

Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership

Rural Action Group

Tuesday 20th October

Stewart Park

Attendance - David Spencer (Redcar and Cleveland BC), Helen Herring (Wildflower Ark), Vic Fairbrother (Teasmouth Bird Club), Ruth Jackson (Natural England), Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Rachel Sparks (Forestry Commission), Keith Ferry (Redcar and Cleveland BC) Beth Andrews (TVWT), Sue Antrobus (TV Biodiversity Co-ordinator).

Apologies: Terry Douthwaite (Stockton BC), Ian Bond (Hartlepool BC).

Rachel Sparks from the Forestry Commission was warmly welcomed to her first meeting of the group.

Updates

Lowland meadows plan - Helen updated on progress towards an East Cleveland HLS scheme for some of the meadows identified in the Wildflower Ark Hunt for Lost Meadows project. Progress has been a little slow as there have been staff changes at the Grassland Trust.

Action: Helen and Ruth to contact Clare at Grassland Trust again to take the project forward.

Arable field margins plan - Dave updated on progress towards hosting an information event for rural landowners in 2010 that could cover field margins, hedges, ponds, winter stubble etc. He has gained support from partners including FWAG, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, RSPB, Natural England but no funding as yet and has started to write to agricultural supply companies for potential sponsorship

Hedgerow plan - Sue has applied to the Tree Council for a number of hedge planting grants that members of the TVBP had suggested in response to an email. This amount to around 2km of new hedgerow, mainly in urban areas. The outcome should be known in a couple of weeks.

SITA enriching Nature Fund - A new continuation fund has been announced by SITA. This is excellent news. However the overall pot is much smaller, 300k for the North East per year.

More info available at <http://www.sitatrust.org.uk/news/101>

Three Tees Valley projects were successful in the last round, David's grassland restoration project in Redcar and Cleveland, restoration of Whinney Banks pond in Middlesbrough and a water vole project on Lustrum Beck

Updates from Terry - Terry was unable to attend meeting but he sent through some updates. He has made and delivered two owl boxes to Geoff Myers are currently working on two more for Derek Clayton. He has also got agreement to install bat boxes at the Wynyard Woodland Park visitor centre.

2. Update on Natural England Biodiversity framework

Sue attended the UK BAP conference (6-8 October) and presented an update of a presentation given by Natural England on the new framework for the England Biodiversity Strategy. The England Biodiversity Group has published a new framework to drive the work on priority species and habitats in England. The framework aims to build on the strengths of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP), promote landscape-scale delivery and embed an ecosystem approach in our delivery of BAP. There will now be national Biodiversity Integration Groups (BIGs) rather than groups for individual habitats and species plans. A major development is that IBAs (Integrated biodiversity areas) where Natural England will focus landscape scale projects to meet biodiversity targets. There will only be around 20 of these in England. Concern was expressed for all the area that not selected in terms of funding for projects.

More information is available at

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/framework.aspx>

Presentations from the conference can be downloaded from <http://www.keystone-group.co.uk/biodiversity/presentations.php>

3. Tees Valley pondscape - pond creation and restoration work

Rachel updated on the progress of the Tees Valley Pondscape. She has contacted many rural landowners over the summer with the booklet and maps showing ponds on their land. She has had excellent response in terms of permissions to survey ponds, however when it comes to creating ponds on farmland they have been less enthusiastic, despite there being if no costs to the land owner. Reasons include loss of land, fears on public liability issues, health and safety and future management of ponds.

The winter work programme has started with a new pond at Stainton. Pond restoration at of a woodland pond at Thornton and a Mill pond near Guisborough are planned. The rest of the sites are mainly industrial/urban and include Billingham Northumbria Water site, Coatham Marsh and land at Lucite in Billingham.

Action: Rachel S and Rachel J- look at woodland grant schemes in relation to ponds.

4. Woodland data and thinking about woodland habitat action plan

Beth presented the results of data collation and mapping work that she has carried out for the TVBP this summer. Beth has obtained data from the following sources

- Natural England Ancient woodland Inventory
- SSSI data from Natural England
- Local sites survey information from the Wildflower Ark
- Various woodland information from Hartlepool and Stockton tree officers
- Searches using aerial photography and OS maps

Using this data she has mapped the boundaries of woodland in the Tees Valley and classified them according to their status, e.g. ASNW (ancient semi-natural woodland), PAWS (planted ancient woodland site) as well as new plantations and recently broadleaved woodland plantation. There may be gaps in the data in terms of not knowing the composition of woodlands but this is the most comprehensive dataset for woodlands that we have ever had for the Tees Valley.

Beth showed some images from GIS that showed the difference in distribution of woodlands between two areas in the Tees Valley, in rural areas of Stockton and eastern Cleveland. Beth was thanked by the group for all her hard work. It was agreed that this provided us with an excellent starting point for a woodland habitat action plan for the Tees Valley.

Rachel Spark has agreed to be the plan lead for our Tees Valley.

Action: Rachel and Sue to meet up to initiate draft woodland HAP.

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 23rd February 2010. Please note different location. The Wellburn Room, Newham Grange Countryside Farm, Coulby Newham., Middlesbrough.

