

Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Plan

Minutes of the thirteenth Steering Group meeting held on 11th September 2002
10.30am, IWC Seaclose Offices, Newport

Present: John Brownscombe, AONB Officer
Matthew Chatfield, Senior Countryside Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Jo Ramsay, English Nature
Richard Grogan, Wight Wildlife
Anne Marston, Assistant Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Colin Pope, Ecology Officer, Isle of Wight Council
Joe Stevens, Environment Agency
Mark Stevenson, DEFRA
Carrie Temple, RSPB
Tony Tutton, National Trust

In attendance: Jonathan Cox, Consultant

Apologies: David Langford, Country Landowners Association
Debbie Wicks, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

SG02/18 **Minutes of the last meeting** were agreed and signed

SG02/19 **Matters arising from the minutes**

SG02/02 Plan folders have been sent to all members of the Steering Group, and the grazing HAPs have been circulated. A small number of typographical errors have been pointed out and a list of corrections will be circulated with the minutes. Steering Group members are requested to amend their copies accordingly.

The HAPs will be presented to the appropriate Council Committee (the Economic Development and Tourism Select Committee) when all the plans have been written. The Community HAP is due for production next year, and this may be the one of most interest to members.

SG02/04 The Red Squirrel SAP has not been produced, as there has been an incident that required immediate action, and resulted in the Grey Squirrel contingency plan being put to the test. There was excellent co-operation between the voluntary and statutory sectors; no greys were trapped, monitoring is on going and there are plans for another trapping programme in the spring. The plan is a key part of the Red Squirrel SAP, and in the light of experience, it requires revising and developing. It has been suggested that a costed business plan is developed to help secure funding to finance any future incidents and the costs of monitoring. This may however be difficult as money can only be committed to cover action within a specified time. It may be easier for organisations to commit time and/or personnel as the need arises. Wight Wildlife has met volunteer expenses to date, and is prepared to do so in the future.

SG02/12 DEFRA has been contacted regarding CSS areas. Information on areas in P1 and P4 is required for the monitoring of the HAP.

Action: MS to chase the progress with the DEFRA GIS department.

SG02/14 Woodland Forum meeting has been organised for 17th October 6.30pm at the Countryman Inn, Brighstone. Invitations will be sent out shortly. Jonathan Howe and Jonathan Cox will be making presentations. JC has prepared a questionnaire, which was circulated; any comments should be with MC by the beginning of next week, when the questionnaire will be formatted and circulated with the invitation to the Woodland Forum meeting.

Action: MC to format questionnaire and circulate with invitation to woodland Forum meeting

The draft list of woodland consultants was awaited from Hugh Milner.

SG02/15 The scope of the estuaries HAP. This is to be modified slightly in response to comments from Judith Beard.

SG02/20 Wetland HAP

JC led a discussion of the draft that had been circulated. The responses received before the meeting had been very positive in tone. JC summarised the current diversity of habitats and the problems that need to be tackled. JS commented that the overall assessment would provide the stimulus for many actions by the Environment Agency and he requested that a further meeting be held with JC and the Agency in the next three weeks to clarify some points of detail. Timescales for action points can also be agreed.

More information is required on the extent to which abstraction is causing a problem. The Flood Management Catchment Strategies and Plans are in preparation.

The question of sea level rise and biodiversity was discussed and it was agreed that it should be an agenda item for the next meeting. Steering Group members are asked to let CP have details of any position statements their organisations have produced so that they can be circulated. The CHaMPs documents will also be useful in this process. A policy statement from the Steering Group would help to set priorities in managed retreat, including those for agri-environment schemes.

The Agency has recently commissioned work relating to survey of the fisheries, and a short annual report could be produced. JS will check on the feasibility of this.

JS reported that the Agency was able to make a contribution of £2500 to the BAP process in this financial year, some of which could be used for the production of the HAP, but the majority directed to practical projects arising from the HAP.

NVZ maps have now been produced and action resulting from them will help to control diffuse pollution.

There was discussion of the status of Alverstone SSSI; JR to check on this point.

Action: Policy/position statements on sea level rise to be sent to Colin by December 2002 for circulation with papers for next meeting ALL

Feasibility of Environment Agency producing short reports on their fisheries studies on Island rivers to be investigated JS

SG02/21 Countryside Stewardship Schemes as the delivery mechanism for BAP objectives

A letter has been received from Chris Clarke, NFU chairman, in response to the Wetland HAP. He raises the concern that CSS is seen as over-prescriptive and consequently farmers are reluctant to participate.

MS explained that the emphasis was changing and that it was possible for compliance with a management plan to be the main part of stewardship agreement rather than the rigid guidelines that exist. However, the production of a management plan is expensive and it has to be done "up-front". Also, advisors setting up stewardship agreements may stick to guidelines when they feel that they have a lack of experience, or if they feel that the farmer will not meet the objectives otherwise.

Better initial survey information and monitoring is required, and then better individual Stewardship agreements can be drawn up. Whether the scheme will help meet the targets for the part of the country are also an important element in whether or not it succeeds in gaining entry to the scheme. DEFRA would be pleased to receive information (eg on the distribution of arable weed species; birds, like the corn bunting, turtle dove and tree sparrow; and invertebrates) but is not in a position to pay for it.

It was suggested that the BAP Steering Group write to DEFRA to put forward the concerns of the group that better quality ecological survey and advice is required in setting up agreements, and that money needs to be available to produce farm management plans. If these underpin CSS agreements, then the delivery of BAP objectives is more likely to be successful as the restrictive prescriptions will not be the driving force.

Action CP to draft letter and circulate for comment IWC to provide GIS files of arable flora 'hot spots' to DEFRA

RG gave details of the progress of the HLF bid to promote sensitive grazing being submitted by the Wildlife Trust. Some modifications were having to be made as HLF money cannot be used to match CSS money, but to enhance stewardship. The Wildlife Trust is putting in £12500 per year to provide match funding.

SG02/22 Any other business

- a) RG reported that funding for a repeat of the Red Squirrel and Water Vole surveys had been applied for, with the intention of carrying out the squirrel survey from October 2002, and the water vole survey in spring 2003.
- a) Timetable for the next few months. Wetland HAP should be completed shortly, to be signed off at the next Steering Group meeting. A draft Woodland HAP will be written after the Woodland Forum meeting, but it is unlikely to be ready for circulation until the beginning of December. **IT WAS THEREFORE DECIDED TO CHANGE THE DATE OF THE NEXT STEERING GROUP MEETING TO 14TH JANUARY 2003, AT 10.30AM AT SEACLOSE**
- a) JB reported that the draft Commons and Open Access maps had now been published. It was agreed that it was most appropriate for individual organisations to make comments, rather than the BAP Steering Group.

- a) JS reported that a study of chimes has been commissioned, to look at the water flow and suspended solids. Two MSc projects from Southampton may be linked to it.

SG02/23 Dates of next meetings

14TH JANUARY 2003, AT 10.30AM AT SEACLOSE

18TH MARCH 2003, AT 10.30AM AT SEACLOSE

The remainder of next year's dates will be set at the January meeting