

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan

Minutes of the eighteenth Steering Group meeting held on 4th December 2003, 10.30am, IWC Seaclose Offices, Newport

Present: Matthew Chatfield, Senior Countryside Officer, Isle of Wight Council
John Brownscombe, AONB Officer
Brendan Burley, DEFRA
Andy Gordon English Nature
Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife
David Langford, Country Land and Business Association
Anne Marston, Assistant Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Jackie Mellan, Environment Agency
Hugh Milner, Forestry Commission
Colin Pope, Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Chris Sprackling, NFU
Les Street, RSPB

In attendance: Jonathan Cox, Consultant

Apologies: Tony Tutton, National Trust

SG03/31 Minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed

SG03/32 Matters arising from the minutes

SG03/19 VisuLands Project. The Forestry Commission gave a presentation to the September meeting of the Steering Group. CP has been in touch with Chris Quine and reported that the plans were developing more slowly than had been expected. The research group were still keen to apply the project on the Island. There is a meeting in early March where the direction of the project will be decided, and a report should be available for the BAP Steering Group between April and June.

SG03/33 Farmland HAP

JC reported that he had been able to incorporate most of the comments received in response to the Farmland Action Plan. However there were some issues that needed further discussion by the Steering Group.

a) *The inclusion of specific bird species.* RSPB suggested that Cirl Bunting should be included in view of the recovery project, and also Song Thrush.

Cirl Bunting is not currently on the Isle of Wight species audit. In discussion, it was felt appropriate that, in the light of work being carried out by RSPB, it could be included under current action or as a separate species action plan. There will be specific targets in the RSPB plan, which is probably a more appropriate place than the LBAP. Agri-environment scheme on proposed introduction sites should benefit other farmland species. It was felt that Song Thrush was not an appropriate species to include within a farmland HAP as it would be a difficult species to monitor.

b) *The JIGSAW scheme.* RPSB had raised this scheme as being in conflict with other parts of the Farmland LBAP. Although there would certainly be some impacts on farmland birds, these were considered to be small and, as the total area of Jigsaw planting is likely to be of the order of 250 ha, this was considered to be relatively insignificant when compared with the total area of arable land.

Les Street agreed to refer both these issues back to colleagues in the RSPB.

c) *Quantifiable outputs in the targets.* It was felt that a greater area of winter stubble would have the greatest biodiversity benefit, but the Action Plan is not able to influence the location or extent of these, and the extent cannot readily be measured or interpreted. The target might be better worded "to encourage". There are some bird monitoring projects going on e.g. Island 2000 project between Blackgang and Compton; IWOGB breeding bird surveys; RSPB site monitoring; and a PTES baseline survey at Briddlesford prior to JIGSAW planting and CSS. There is also the RSPB's Volunteer Alliance Scheme. As the CSS schemes are due to be changed in 2005, currently there has been little interest in Arable Options.

d) DL raised the issue that the basis of CAP reform is still unknown and target setting is impossible until the emphasis is fixed. A more environmental push is expected through CAP, and he recommended holding back on the final version of the Action Plan until further information from the Government was forthcoming in the New Year. RG commented that financial incentives are important, which is why JIGSAW has been so effective. There may be willingness to carry out environmental improvements on marginal land. CS noted that the changes in the market prices are a major factor, which are unpredictable and may change dramatically in the coming years. Also there is still a large loss of skilled labour from farming and more is expected as the current generation retire.

e) The proposed actions were discussed in detail and will be revised and circulated. It was agreed that a Government announcement would be awaited before the plan was finalised and that the intention would be to sign it off at the next meeting.

Action: JC to produce final version of the Farmland HAP in January, following Government announcement on CAP reform.

SG03/34 Solent Coastal Habitat Action Plan

Discussion of the draft Solent Coastal HAP allowed members of the group to raise various issues. Written comments from organisations are requested by Friday 16th January, to be incorporated into a final draft to be presented to the February meeting of the Steering Group. Organisations are also asked to consider the action points and the part they can play in delivering them.

Action: Comments to be with AM by 16th January 2004

SG03/35 Next year's meetings: Dates for 2004 and Agenda items

Dates: Thursday 12th February
Thursday 13th May
Wednesday 8th September
Wednesday 8th December

Agenda items: Sign off Farmland Action Plan, Finalise Solent Coastal HAP, Develop a Community HAP, Monitoring of HAPs, consideration of Species Action Plans, Visulands, links with Lgap, local biological records centre.

SG03/36 Any other business

- a) Wight Wildlife has obtained Leader + funding for a period of 3-5 years from April 2004 for a Grazing Project Officer.
- b) Wight Wildlife will be carrying out surveys of Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered fritillary and Duke of Burgundy Fritillary in 2004.
- c) A draft report on the Water Vole survey has been received by Wight Wildlife. Results indicate some decline in numbers, possibly as a result of habitat degradation through lack of management. They may have been lost from the Newtown catchment.
- d) The Wight Wildlife Kitbridge project to dig a new pond and manage existing ponds for Great Crested Newts is about to start.
- e) A planning application to construct a Great Crested Newt pond in the same area in mitigation for one to be lost as part of a development at Carisbrooke has been submitted.
- f) English Nature Council met on 2nd December when the Compton to Steephill Cove SSSI was debated. Presentations were made by two objectors including the Isle of Wight Council. The site is likely to be confirmed on 14th January 2004. This designation will be important in the delivery of the Maritime Cliffs and Slopes HAP.
- g) LS reported that the engineering work for the first of the dams to hold back water on the RSPB Brading Marshes reserve has started.
- h) As this is Jonathan Cox's last meeting with the Isle of Wight BAP Steering Group he was thanked for his work on the Habitat Action Plans.

SG03/37 Date of next meeting Thursday 12th February 2004 10.30am Seaclose Offices