

Tees Valley Wetland and Coastal Action Group

Wednesday 11 March 2009

Draft meeting notes

Attendance – Allan Snape (Northumbrian Water), Neil Docherty (SBC), David Laing, Deborah Jefferson (HBC), Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Robert Woods (INCA) Katy Dickson (Environment Agency), Keith Ferry (R&CBC), Sue Antrobus (BAP Co-ordinator).

Apologies – Richard Buckley (MBC), Helen Herring (Wildflower Ark).

Note: Katy Dickson is remaining as the representative of the Environment Agency and Fiona Morris will be their representative on the steering group meetings.

Deborah and Rachel were welcomed as new members of the group

1. News roundup on wetland and coastal matters

Crassula helmsii

Keith reported this as occurring at a pond on R&C Council land at South Gare. No one knew of any other sightings in the Tees Valley. This invasive pond plant has been a serious problem in other parts of the country however it is not a designated noxious weed. A discussion followed.

Action: Sue and Rachel- research current best practice on its control and email all members of biodiversity partnership.

Rachel: Include in pondscape newsletter and request any one send any sightings so we can see scale of problem and to raise awareness amongst countryside managers.

We need to communicate to the general public and garden centres about the problem of invasive pond plants, Deborah suggested that placing temporary information posters at ponds at Country Parks would be a good way of communicating this as many people visit these ponds and it is often at these publically accessible ponds that people add plants, fish and frogs from their garden pond. Sue has pdfs of a national leaflet and postcard done by a partnership of environmental organisations.

Action: Rachel to laminate posters and send to every countryside centre in for display.

- Robert Has been working on saline lagoons to ensure correct levels on salinity-later on the agenda.
An illustrated booklet/leaflet on dragonflies and damselflies in the Tees Valley is being published by INCA - currently at the printers.
- Rachel Organising training on dragon and damselfly larva. Places limited to 5-6 people.
Contact Rachel ASAP rjackson@teeswildlife.org if you are interested.
- Deborah A growing problem with thistle invasion at Seaton Common. Topping is not enough. Also the window when they can carry out topping work after nesting birds and thistles set seed is becoming smaller. Vegetative spread is an issue. She has done a lot of research, consulting Defra research. She will be working with Carl at Natural England using Clopyralid and they will be monitoring the results and will communicate progress with group.
Action: Deborah to send Defra report to Sue to attach with the meeting notes
- Keith The winter months have mainly been spent on woodland management.
The newt fencing at Carlin How recycling facility is being damaged by vandals.
- Alan Attended a consultation event on the 5 year management plan of Teesmouth NNR.
organised by Natural England. **Action: Alan to email the plan to Sue to send with meeting notes.**

- Neil Although the weevils worked last year against the azola problem some plant material has been found this year, this is not entirely unexpected as the ponds are interconnected especially during the winter. They will treat again this year.
- Dave Not related to wetlands but gave an update on the saga of Longridge Wood in Marton. Also in Middlesbrough there are plans by the council to build on the lake that is next to the bottle of notes. Local residents have made a DVD about the public campaign to save both these sites. This can be downloaded from web at www.youtube.com/pancrack
- Katy She is meeting up shortly with Fiona to flesh out their two action plans (rivers and streams, grazing marsh).
EA are working in partnership with TVWT on a large project at Preston Farm. This involves breaching the flood banks to create new wetland habitats on the floodplain. There were some fishery issues which have now been resolved.
EA is continuing to work on Middlesbrough Becks and area supporting an application to Access to Nature from Middlesbrough Council for this area which will focus on community involvement.
EA have contributed 25K to Tees Valley pondscape project
Doing some work looking at Stockton's urban waterways with Anne Louise Orange.
Work at Hartlepool focusing on the beck that runs through the Burn valley gardens.
- Sue Submitted a stage 2 bid to Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for match funding for the Tees Valley Pondscape project. However they have a 5 month response time for stage 2 at the moment.

