

Tees Valley Wetland and Coastal Action Group

Wednesday 24 June 2009

Draft meeting notes

Attendance – Allan Snape (Northumbrian Water), David Braithwaite (RSPB), Anne-Louise Orange (Groundwork) Neil Docherty (SBC), David Laing, Deborah Jefferson (HBC), Robert Woods (INCA) Katy Dickson (Environment Agency), Keith Ferry (R&CBC) , Kenny Crooks (TVWT), Sue Antrobus (BAP Co-ordinator).

Apologies – Carl Watts (Natural England), Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Richard Buckley (MBC), Helen Herring (Wildflower Ark).

Matters arising

INCA have published a guide to adult dragonflies and damselflies in the Tees Valley. Copies available from Robert Woods

Pondscape project has received some match funding from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation which will allow the delivery of pond education activities relating to aquatic alien plants discussed at last meeting.

1. Draft water vole Species Action Plan

A copy of the draft was circulated prior to the meeting. Kenny Crooks, Ian Bond, Robert Smith and a student from Sunderland University-Mark Slaughter have fed into the plan via email. Kenny raised the subject of mink control as no strategic control is mentioned in plan. He advised that coordinated, targeted mink control is vital to ensure the success of habitat improvement projects in the Tees Valley and to protect the areas, such as Middlesbrough, that are currently free of mink. Mink have been reported and established in parts of Stockton, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool. Keith mentioned that reports of otter colonising in his area and that they seem to reduce mink numbers as therefore increase water vole numbers, but this could be too late for water voles as hard for them to re-establish if no neighbouring populations. Deborah mentioned that no signs of mink found in a recent survey in Hartlepool but Kenny said likely to still be there.

Kenny said that it is Wildlife Trust policy is to support coordinated mink control. He is experienced in building mink rafts, monitoring numbers, trapping and dispatching mink. However it is a very labour intensive job. A licence is not required but there are best practice guidelines. Kenny has a new post within TVWT running a Wild Places project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Through this he can provide some training as relates to urban mammals. The use of volunteers was discussed re building and checking mammal rafts. Katy discussed a project in County Durham on River Skerne where mink control was being carried out by Karen McAuthur but with the legwork being carried out by volunteers from the BASC.

Katy proposed that it is far better to focus work on a catchment or section of catchment rather than a scattergun approach over the Tees Valley, which was agreed as the best way forward.

Dave L mentioned the need to be careful about demonising non native mammals. All agreed but recognised that mink are a major factor in rapid decline of water voles and was essential, although obviously a need for discretion and sensitivity.

Water voles on Chapel Beck in Guisborough were discussed. Kenny said that they are still present but numbers declining due to a need for appropriate habitat management.

Redcar and Cleveland Council are keen to do a project with Jo Feary as lead officer. Kenny confirmed that he would be able to provide guidance on what habitat management is needed and work with local people on water voles and possibly some training for pest control and community leaders.

Action Plan targets - David B pointed out that the suggested targets would be very difficult to measure due to resources to survey and after discussion suggested that could monitor 4/5 contrasting sites. Two suggestions were Salthome and Greenabella Marsh.

Actions:

Katy: to pass on details of Durham mink control to Kenny

Kenny & Sue: Follow up leads with BASC for a joint project

Kenny: Select area to concentrate mink control and put plan in place based on amount of volunteer support from BASC.

Sue: set up a discussion meeting with Kenny and Jo Feary to progress water vole project in Guisborough

Sue: Ask Nick Brodin for advice on targets

All: when Sue circulates 3rd draft of plan to send any comments back

2. Discussion on salt marsh Habitat Action Plan

Carl Watts is plan lead. He suggested yesterday that as Saltmarsh is a transitional habitat and linked very much to mudflats that these two plans be combined. This was agreed. Sue has prepared some initial notes on the national habitat description, current trends etc which were circulated.

A discussion followed on where the main areas of saltmarsh are in Tees Valley, their management, ownership and potential for habitat expansion.

