



Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership

Coastal and Wetland Action Group

Tuesday 24 May 2011

Attendance; Anne Gladwin (MBC), Toby Collett (RSPB), Allan Snape (Northumbria Water), David Laing, Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Martin Allen (Wildflower Ark), David Neil (Stockton Borough Council), Deborah Jefferson (HBC), Robert Woods (INCA), Ben Lamb (Tees Rivers Trust), Sue Antrobus (BAP Co-ordinator).

Apologies; Barry Jobson (Boro Becks team), Daniel Barker

1. Potential wetland creation in Hartlepool

Deborah has identified a number of areas within the town's parks that would benefit from wetland creation as part of the Wild Green Spaces project. Although Rossmere Park and Ward Jackson Park already have lakes they have very little invertebrate and no amphibian species so they would love to create a number of associated shallow ponds adjacent to lakes which will support a greater diversity of species (both flora and fauna). These would need to be fenced off initially to keep the wildfowl off until any planting schemes had time to establish but once they would have the option to remove it, or alternatively leave them and promote the areas as wildlife ponds for public and educational use. This could be a potential application to SITA as it appears to fit their criteria in terms of habitat creation of a BAP habitat. However the deadline is tight- **1st July. Action: Deborah to write application and Sue to assist with the links to local and national BAP targets bit.**

2. Potential ERIC amphibian and reptile HLF project application

ERIC North East have proposed developing a "North East Reptile & Amphibian Monitoring Project" to be run in partnership with the three North East Wildlife Trusts, North East Reptile & Amphibian Group (NERAG), the Natural History Society of Northumbria and the National Amphibian & Reptile Recording Scheme (NARRS). The project development is still at an early stage and they plan to develop it for HLF funding. The TVBP have been asked to contribute ideas and plans to help develop the project. Katherine Pinnock from ERIC gave a short presentation and paper at the last TVBP steering group. So far the proposed aims and objectives of the project are:

Aims

- To support and increase voluntary recording of reptiles and amphibians
- Enable changes in distribution and numbers of reptiles and amphibians to be monitored in the North East of England through a network of active volunteers
- Raise public awareness of the herpetofauna found in the region
- Promote management of suitable habitats for reptile and amphibian species

Objectives

- Encourage, facilitate and support volunteers and wildlife groups in the continued monitoring of local herpetofauna and increase the numbers of people involved in amphibian and reptile recording
- Identify data gaps and map suitable habitats for targeted surveying and monitoring
- Deliver volunteer training days in survey techniques, recording and the identification of amphibian and reptile species at regional target sites
- Train and support newly licensed volunteer great crested newt surveyors
- Deliver a series of educational events for children to encourage them to record herptiles on their school grounds / garden ponds via the EYE Project website
- Deliver a series of talks to community groups to increase their knowledge of herpetofauna and their habitats in the region, along with the importance of recording.

How this fitted into the needs of the Tees Valley was discussed. The need for local training and survey coordination in the Tees Valley was highlighted. It was felt that at present that there was no focus for volunteers to carry out surveys or be trained in the Tees Valley and that much of the current focus of NERAG's activities was Newcastle/Durham focused which was too far for local people to take part in. It was hoped that the proposed project could address this need.

Action: Sue to pull together suggestions to Katherine who will include suggested general events for all; training for existing groups e.g. RSPB Phoenix youth group, training workshops for volunteers, survey programme tailored to local needs and habitat creation and management.

Action: Deborah to contact Askham Byran College to explore possibilities for their involvement in such a project.

3. Final Pondscape report

The Tees Valley Pondscape project has now been completed and has successfully met the targets and actions in the Tees Valley Ponds Habitat Action Plan that it set out to deliver. Sue is finalising the report and data. These will be distributed to TVBP partners on disc in June. The data is in excel sheets and on GIS. The project has highlighted several potential Important Areas for Ponds (IAPs). These were discussed.

4. SITA funding- possible Eel and/or water vole/mink control project

The Tees Rivers Trust is very keen to develop projects to conserve and monitor eels on the River Tees catchment. Ben introduced the background on the fall in eel numbers and possible causes. A factsheet on the plight of the European Eel will be sent out with the minutes. Despite eels being so common, little is known about them, especially the marine phase of their life cycle, or why they have undergone such a dramatic decline in population in the UK. It is estimated that numbers have fallen by between 70 and 99% since 1979 and as a result they are now on the endangered list and subject to EU regulation. A combination of factors including climate change, habitat loss and obstruction of waterways are thought to play a role. Predation may also be an issue. It was agreed that this would be an important project in the Tees Valley and also one that would capture public imagination. However a lot of development work is needed for a full funding bid to SITA as this would be quite a complex project. The July deadline would be unrealistic. Ben will keep the group updated and ask for input/support when needed.

5. Great crested newts and dogs –potential conflict

Sue has been asked to provide ecological advice on the affects of dogs in ponds (great crested newts) at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park to Stockton Borough Council. They have just had a consultation with park users on dogs. Sue has sought advice from David Orchard from the ARC (Amphibian and Reptile Conservation) and downloaded advice from Pond Conservation's Million Ponds Project. The affects of dogs swimming in ponds were discussed and agreed to be one of

disturbance of the substrate, which increases turbidity, which in turn reduces light that affects the growth of aquatic plant life on which great crested newts lay their eggs. It was agreed that fencing of ponds was more effective than having a rule of dogs on leads as this rule is difficult to enforce. Having a sacrificial pond where people can let their dogs swim/paddle coupled with information explaining the reasons for park users were suggested. David Neil said that the wardens had fenced a pond in Thorpe Wood (Wynyard Woodland Park) and had noticed an appreciable difference as a result. It was recognised that some people feel very passionate about their dogs and that dog control policies can be very controversial with group members giving examples at Hardwick Park and Linthorpe Cemetery.

6. Discussion on some issues relating to beck realignment in Middlesbrough

Anne gave an update on the Ormesby Beck realignment that the Environment and Middlesbrough Council are carrying out. This work is required to preventing flooding of homes. The project will also create semi-natural habitat and a more natural water course. However for various reasons the project has been delayed which is causing complications with wildlife protection issues (water vole habitat and nesting work). Kenny Crooks of TVWT has been providing ecological monitoring and advice. To prevent water voles from breeding and using the old water course whilst the new one is being constructed strimming of bank sides and turf removal is being carried out. A discussion was held on the delicate balance of not disturbing wildlife and breaking wildlife laws and the political and organisational pressures to deliver projects to deadlines.

7. AOB

Water voles- Deborah reported that signs of water vole had been recorded on Greatham Beck by Jonathan Pounder

Coastal fires- Deborah reported on a partnership between Hartlepool Countryside Service and the Fire Service's Community Liaison Officer, Peter Bradley. Deliberate burning of vegetation by young people is an issue on some countryside sites in Hartlepool, especially on their coastal sites. A combination of presentations in local schools and diversational MUGA (multiuse games activities) has reduced fires by 25% and it is hoped that this will be continued during the summer. A very good example of successful partnership environmental youth working!

Salthome and surrounds - A 10 year management plan for restoring Cowpen Marsh into favourable condition is been developed by the RSPB. Martin and David have some permanent transects recording vegetation on the site and will liaise with Toby. The RSPB/INCA partnership has secured funding for a safe place to view Seals on Greatham Creek. The safety of people and the disturbance of seals was an issue discussed by this group last year so this is very good news.

Date of next meeting: 13 September 2011 at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre