TEES VALLEY WILDLIFE TRUST AND INCA EMBARK ON A PROJECT TO CONSERVE BROWNFIELD INVERTEBRATES

Brownfield sites are often rich in biodiversity and form an important refuge for wildlife. They are now included in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) as the priority habitat titled 'Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land'. In the Tees Valley, many brownfield sites contain areas which develop a semi-natural habitat supporting a diverse flora and fauna. Such sites have regional importance for many Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, including invertebrates.

Typical flower-rich grassland on a Brownfield Site

Invertebrates are very sensitive to changes in their environment and are therefore good indicators of the health and quality of their environment. Brownfield invertebrates are highly vulnerable due to habitat loss. The aim of the project is to restore and enhance four brownfield sites across the Tees Valley, including land on two industrial sites at Lucite and BP CATS and two nature reserves managed by the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust (Gravel Hole and Maze Park). Each of these locations has a substrate comprising of a unique limestone slag, which has a high value to many aspects of biodiversity. Restoration work proposed will include managing grassland by cutting vegetation to create a varied sward structure. This will provide a mosaic of different habitat, supporting a wide range of invertebrate species. Habitat creation will take place through the winter of 2010 and will be achieved by mechanical stripping of the top layer of soil in parts of each of the four locations and creating 'scrapes' which will be allowed to revegetate and colonise naturally. The 'spoil' from this activity will be recycled on site to create raised or undulating areas alongside the scrapes, which will provide a varied aspect and structure. Early successional habitats such as this, including patches of bare ground, are so important for many invertebrates. These actions will create habitat which will support viable populations of many specialised invertebrate species.

Learning from this brownfield invertebrate project will also act as a pilot for future conservation projects relating to brownfield sites in this area and beyond. More information can be obtained from INCA (Robert Woods) or the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust (Sue Antrobus).