

Water and Wetlands Focus Group Minutes

15th September

2-4.30pm

BRERC, Ashton Court Visitors Centre



Chair: Melissa Clarkson

Minutes: Jenny Hayward

Action

Attendees + their interests in the group

Alison Slade, Ecologist, B&NES Council. Rivers and streams and watervoles. Both link with B&NES BAP.

Craig Stenson, Biodiversity Projects Officer, Avon Wildlife Trust. Would like to see more survey, monitoring, capital works. Watervoles and white-clawed crayfish.

Dan Green, Environmental Project Officer, Wessex Water. Support various BAPs in the SW (e.g. Dorset, Devon, Avon). Interested in how they are implementing action on the ground.

Kathy Derrick, Bristol Living Rivers Project (funded by Bristol City Council and EA). Have own action plan compatible with Rivers and Streams BAP and contributing to latter's implementation.

Elaine Weller, North Somerset Levels and Moors Project. Floodplain grazing marsh and riparian mammals.

Robin Marshall-Ball, BASC. Somerset Levels. Link with landowners, wider public, conservation of environment and biodiversity where shooting takes place.

Stuart Hales, acting Head of Reserves, Avon Wildlife Trust. How reserves helping to implement BAP.

Oda Dijkterhuis, Ecologist, British Waterways SW. Kennet and Avon Canal. Interested to see how group working as has only been involved in Avon BAP recently.

Dave Villis, Ecologist, South Gloucestershire Council. Ponds, ditches, rhynes all part of emerging SG BAP.

Mary Wood, Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group. Great Crested Newts.

Chris Sperring, Hawk and Owl Trust. Watervoles and barn owls (which use watercourses for distribution).

The role and function of the group

All agreed to use JH's model as a starting point (role of groups model). To evolve, if necessary, with the group. Habitats to be covered: Standing Open Water, Reedbeds and Sedgebeds, Rivers and Streams, Floodplain Grazing Marsh. Associated species action plans: watervole and white-clawed crayfish.

Issues that can't be solved through existing work – where the BAP can really make a difference and projects to deal with these issues

1/ Great Crested Newts

Project proposed (MC) following on from recent Avon-wide GCN survey (BRERC) and linking to at least one action under each of the objectives in the standing open water plan. Project would continue survey and act on its results, with habitat management and restoration and landowner liaison/education work. Project would be done in partnership with different members carrying out different relevant aspects, with one person to co-ordinate it. Bid would include elements for management of related habitats e.g. rough grassland/hedges.

Background. BRERC Newt Survey (MW): Based on ponds known to have potential for

newts. Checked 60 and found evidence of newts in 3 areas. Need further funding to continue and more work with local communities to teach them to survey for newts and about issues related to management of habitat. Also work needed with landowners to prevent drying/silting of ponds.

Find out how much of this will be covered in new AES whole farm proposals.

JH
MW/AS

AS has £120 for newt work which MW could use to continue some of this survey. MW to contact AS if needed.

Herpetological Trust could give funding for pond creation/management. AS/JH to pursue, perhaps in line with bid.

JH/AS

RM-B BASC members have lots of ponds that have not been surveyed. Element of newt survey training/management advice could be included in BASC Flight Pond Management Day (Feb/March). Could have speaker there as well as giving out leaflets etc. RM-B/JH/MW to discuss over next couple of months.

RM-B /JH
/MW

Concern: Management advice given should be consistent and not too species-specific to avoid risk of confusing landowners. This should happen through new AES advisor training. JH to contact DEFRA to find out how new scheme approach needs of newts.

JH
JH

- Work up project brief with help from relevant partnership members (incl. FWAG/DEFRA)

- Comment on draft brief

ALL

2/ Invasive Species

Issue for rivers and streams but also many other habitats. Of particular concern in urban areas. Many organisations trying to do something about problem (e.g. BWW, Councils, EA, AWT etc). Is there scope for co-ordinated approach? Eradication unfeasibly expensive but control using community groups to help and educational/awareness raising programmes could help (e.g. with landowners/garden centres). Could repeat KD's river awareness week on and Avon-wide scale. KD to let JH know details and feedback from this week. JH to pursue and bring up at Communications group meeting. Alien species projects currently running in Cornwall, Swansea, Devon. JH to investigate further. Important not to divert funds away from on-the-ground management but to ensure that efforts focussed at areas where invasive species are destroying important habitats. Or could look at a single catchment where this is a particular problem. Investigate possibility of another Avon BAP group who could deal specifically with this issue. SH, EW, CSp, MC expressed interest in such a group. JH to sound out the idea, in the first place at the steering group meeting in December.

KD
JH

MC to feed back relevant information from Aquatic Plant group annual meetings to W+W group.

JH/MC
steering
group

KD can put info in 'Adopt a River' pack currently being preparing. MC to provide expert advice + publications.

KD/MC

MC to provide leaflets about invasive plants to any who require it. All to contact MC if you'd like this info.

ALL

3/ White-clawed crayfish

CS's project: Keep monitoring population at Frome and working on preliminary stages of translocation project. Idea is to move crayfish from ByBrook (where signals have recently been found) to Mendip Streams with good habitat (upper reaches of Congresbury Yeo). Wessex Water has offered funding. Ideally this wouldn't be a one-of event but part of an ongoing project. Further feasibility studies will be carried out before project goes ahead. CS to investigate translocation projects in other parts of the country and seek expert advice in order to use best-practice.

CS

White-clawed crayfish one of our most endangered species. JH to prepare Species AP for them in the next few months – to capture essence of what has been discussed today.

JH

Note: WCC have been found on Wellow Brook recently.

Zoo has offered facility for captive breeding programme but has been little success in past with such programmes elsewhere.

4/ Watervole

JH to finish current draft of Watervole AP, ALL to comment. Discussion of possible watervole project deferred with idea that it may be appropriate to organise a meeting dealing specifically with watervoles in future.

JH/ALL

CS will soon re-check status of watervole on Kennet and Avon canal, looking first at most recent survey results to be provided by OD and also to contact Mark Satinet for his results.

CS/OD

Let JH know of any potential funding sources for projects identified above e.g. Herpetological Trust, Wildlife Habitat Trust (BASC)

ALL

Monitoring and reporting back on action

Frequency of reporting: 3-monthly to start with

Data to be reported: As quantitative as possible.

Method: Initially in word documents, reporting against each action in action tables.

- JH to provide all with relevant action tables in word format
- All to determine how monitoring and reporting back will work best for their particular organisation/group

JH

ALL

Issues for other groups? (Monitoring/Funding/Communication + other habitat ones)

Funding: newt project

JH

Communications: Invasive species

MC to feed back to chairs of other groups at next steering group meeting

MC

Feeding back to your organisation

All to ensure relevant people in their organisations kept informed of Avon BAP group activities

ALL

Are the right people attending the groups?

Yes. Make sure IDB ecologist, Phil Brewin, kept informed of meetings and minutes.

MC/JH

What about EN representation?

List of emails to be circulated

JH

How often should group meet?

6 monthly unless special circumstances require more frequent meetings

Next meeting date: March 16th 10am-1pm