

**Tees Valley BAP  
Rural Action group  
Tuesday 21 July 2009  
Stewart Park  
Draft Meeting notes**

**Attendance** - Terry Douthwaite (Stockton BC), Vic Fairbrother (Teessmouth Bird Club), Ruth Jackson (Natural England), Rachel Jackson (TVWT) Ian Bond (Hartlepool BC), Sue Antrobus (BAP Co-ordinator).

**Apologies:** Jennie Stafford (FWAG), David Spencer (Redcar and Cleveland BC), Helen Herring (Wildflower Ark),

**Matters arising from last meeting and updates not including on agenda**

**Barn owls** - Discussed the opportunity to get all the people working on barn owl recording and nest boxes Tees Valley together once a year to ensure communication and ensure information feeds into the barn owl SAP. This would include Vic, the two barn owl ringers (Derek Clayton and Geoff Myers) and also people doing work at Saltholme and Forestry Commission.

**Action:** Sue to email the people concerned to see if there was interest in this.

A separate event would be a potential farm walk on barn owls for interested members of public and landowners. Kenny Crooks is able to lead this.

**Action:** Sue to liaise with Kenny and Eastfield farm re dates

Terry has constructed two owl boxes and they are ready for delivery.

**Action:** Sue and Vic to supply Derek's and Geoff's contact numbers and emails to Terry.

**Local Sites selection in Hartlepool** – Ian reported that that the Local Sites review should be finalised in Hartlepool by August. Survey work has thrown up a couple of interesting sites that were previously unknown.

**TVBAP annual gathering**- 9 September at Teessmouth Field Studies Centre. Invites being mailed shortly

**Lowland Meadows HAP- progress on managing meadows**

Ruth provided an update on progress with setting up a HLS scheme with Grassland Trust for East Cleveland Meadows. Ian Craft has been replaced at the Grassland Trust by a new Officer, Clare. She is keen to take forward the proposal. Helen has supplied some very good data to Ruth from the Lost Meadows surveys. Of the sites surveyed about 20 have grassland habitat of suitable BAP quality. However the complicated process now is working out what schemes these landowners already have especially if they are in existing ELS/Countryside Stewardship. It would appear that of the landowners with suitable land there are 7 that are not in any scheme. Ruth will give this information to the Grassland Trust to see if these landowners are interested in joining a HLS scheme under the Grassland Trust. There may also be opportunities to tweak arrangements for those with existing Countryside Stewardship. For those with ELS the time to influence these will be when their scheme is up for renewal. Sue reported that Dave Spencer has put in a bid to SITA for meadow(s) owned by Redcar and Cleveland Council based on the Hunt for Lost Meadows data.

Sue has met with John Beech who is the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Heritage Coast Officer. He is developing a Grazing Animal Project (GAP) for sections of coastal grasslands along the heritage coast.

Natural England is also working with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust to look at opportunities for HLS schemes on Trust nature Reserve grassland.

The general feeling was that all these project together are moving us forward on getting grasslands in the Tees Valley into favourable condition and that the Wildflower Ark's lowland grassland developing inventory has been an invaluable precursor to this.

**Update on Tees Valley Pondscape project –rural landowners**

Rachel reported a very positive response from landowners to the publication. She is sending it out in batches to spread the timings of enquiries as a result. 30 farmers have requested pond surveys and about a third if these have asked for specific advice. Most however do not want new ponds but to manage the ponds they have.

The pond creation training course last week went well. It was led by Pond Conservation as part of the Million Ponds Project. An opportunity for a pond event for rural landowners through the pondscape project is planned for 2010/11 with Hart Moor ponds in Hartlepool a possible location.

Rachel is now planning pond creation and management work programme for this winter and is looking to partner organisations to suggest suitable sites.

*Actions: Terry to contact Rachel regarding his ideas for ponds in Stockton.*

*Rachel and Ian liaise over ponds at Coatham Stob.*

*All: Consider potential locations for pond creation and management work and feed to Rachel.*

### Arable field margins HAP-farm event

David Spencer has been working hard on our behalf on this HAP. He has developed a contact with the Game and Wildlife Conservancy Trust. He attended one of their grey partridge events for landowners, which was very well organised. They are the national BAP coordinator for grey partridge. Dave and Sue met Henrietta Appleton at Flatts Lane earlier this month. Dave and Henrietta plan to do a farm event in spring/summer 2010 on arable field margins. FWAG are interested in taking part and Jennie Stafford has suggested contacting one of the two new Natural England Stewardship advisors, Alison Hiles and Phillip Bull and also Gary Woodburn, who is running a new regional farmland bird initiative. He is based at RSPB but is currently seconded to Natural England for a period of time for this project and funded by Natural England and other partners. It was agreed that Gary would also be a good contact to help us with our farmland bird SAP which we have yet to start.

*Action: Sue to contact Alison Hiles and Gary Woodburn.*

### Developing a species action plan for bats

Ian has produced the introduction for this and opened a discussion on what we want to do and can achieve in the Tees Valley. Ian currently keeps records for the Tees Valley area and sends these to the two vice county recorders. Our knowledge of bats in Cleveland is very low but populations are probably below the carrying capacity of habitats and are probably limited by roosting opportunities as it is nationally. The national picture is that pipistrelle and Daubenton's are increasing at around 4% per annum after a crash in the 1970s and 1980s. An issue is likely also to be lack of habitat connectivity making colonisation of suitable sites difficult. Energy efficiency work on new and existing buildings may be a problem in the future with a lack of suitable gaps for pipistrelles. Bat bricks in new buildings have a very limited capacity as they soon fill up with droppings. For other more demanding species it is essential that we ensure protection of existing roost sites. It was also pointed out that inappropriate lighting can affect these roosts. Vic mentioned the sensitivity required with promoting this SAP as many people are concerned about having or encouraging bats due to their legal protection. Sue mentioned that there is scope for Kenny Crooks to get involved with bat work on the action plan through his new Wild Places Project, which could include survey and creating roost sites.

Ian reporting a disappointing uptake on the 2009 Cleveland Bat programme despite a lot of initial interest.

Opportunities for improving local authority buildings for bats were discussed, starting with countryside centre sites. Driving car transects were also suggested by Ian as a valuable way to obtain more bat data.

Local authority planning sections receive data on bat reports on development sites. This would be really valuable data. We should be able to access this data through our local authority contacts on the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership.

*Action: Ian to further develop plan actions and targets in discussion with Kenny Crooks*

### Slow worms and allotments

This has been added to the agenda after a flurry of emails arising from an email from Ian. Slow worms are uncommon in the Tees Valley but at a meeting that Ian attended recently in the Midlands it was suggested that they may be under recorded and that allotments are a prime habitat. With the emerging Tees Valley Gardens and allotment HAP there is an opportunity to communicate with allotment societies. It would be very useful to have a spread sheet of allotment societies in the Tees Valley and we could archive this through contacts that Simon Blenkinsop has. He is the plan lead and currently working on Middlesbrough's allotment strategy. The EYE project may be able to produce a post card survey but this may not be needed- simply contacting the allotment associations with some info and info on where to send sightings, this could be supplemented by having a local person to contact. Terry is the local amphibian and reptile recorder for the Tees valley for NERAG.

*Actions: Ian to produce some background info on slow worms*

*Sue: to develop a database of allotment societies and contacts with Simon Blenkinsop and send out a communication to them, sending a draft to Ian and Terry before doing so. Also look at press opportunities and ways of using this to promote garden and allotment HAP.*

Provisional date of next meeting - 10 am in Stewart Park Conference Room, 20th October but need to confirm with David, Helen and Jennie first.