According to the NE regional biodiversity audit there are 26.5ha in the Tees Valley (15 ha in Hartlepool Borough and 11.5 in Stockton-on-Tees). It was noted that Greatham Creek/ Salthome were the largest area. Of this 5.6 ha is owned by RSPB. They have non intervention management. The saltmarsh at Greenabella Marsh is small and confined to a narrow strip of halophytic plants. Saltmarsh habitat is growing at the expense of mudflat on seal sands. South of the Tees Robert reported a small amount on Corus land.

Katy updated on the Environment Agency managed realignment project at Greatham Creek. The project plan started in 2001 and this year they have purchased land behind the sea wall. The project will involve breaching the sea wall to provide 20 hectares of intertidal habitat which will compensate for losses due to coastal squeeze. The site has opportunities for the creation of further habitats over and above this but habitat types and areas have yet to be determined.

Issues affecting salt marsh discussed- erosion significant at Greatham Creek where as accretion taking place at Seal Sands. However this means that the area of mudflats is being reduced which will affect bird habitat which is the main interest feature of the SPA designation. Noted that saltmarsh is an important habitat for invertebrates. Two saltmarsh moth indicators have been recorded at Greatham Creek. The main player for mudflats in the Tees Valley is Natural England, agreed Sue to set up meeting with Carl and Mike so can progress the mudflats/Saltmarsh plan targets, actions etc.

Actions:

Robert: Provide location and area details of Saltmarsh at South Gare and Greenabella to Carl and Sue

Carl, Mike and Sue: Get heads together to bash out the remaining action plan, covering sections-habitat in the Tees Valley, current activity, mission statement, targets and actions and email to the rest of action group for input.

3. Maritime cliffs and slopes

Keith and Sue have produced a draft action plan. We have 19 km of this habitat in the Tees Valley which is between Saltburn and Staithes. The plan will cover the habitat from Saltburn to Boulby and east of Boulby is covered by the North York Moors BAP. Keith and Sue are meeting up with the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Heritage Coast Officer at the beginning of July. He is employed by the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Coast Forum and is involved with projects to allow for coastal erosion, monitoring of coastland habitats and awareness raising.

Maritime cliffs and slopes are important for invertebrates. As far as we know there has been no invertebrate survey work on this section of coast. Robert interested in getting involved, although fully booked for 2009.

Action: Sue and Keith to finalise action plan after meeting in July and circulate to group for comment.

4. Sand dunes Habitat Action Plan

Deborah is acting as the plan lead. We haven't started plan yet.

Figures from the North East Biodiversity audit were discussed. We questioned where these figures come from, especially the ones for Stockton.

The habitat in the Tees Valley main areas are North of the Tees- North Gare, Hart Warren, and south of the Tees – South Gare, The Stray and small amount at Skinninggrove. Deborah discussed the factors affecting sand dunes in the Tees Valley. At Hart Warren there is a big problem of erosion, yet at North Gare there is accretion. The main issues are that of antisocial behaviour with motorbikes, fires and litter/fly tipping. Dog mess also leads to eutrophication, which can change the plant composition. Sand extraction at North Gare does not appear to have an adverse effect on the dune system there.

Actions

Keith: Supply any information/data on sand dunes in Redcar and Cleveland to Deborah

Robert: Supply information held by INCA on sand dunes owned by Corus

Action: Deborah: Find out what information is held by the Wildflower Ark

Action: Deborah and Sue to work up an advanced draft of plan by next meeting

Updates

Robert: Annual seal monitoring started, first live pup born yesterday. Bid submitted to Entrust for brownfield invertebrate project.

Anne-Louise: Gave an update on her role with Groundwork and Stockton Borough Council.

Neil: They have a serious problem with *Crassula* at Cowpen Bewley.

Sue: TVBP annual gathering is on 9 September, invites to follow.

Wednesday 16 September 2009 10 am at Billingham Beck