

Tees Valley BAP  
Rural Action group  
**Wednesday 22 April 2009**  
Stewart Park  
Draft Meeting notes

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

**Apologies:** Jennie Stafford (FWAG), David Spencer (Redcar and Cleveland BC).

**1. Barn owl species action plan**

Vic outlined a draft plan for 2009-13. He has based a lot of the background information on the newly published Birds of Cleveland publication and the previous action plan. The plan concentrates on the activities that we can do in the partnership which is making and placing boxes and monitoring their use. Geoff Myers and Derek Clayton are the two licensed bird ringers who are monitoring the boxes and advising on their location. Terry is currently working on making nest boxes.

Ian noted that there is limited scope for increasing population in Hartlepool, mainly due land being sandwiched between the A19 and coast.

Ruth noted that under HSL that there is a small amount money to cover nest boxes for those in the scheme but that it didn't cover the full cost of barn owl boxes, which are expensive to make. Vic suggested that there may be a good opportunity to have an informal meeting once a year on barn owls so people could see where boxes had gone and their success to create a link with bird ringers, surveyors, volunteers' landowners etc. There may be an opportunity to combine with an owl watch, for example at Nunthope with Kenny Crooks from TVWT and the farmer Mike

**Action: Sue and Vic to explore organising a date further**

**2. Lowland meadow species action plan**

Helen and Sue have been developing the plan. The draft was presented which included a suggested change in the title of the plan to lowland meadows. This would fit the national BAP better with the suggestion of coastal and calcareous grassland being a separate plan and the brownfields plan covered post industrial "slag" grassland. This was agreed.

Sue updated on flexigraze-the flexigraze project which operated in Northumberland and Durham. finished with the Great North Forest. However the Grazing Officer, Stephen Comber, is now hosted by the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and is currently developing funding bids for a new scheme. He is interested in covering the Tees Valley. Sue has written a letter of support on behalf of the TVBP for his grant application to the Lottery "Local Food" grant fund.

Data - The Wildflower Ark Hunt for Lost Meadows project in eastern Cleveland and their work surveying Local Wildlife Sites has created a substantial amount of detailed up to date information on the habitat in the Tees Valley that can form the basis of an inventory. As they have the methodology worked out it would not be too expensive in terms of time to carry out additional surveys to add to the inventory.

The main issues for the remaining high quality meadows in the Tees Valley are scrub encroachment and lack of grazing. Fencing is often the issue due to high capital cost for little return.

It was agreed that the plan would concentrate on restoration of habitat rather than recreation.

Helen described the potential project with Ian Croft of the Grassland Trust to form a single HLS project covering several small meadows belonging to different owners. Ruth updated us on the progress of the similar project that Natural England is implanting on Durham grasslands with the Grassland Trust. We learnt that Ian has left the Grassland Trust

**Action: Helen to contact Ian Craft re the current position on the Eastern Cleveland HLS meadow proposal.**

### **Update on Tees Valley Pondscape**

Rachel reported that over 800 ponds are now on database and basic surveys are going very well. She is in the process of creating a database of landowner information and now has contact details for over half of these. A leaflet for landowners has been produced and has been well received. Thank you to Jennie from FWAG and Ruth from Natural England for their input. Rachel is in the process in sending it out in batches to farmers with ponds along with a letter and a map showing locations of ponds on their land and a request for permission to survey. She is already receiving phone calls from farmers requesting site visits. Ian suggested sending the leaflet to farmers who haven't got ponds as it covers the creation of new ponds.

Sue suggesting distributing the leaflet to Industrial landowners through INCA.

Terry is the new Tees Valley recorder for amphibians in the Tees Valley.

Rachel has organised some dragonfly larva workshops-all places have been fully booked.

The official launch of the Pondscape Project is 5<sup>th</sup> May. Everyone in the action groups has received an invitation. There will be speakers from Buglife and Pond Conservation.

### **Farmland walk/event**

The type of activity and timing was discussed. A summer late afternoon was suggested running into early evening. A suitable farm was discussed that had facilities preferably one that is part of farmland bird survey. Helen and Vic expressed an interest in taking part.

We need to create a wider farming mailing list. We already have the basis of this with landowner information from the lowland meadows survey and the pondscape work.

Discussion followed on invitations, mailings and newsletter- generally agreed that although email is cheaper and more environmentally friendly that paper would be best.

**Action: Sue to ask Jennie for further advice on best ways to communication newsletters and information to farmers**

### **Woodland habitat action plan**

We don't seem to have had a biodiversity habitat plan previously in the Tees Valley although there have been various Cleveland and Tees Forest strategies. As a starting point it would be useful to have a GIS map of our semi natural woodlands. There is an old English nature inventory of ancient woodland but it contains inaccuracies especially in Stockton. Helen says the Ark have all W1 (ancient woodland) and W2 (replanting ancient) recorded from the Local Wildlife Sites surveys for Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton boroughs. Beth Andrews (TVWT) can provide some time to draw this together with Data that Hartlepool and Middlesbrough have for the next meeting. It was suggested also useful to have new broadleaved woodland creation marked on including those planted by the Tees Forest. Another source of woodland creation data would be the Forestry Commission.

**Action: Helen to provide Local Wildlife Sites digital data on woodlands to Beth.**

**Action: Sue and Beth to work on woodland mapping for presentation at next meeting.**

**Action: Ian to forward Hartlepool data to Sue.**

### **Farmland bird survey**

Forms have been sent out to surveyors, we have lost two surveyors but gained two more.

FWAG are promoting the survey to volunteers and farmers at an event they are doing at Nunthorpe.

Kenny Crooks will be representing us.

### **Tees Rivers Trust**

Vic, Terry and Sue met up with Douglas Slater from the Tees Rivers Trust that is launching shortly. The organisation is in the process of evaluating what its role will be and meeting potential partners. One idea Doug floated was a giant hogweed survey. Our Wetland and Coastal Action Group have suggested that this would be best widened to an aquatic invasive plant survey in general. At the meeting the use of river corridors by barn owls was discussed. Vic has sent them information on barn owls

### **Some Rural updates**

- Ian In the process of carrying out surveys to select Local Sites, which should be complete by the end of summer.
- Vic Teesmouth Bird Club have been involved in reviewing the Tees Valley criteria for the selection of local Sites for birds, Jeremy Garside gave a presentation on the selection process to the TBC conservation committee which was well received.  
The new publication-Breeding Birds of Cleveland- is selling very well and may go out of print soon so get your copy fast!
- Terry Has been involved with the public consultation of Stockton's green infrastructure strategy.
- Ruth Natural England's Land Advisory Service team is now up and running and is managed by Sue Harrison. This team can provide advice to people on selecting Environmental Stewardship options. **Action Rachel to contact the team to see if they want some Tees Valley Pond Leaflets**

*Date of next meeting*

*Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2009 at 10 am in Stewart Park Conference Room*