

**Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership  
Coastal and Wetland Action Group  
Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

**Attendance;** Richard Buckley (MBC), Ian bond (HBC), Toby Collett (RSPB), Kenny Crooks (TVWT), Sam Garside (MBC), Neil Docherty (SBC), Katy Dickson (Environment Agency), Robert Smith, Sue Antrobus (BAP Co-ordinator),

**Apologies,** Allan Snape (Northumbria Water), Deborah Jefferson (HBC), Anne-Louise Orange (Groundwork), Rachel Jackson (TVWT), Robert Woods (INCA), Ben Lamb (Tees Rivers Trust), David Laing.

### **1. Coordinated Mink control in the Tees Valley**

Background: It is nationally and locally established that mink often lead to the eradication of water vole populations and that if we are to retain and expand our populations in the Tees Valley mink populations needs to be humanly controlled.

The Tees Valley species action plan lists mink control as one of its main actions.

It was agreed for this to be effective there was a need for coordinated control to maximise effectiveness. This discussion was called to work towards this and to resolving some of the issues are currently preventing effective control. The main points of the discussion were as follows;

#### **Stockton**

**Stockton countryside section:** Neil reported that at Cowpen Bewley and Billingham Beck, the countryside rangers have been setting mink traps on and off since summer 2009. The mink have been dispatched by SBC's pest control service. He did not know if they had been internally charged for this service.

**Neil to find out if they are charged and if so what the level of charge is.**

**Saltholme RSPB:** They have mink sightings which appear to be on the increase and have the traps but no method of dispatching on this very public site. So far the staff do not have authorisation from RSPB to dispatch. Toby has contacted SBC's pest control service but despite being willing to pay they said that they couldn't assist. He has also contacted private pest control companies who were not able to offer a suitable service.

**Sue to ask if can get a service from SBC for the RSPB by contacting someone higher up in the council.** (*action done and RSPB and Stockton pest control are planning a programme in September- the issue for the pest control people is that they are fully stretched especially in summer with calls to deal with wasps, bees and rats so can't guarantee a rapid response which would cause distress to the trapped mink however they really do want to help and can do so if the trappings is not continuous but are planned on set dates that don't coincide with their busy periods*)

**Ian to investigate if SBC could provided a paid for service to RSPB Saltholme and Greenabella marsh (Tioxide land).** (*Action done - SBC have no capacity in their pest control section to deal with mink in Hartlepool*).

**Toby to continue exploring option of staff being able to dispatch mink themesleves in situ.**

Apart from the activity by the rangers on the Stockton Countryside Sites as far as we know there is no other work with other landowners on mink recording and control. We have to build these up from scratch.

The TVWT has a water vole project starting on project on the lower reaches of Lustrum Beck. Kenny has been carrying out initial water vole surveys however most of the work will be in year two and three of the project.

### **Middlesbrough**

Middlesbrough has strong population urban water voles. We have detailed knowledge of these populations through various projects delivered by the Wildlife Trust with support from Middlesbrough Council and the Environment Agency. Kenny is trapping mink on upstream on private landowners. He has developed good relationships with these landowners and is able to dispatch the mink himself to the national guidelines. He plans to continue with this work which should safeguard the water vole populations downstream.

### **Hartlepool**

We have a good knowledge of water vole populations in Hartlepool, especially around Greatham Creek in recent years mainly from surveys and observations carried out by Robert Smith. The picture is that of decline and associated increase sightings of mink. Robert took part in a trapping programme some years ago with traps provided by Geoff Barber at INCA, although no mink were successfully trapped. Robert discussed some of the problems with setting mink traps on some of the more urban becks, such as vandalism or traps and contents being tampered with. He considers that there are opportunities further upstream and involve private landowners such as Greatham Estates. And he has discussed possibility with a landowner near Brierton. He is happy to work with the TVBP on progressing to see if these landowners would want traps and if they have the capacity. Robert felt that it would be more appropriate if these landowners were contacted officially by TVBP by letter and he can assist.

