



Biodiversity is the *variety of life*. It includes all living things and their environments. It is everything from the tiniest bacteria to the biggest tree. Following the UN Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio, over 150 nations signed up to protect Biodiversity. As part of the UK response, Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) have been set up throughout the country. The North East Scotland LBAP is a partnership that co-ordinates action by local people and organisations to conserve the precious wild species and habitats of this region. LBAP focuses action on both national and local biodiversity priorities.

Maintaining and enhancing biodiversity is central to achieving sustainable development - to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.



Local Biodiversity Action Plan Update

Recently the North East LBAP partners have focussed on action for wildlife gardening, water voles, red squirrels, species-rich grassland, and the coast. Read on for more details.

Wild About Your Garden

Working with 23 Garden Centres throughout the North East, this project, which is part of the Urban Areas Action Plan, has been launched to promote the benefits of wildlife gardening to Garden Centre customers. The project aims to make it easier for the customer to know what to buy in order to make their garden a wildlife haven. It also aims to encourage Garden Centres to stock appropriate plants. We have developed a poster and leaflet full of easy tips on how to get started and the benefits of bringing more wildlife into the garden. In addition customers can look out for our bumblebee sign, which will be sticking out amongst plants that are of particular value to wildlife.



Priority Species & Habitats



Watervole

Project work has continued to progress well to attempt to halt the loss of Britain's fastest declining mammal. Talisman Energy (UK) LTD have generously donated £5000 towards the project for 2005-06 and produced a publicity film highlighting the project. This is in addition to the continued funding from The Mammals Trust UK, SNH and Aberdeen University.

Research at Aberdeen University has identified the main reason for the decline of water voles is the impact of the introduced, highly effective, alien predator, the American mink, which escaped from fur farms and were released by animal rights activists. However, mink are not the only threat. Changes to the water voles' bankside habitat, resulting from dredging of small burns, is also to blame for the water vole's demise.

As part of the Action Plan, the Water Vole Conservation Officer has been conducting surveys at a number of sites to identify the presence of water voles and mink, by using the Game Conservancy Trust's rafts.



Priority Species & Habitats continued

The rafts have proved simple to use and very effective. Rafts have been supplied to SWT, Forestry Commission, NTS and a number of estates.



The Water Vole Conservation Officer provides advice to landowners about habitat management and her work involves community participation, working with gamekeepers, ghillies and river boards to provide urgent action to secure water vole populations at known

sites and to identify additional 'key areas' for conservation of this priority species.

Training has been provided at Countryside Rangers Association training days, as well as for the general public.

Future work will contribute to the 3 Dee Vision project, which aims to improve the quality of the water environment on the River Dee and its tributaries.

Collaborations are also being developed with Cairngorms LBAP, with the intention of a similar project being set up in their area.

Reds Squirrels under increased threat

The problem of our native reds being outcompeted by the non-native grey is already fairly well known. But red squirrels face an even bigger threat from their American cousins than was previously considered. There have been reported cases of Squirrel Pox (Parapox Virus) in Scotland for the first time.

It's been on the go down south since the 80's, but has just been found across the Scottish border. Greys only act as a host, but infected reds usually die within 15 days, with skin ulcers, swellings, discharge etc. The worrying thing is that greys that have developed antibodies against the pox replace reds 20 times faster than they normally would.

Although there are no reports here yet, it could potentially have a very serious effect on Grampian's red squirrel population. As a flagship species and an LBAP Priority, targeted action across the region needs to be implemented.

The Grampian Squirrel Group website has gone online www.grampiansquirrelgroup.co.uk.

Please send any records of sightings of either reds or greys to the site. A leaflet has also been published highlighting the needs of red squirrels in North East Scotland.

Pink butterflies for Biodiversity

All over the North East, Pink Butterfly signs are being put up on roadside verges that are good for wildlife.

Recent changes in the countryside such as intensive farming practices mean that small areas of habitat have become important refuges for wildlife. Road verges that contain many species of plants, if managed correctly and not cut too frequently can prove to be very valuable wildlife habitats. They are also very colourful and attractive during the summer months. Wildflowers attract butterflies and other insects, which in turn attract other animals that feed on them, including small birds and voles, which can then attract birds of prey.

As part of the N E Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Species-rich Grassland, the Councils are helping ensure that these important areas are managed correctly to ensure that their conservation value is protected, whilst recognising the requirements and importance of safety to road users. To mark these sites that have been identified as being particularly good, the pink butterfly signs, on which are written "Road Verge Managed for Biodiversity" are being put up all over the North East. A particularly good site for people to safely see a species-rich verge is at the Gartly lay-by, where the planting of native wildflowers from a Scottish Executive Biodiversity Action Grant (BAGS) has enhanced the site further.

So, next time your out for a drive and see a pink butterfly on the side of the road, slow down and appreciate the colourful verge that is helping protect wildlife in the North East.