2. Update on the Pond project by Rachel Jackson

Started in post in January but project started in November with Wildflower Ark and staff and volunteers from TVWT. We now have a database of all known ponds in excel which has been digitised on GIS arc view. Water vole and amphibian data has been digitised by the Wildflower Ark. Initial basic surveys have been carried out on 100 ponds and entered into an access spreadsheet. Rachel is delivering two training days on pond survey and newt work for volunteers this month, which have booked up. Rachel attended the launch of Pond Conservation's Million Ponds project and recommends viewing of their new downloadable pond creation toolkits. Currently putting together an application to Millions Ponds project to create 3 ponds for amphibians on Hartlepool Council land near Corus. If successful this work will be carried out during the winter. Just completed work on an information leaflet landowners, a postcard promoting the project and displays which will be printed in the next couple of weeks. Launch of the project is on Tuesday 5 May at Cowpen Bewley. Two staff from the million ponds project are taking part. Invitations will be sent shortly, please reply promptly especially if you want to book on the afternoon workshops.

3. Tees Rivers Trust and possible hogweed survey

Sue with Vic Fairbrother and Terry Douthwaite of the Rural Action Group met up with Douglas Slater who is the chairman of the Tees Rivers Group. This organisation is about to launch shortly. A discussion on followed on the role of interests of "Rivers Trusts" From the meeting that Sue has it would appear that the Tees ones seeks to be cover a wide range of river interests and they are keen to work in partnership with others. They are currently meeting with other groups to assess what their niche will be. One idea they have floated is to coordinate a giant hogweed survey. Katy said determining the upstream limits of the species would be really useful. Another suggestion was for survey to identify other invasive plant and other issues affecting the river, e.g. land management.

4. Habitat and Species Action Plans

Sue distributed an up to date list of where we were with all the action plans, highlighting the ones that belong too this action group. It was suggested that the word tranche be dropped and replaced by the word group or phase. All the phase 1 plans (ringed plover, ponds, purple milk vetch lakes and

reservoirs) have been approved by steering groups and have been amended ready for publication on website. An email will be sent to all when these are on the website. These plans have been entered on to Bars and Sue will collect activity reports from plan leads every six months, with the first one in June. Of the phase 2 plans great crested newt, and common seal have been passed with a few minor amendments by the steering group and will be added to BARs and published on the website by the end of March. A little more work needs to be done to rivers and streams, reed bed and grazing marsh. The remaining wetland and coastal plans yet to be tackled are saline lagoons, marsh and swamp, sand dunes and coastal grassland, salt marsh and water vole. Geoff Barber will be the plan lead for saline lagoon and INCA have already started writing the plan. Sue is helping Kenny Crookes to do the water vole plan both for phase three for the steering group meeting 6 May. Deborah suggested separating sand dunes from coastal grassland and perhaps adding coastal grassland to the unimproved grassland plan. This still leaves sand dunes, salt marsh and marsh and swamp as action plans without a plan lead. A discussion followed. Deborah volunteered to do sand dunes if the habitat was in phase four. We have discussed with RSPB Newcastle office about their involvement in Tees Valley Bap process. They are very stretched on a regional level and cannot regularly attend meetings or take on plan leads but can respond to advice on specific projects. Rachel volunteered to be plan lead for marsh and swamp. Robert said he would consider doing salt marsh if no one else came forward, however Sue was concerned about his workload as he is already a lead for a number of plans.

Action: Sue to add Deborah to bars and provide initial training.

5. Progress on saline lagoon plan

Robert gave a summary of the interest of saline lagoons and their location in the Tees Valley, which are on industrial sites. Last year INCA sampled the salinity and found it at the lower level for the specialist invertebrates that the lagoons support. To remedy this lagoon gates will be opened for a short period to allow seawater on one high tide to enter.

Action: Robert to show Sue, Deborah and Rachel around the lagoons when they next do work to increase their understanding of the habitat.

Wednesday 24th June at 2009 10 am at Billingham Beck