

THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Imagine the poverty of a sea without fish, a wildflower meadow without bees or Wordsworth's world without its 'host of golden daffodils'. Practically all life forms are mutually inter-dependent. Higher life forms, and especially humans, could not exist without this complex variety of other living creatures. Biological resources feed and clothe us and provide housing, medicines and spiritual nourishment. The beauty of our surroundings depends in a large part upon their diversity. And biological diversity - 'biodiversity' – is the variety of life on earth.

Taking Action

The importance of taking action to preserve this diversity was first recognised with the signing of the Convention on Biological Diversity at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Local biodiversity action planning is the means by which national strategy and priorities are tailored to suit the local area, and translated into on-the-ground action. To do this effectively, the Avon BAP was developed with the help and involvement of wide range of local experts and organisations – the Avon Biodiversity Partnership - ensuring that it is as forward-thinking and widely supported as possible.

What is the Avon BAP?

The Avon Biodiversity Action Plan is the first over-arching conservation strategy for the former county of Avon. It has a ten year timescale. The plan's production was led by the Trust and the three main aims of the plan are:

- 1 To focus action on habitats and species that are of particular value in Avon, within the national context
- 2 To encourage a common approach to biodiversity conservation and sharing of best-practice in Avon
- 3 To encourage education and community action as an integral part of the biodiversity process

A common approach

The plan is aimed at all those organisations, groups and individuals wishing to improve biodiversity in the area and particularly at partnership and potential new partnership members. There is an incredible amount of energy going into preserving and enhancing wildlife in the region. The plan and partnership aim to focus this energy on common objectives, targets and actions in order to harness its full potential. The involvement of local communities and individuals is also essential if the partnership's vision is to become reality.

' a landscape rich in wildlife, where species and habitats are part of healthy, functioning ecosystems that ...are valued by everyone; where conservation of biodiversity is integrated with social, cultural and economic activities'.

The partnership's vision

What's included in the plan?

In ecological terms Avon is exceptionally diverse for its size. Its varied geology has created a wide range of habitats, from the species-rich calcareous grasslands of the Cotswold and Mendip Hills and the ancient woodlands of the ridges, steep slopes and scarp faces, to the network of rhynes of the levels and moors and the coastal saltmarshes of the Severn Estuary.

Objectives, targets and actions for many of Avon's most important habitats and species, are set out in specific habitat and species action plans within the Avon BAP. These are: species-rich grassland and heath; hedgerows; arable farmland; purple moor-grass and rush pasture; woodland; wood pasture, parkland and veteran trees; standing open water; reedbeds and sedgebeds; watercourses and floodplain; coastal and floodplain grazing marsh; estuary and dormouse.

Other plans for urban areas, water vole, white-clawed crayfish, bat species, otter, and great crested newt will also be developed and included in the BAP over the coming years.

Ten cross-cutting themes that affect more than one habitat or species are addressed in the BAP:

- 1 Farming and private ownership
- 2 Development and planning
- 3 Water and wetlands
- 4 Other environmental interests
- 5 Invasive and non-native species
- 6 Information and data
- 7 Landscape-scale conservation
- 8 Communications
- 9 Recreational activity
- 10 Funding

One of the most valuable outcomes of developing the plan has been bringing people together, making others aware of current activities and ideas for future collaborative projects. An essential part of the plan's implementation is to build upon this contact.

Themed partnership sub-groups will co-ordinate and drive implementation of various aspects of the BAP. Looking at what we can do within existing resources and where new resources must be brought in and new projects developed to achieve our aims. Meetings of the topic groups are scheduled for the last three weeks of September, with partnership members already signed-up to attending. Chairs for these groups have been found from relevant organisations in the partnership.

What does the plan mean for the Trust?

Fitting our action in with national priorities means that we can, for example, cut scrub to restore heathland at Dolebury Warren because we know that by doing so we are preserving something of national and even international value, not just because we have an inherent feeling that the heath is worth looking after. We also know that we're not working in isolation when doing this, but as part of a team of committed organisations and people across Avon and the whole country. At another level, the national context of the BAP helps to justify our actions to politicians, protect our most valuable sites from development, and draw in money to help with their management. It will also mean we are more aware of what others are doing, can integrate our aims

with theirs, and make sure others know how much the Trust does for wildlife in the area.

How are we going to take it forward?

The co-ordinator for the Avon Biodiversity Partnership is based at Avon Wildlife Trust and we intend to maintain this position in order to lead co-ordination of the plan's implementation. The Trust will integrate objectives from the Avon BAP into its five-year strategic plan, to be produced this year, as well as into the annual work programmes for our different teams. The Trust's staff are committed to the aims of the Avon BAP in their different roles, be they outreach and education, working with farmers, managing our reserves or making decisions about the Trust's buildings. We are also committed to monitoring and reporting on the effects of our actions.

If you wish to be a partnership member or find out more about partnership activities contact: Dr Lucy Rogers, Avon Biodiversity Partnership co-ordinator, at the Trust (email: lucyrogers@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk) or visit our website at: www.avon-biodiversity.org.uk.