Wood Pasture, Parkland & Boundary Trees

Wood pastures and parklands are historic man made landscapes that typically consist of patches of wooded areas separated by grazed or mown grassland. Veteran boundary trees are remnants of this landscape and provide valuable habitat for wildlife. This plan was recently completed and a launch event will be held sometime in the early spring to highlight this decreasing habitat.

Black Grouse



Following on from the results of a Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) study looking at what could be done to improve habitat for black grouse near Huntly, a large-scale project is now under consideration.

The FWAG report highlighted that the mosaic-type habitats required by black grouse could only effectively be recreated by a forest restructuring project that would aim to connect up with other, more productive areas. LBAP, along with key partners such as the Forestry Commission and RSPB are now looking into the feasibility of a project, similar to the successful project in Wales, which has seen an encouraging reversal in the fortunes of this charismatic priority species.

Wych elm

In much of the UK the wych elm is threatened by Dutch Elm disease and reduced planting, but here in the North East it still remains fairly common. Despite this the threat of disease is ever present, which is why the Wych Elm Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed. The wych elm is an important part of the landscape and culture of the North East and also supports a variety of wildlife. The potential impact of the loss of this magnificent tree would be very significant. At the Treefest event in Duthie Park, the LBAP Co-ordinator gave away young wych elms to members of the public to plant in their own gardens, while highlighting the importance of the tree in this area.

Plans Under Development

Marine

The development of an Action Plan to benefit the marine environment is a huge undertaking and has been avoided by most other LBAP areas. But North East Scotland is leading the way. The new plan will be implemented in close association with the N E LBAPs already in place for Coastal Sand Dunes and Shingles, Coastal Cliff and Heath and Estuarine and Intertidal Habitats. Collaborating as part of the working group will be the Fisheries Research Service, the Marine Conservation Society, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, SEPA, SNH, Aberdeen University's Ocean Lab, The East Grampian Coastal Partnership and the Crown Estate, amongst others.



Wetland

The NE LBAP partnership will be employing a short-term contract researcher to help develop the information base for a NE Scotland Wetlands Action Plan. This will involve the collation of information on wetland sites in the area. Wetlands are defined here as reedbeds, swamps, fens, wet and seasonally-inundated grasslands, including those close to water bodies. The main aim of all the proposed work is to produce an assessment of sites where realistic action can be taken to extend, restore or create wetlands for biodiversity benefit and to meet flood control and water quality objectives.

Coastal Cliffs and Heaths

More than half of the coastal cliffs in Britain are found in Scotland. This plan will cover cliffs above the high-tide level and coastal heath, which is strongly influenced by maritime conditions. Internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds are dependant on these habitats at Troup, Pennan and Lion Heads, Buchan Ness to Collieston and Fowlsheugh. Troup has the only mainland Gannetry in Scotland. They are also important for a number of other priority plant species. Plans are also currently being developed for Broadleaved Woodland and Loch & Ponds.



Other Local Action

Better Boddam Wildlife Project

This BAGS funded project set out to improve the small coastal community for wildlife benefit through public consultation. Following a questionnaire to all residents and a door-stepping session, a public meeting was held to discuss results and get the local community to suggest and vote for their favourite future projects for development. The planting up of the area around Boddam harbour with wildlife friendly native plants was the first choice for a project the local community would like to see developed. These results are now being used to find funding to implement the desired project in the near future.

Promoting Biodiversity

LBAP has continued to publicise the importance of biodiversity conservation by attending events such as Green City Fun Day, Inverurie Environment Day, Treefest, Britain in Bloom competitions as well as giving a number of talks and presentations.

Help take Action for NE Wildlife

North East Local Biodiversity Action Plans are developed through working groups facilitated by the Biodiversity Co-ordinator. Anyone with an interest in a particular habitat or species can get involved in developing the action plans, so there is a shared commitment in progressing the actions.

For upcoming events, or for more information on North East Biodiversity, please contact:-

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Bottlenose Dolphin - Charlie Phillips Images.
Red Squirrel - Rory Milne
Water Vole - Terry Whittaker
Riparian Wood - Simon Langan
Wildlife Gardening poster. Artwork courtesy of Kath Hamper

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North East Scotland LBAP Steering Group Members are:

Aberdeen City Council,
Aberdeenshire Council,
NFU Scotland,
Scottish Environment Protection Agency,
Scottish Executive Environmental and Rural Affairs Department,
Scottish Rural Property and Business Association,
Scottish Natural Heritage,
Scottish Wildlife Trust,
Forestry Commission for Scotland,
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Aberdeen Bat Group,
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Crown Estates,
East Grampian Coastal Partnership,
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group,
Fisheries Research Service,
Forest Enterprise,
Grampian Squirrel Group,
Macaulay Institute,
Mammals Trust UK,
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