Robert to pass landowner details to Sue (received thank you Robert).

Sue to write to the landowners to explore practical mink control on their land. (Should be done after approval by steering group)

Water vole has largely disappeared from Greenabella, Discussed getting Huntsman Tioxide involved if appropriate on their land as the organisation are very supportive in managing their land for biodiversity. But we need to ensure we have a mechanism in place for dispatching before we contact them.

### **Redcar and Cleveland**

*We didn't talk about this as we no longer have any Redcar and Cleveland staff. However there are some semi-rural populations around Leven and Guisborough and as far as we know no recordings of mink.*

### **Best practice and legal issues**

A discussion was held on trapping and method of dispatching and if it was a requirement to dispatch in situ.

### **Position statement**

Toby felt that it would be beneficial to have a position statement from the TVBP on mink as he is frequently asked what the situation was and what the conservation organisations were doing about it. Everyone agreed. This could be simply and sensitively worded. Kenny mentioned that the Wildlife Trusts have a position statement that would be useful for us to draw upon. Katy noted that it was vital that our position statement did not deter other people from taking action thinking that we were doing it all, it needs as many people and also have the staff who are capable of dispatching to the guidelines.

Kenny to send position statement to Sue (Action done)

Sue to write and circulate around Soggy Group. (sent with minutes)

*Note: I have spoken to Malcolm Steel, once we have agreed something he has asked me to summarise our discussions and the statement to send for steering group meeting . The meeting is on 14 July and papers are sent out and papers need to be ready by the 6th July so we will need to move quickly.*

### **Recording and monitoring**

Members of the TVBP and participating landowners to record all mink sightings and numbers trapped and dispatched to be recorded so we have a up-to-date picture of where mink are and how successful we are being. Toby suggested that as the TBC have been mentioning mink sightings on their website that it would be worthwhile if their members could record mink sightings.

Kenny to prepare a form and Sue to send around the TVBP partnership. (done)

Sue to create page on TVBP website with position statement and downloadable survey form.

Sue to email survey form and text to Jamie at TBC

### **Support from statutory agencies**

Katy highlighted that whilst the Environment Agency are not able to provide finances that they were very supportive of efforts for coordinating mink control, Mike Leakey had also emailed Sue prior to meeting to express similar and to keep him up to date.

### **NWL**

Noted that NWL are a very supportive member of partnership and committed to nature conservation. Sue to liaise with Ben and Allan about recording any mink sightings on their landholdings and taking action if needed

Sue to discuss with Ben and Allan.

### **Possible assistance from BASC**

Sue had circulated a case study in the south west where the BASC had worked with wildlife agencies on mink control. Karen from the Durham Wildlife Trust also had a local partnership in a similar project. Kenny is a member of the BASC and so a useful link

Kenny: Follow up contacts with BASC to explore opportunities for partnership working

Sue: Find out from Karen at DWT more about their partnership with the BASC and how this worked.

## **2. Matters arising from previous minutes**

Toby will look at the draft reed beds HAP actions section

## **3. Still water bodies criteria for Local Sites in the Tees Valley**

Ian Bond and Rachel Jackson have been working on the criteria using the priority ponds under the national ponds habitat action plan as a starting point. This is far from straightforward. Ian ran through the draft criteria that covers wetland plant species and invertebrates and bats. We already have criteria for amphibians. A criterion for water bodies known to be feeding areas for four or more species of bat or for a BAP bat species. One of the issues is Crookfoot reservoir which at the moment does not have to meet any of our local site criteria. Agreed that the paper should be taken to the next steering group meeting.

Ian to finalise paper for TVBAP steering group

## **4. Other updates**

Middlesbrough Becks project is about to start. Funding from Access to Nature fund. Three posts will be advertised this week.

Thank you to Stockton Council for providing the meeting venue.

**Date of next meeting: Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> October at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre.**