspirations
  - Is an audit of farmland species and habitats required?
  - Buyers want local produce: producers not so sure.
  - Educational material that has been produced is not being used by schools because of difficulties fitting it into the National Curriculum
  - Is there a role for a Farmland Biodiversity Officer?
  - Farmland Action Plan would provide a consensus to present to a farmer, and assist with the development of Farm Management Plans

**Action: Agreed that there would be a month for consultation, and replies should be sent to CP or AM for forwarding to JC. Issues to be addressed are:**

**Which actions are required?**

**Are the actions correct?**

**Who should be the lead partner for each action?**

**What is the priority for each action?**

**ACTION: comments on draft farmland HAP to be sent to AM by 14 November.  
JC to produce revised draft to be circulated before the next meeting**

### **SG03/27 Monitoring of Grassland HAPS**

AM circulated a sheet summarising the responses from lead partners in the Grassland HAPs, together with a national summary published recently in Biodiversity News. A national system, the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) is being trialled at the moment and is expected to come into countrywide use during the next year. This will require some precision of information of habitat under restoration or recreation so that progress towards national targets can be assessed more readily. When further details of the BARS are available, our monitoring process will be re-assessed in the light of the information required.

### **SG03/28 Red squirrel and dormouse surveys**

RG produced a summary sheet to show details of the red squirrel and dormouse surveys carried out recently.

### **SG03/29 Any other business**

- a) HM informed the group that WGS and WIG schemes will close in 2004. A new scheme, with an entry and higher level is being debated at the moment.
- b) AG mentioned that an amalgamation involving Forestry Commission, Countryside Agency and English Nature is under discussion at present.
- c) RH gave an update on the Cirl Bunting reintroduction programme being proposed for the Island. The Mottistone Estate is the selected area, which has hedgerows for nesting, grassland, providing insects as food for the chicks in summer, and grain available as winter food. These are needed in close proximity, as the birds do not disperse very far. Sensitive management of adjoining land is also required. At this stage, this information is confidential.
- d) The Isle of Wight Flora has now been published.

**SG03/30 Date of next meeting** Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2003 10.30am Seaclose Offices