

Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership
Rural Action Group
Tuesday 8 June 2010
Nature's World
Draft meeting notes

Attendance - Terry Douthwaite (Stockton BC), Vic Fairbrother (Teesmouth Bird Club), Martin Allen (Wildflower Ark), Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Rachel Sparks (Forestry Commission), Sue Antrobus (TV Biodiversity Co-ordinator). **Apologies:** Ian Bond (Hartlepool BC), Ruth Jackson (Natural England).

Hedgerows

Hartlepool Hedge Survey

Jessica has been successful in obtaining funding from Defra for the Wildflower Ark to carry out a survey of hedgerows in Hartlepool. This will be to the methods in the national hedgerow handbook. Hedgerows have been selected using a random methodology as specified in the grant. The project will involve volunteers and training is being organised. This work will compliment that carried out in Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland, although the standard methodology has evolved since the earlier surveys. The Ark where unable to apply for funding to carry out surveys on Middlesbrough's hedges as the fund was focused on projects in arable/mixed farmed area. However the Ark has been contacted by Middlesbrough Council about hedgerow surveys which they are following up.

Tree Council "Real Hedge" Fund

Sue has submitted the final grant claim to the Tree Council for the hedges planted during the winter under this scheme (3,288 m in total). All have successfully come into leaf. The sites are as follows; Seaton Common, Butts Lane and West Lane Cemetery in Hartlepool, Fairy Dell and Middlesbrough Allotments, in Middlesbrough, Wilton Corus Works and Coatham Marsh in Redcar and Cleveland.

Orchards

The Wildflower Ark HLF funded Orchard project is well underway. Helen has already visited 16 sites. Many are remnants of orchards associated with old farmhouses and estates. Veteran fruit trees have been found and some good opportunities for restoration. There has been a lot of interest amongst landowners. A volunteer "fruit group" has been established as part of the project and a recent fruit pruning course was very popular. There has not so far been good unimproved grassland associated with the orchards although some species rich orchard lawns have been found at a couple of sites.

Grassland

Pickards Meadow- Stockton will find out by the end of June if their bid to SITA for meadow creation is successful.

HLF grasslands- the multiple owner application that is being coordinated by the Grassland Trust is being expanded from the sites arising from the Wildflower Ark survey in Redcar and Cleveland to cover some additional LWS sites in Stockton. Suggested that perhaps the LWS at Bluebell Beck could be included

Action: Sue to contact Grassland Trust and Middlesbrough Council about possibility of inclusion.

Bluebell Beck- This is a LWS in Middlesbrough that is in declining condition due to the grass cutting regime. It was for many years cut and bailed but now it is cut but the arisings are not removed. Sue is assisting Anne Gladwin with looking at practical solutions in bring site into positive condition.

Action: Terry to pass contactor grass cutting and bailing contact to Sue

Pondscape update

Rachel has been carrying out, with the help of volunteers, amphibian surveys over the past two months. These have concentrated on Local Wildlife Sites where the records of great crested newts have been over 10 years old. In most cases great crested newts have been found although the dry weather has made bottle trapping difficult and made for a short breeding season. Thornton pond has been planted up with pond plants, with the aid of the local community, Wildflower Ark and a volunteer group from the TVWT.

The Wildflower Ark has been commissioned to carry out aquatic plants surveys for the project and Rachel is starting the second summer of invertebrate surveys.

Vic mentioned the OPAL project and it was agreed that any work that members of the Cleveland Naturalists did on this would be useful information for the Tees Valley Pondscape project.

IBDAs and East Cleveland

The England Biodiversity Group have been working on selecting a set of integrated biodiversity development areas to focus landscape scale delivery for National Bap habitats and species. East Cleveland has been selected as one of only three in North East England. This could assist with bringing HLS and other funding for biodiversity. The data on lowland meadows and hedgerows from the Wildflower Ark was very helpful in this selection process.

Action: Sue to forward the latest paper on IBDAs to members of group.

Tees Valley Ancient Woodland Ecological Condition Project

Martin and Sue provided an update on the aims of the project and the funding which is coming from the Forestry Commission, Natural England, the Wildlife Trust and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. Emma Goldberg, a national woodland specialist from Natural England has provided advice and came up to deliver training which was attended by 19 people in the TVBP.

There was a discussion on setting the criteria for favourable condition, especially in relation to sycamore. It is vital that the same criteria are used in our survey that was used in Northumberland and Durham for comparative purposes.

Action; Rachel S. to send spreadsheet for Durham and Northumberland to Martin and Sue

AOB

Owl boxes discussed-TBC has asked if they can help by purchasing boxes. Sue to contact Geoff Myers to see if/where the need is.

Date of next meeting: to be arranged.