

Tees Valley bio-update

The newsletter of the Tees Valley Biodiversity partnership

Issue 3

Autumn 2007

The Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

covers the former County of Cleveland under the unitary authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland plus Stockton-on Tees.

It is a plan of action for threatened habitats and species in our area. It is carried out by the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership, which is a partnership of local organisations and people working together to benefit our wildlife.

There are loads of great projects happening, and lots of opportunities for you to get involved.

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Welcome to the third newsletter of the Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Partnership and the first one in a web based email format.

We hope this will keep everyone involved or interested in biodiversity within the Tees Valley and up to date with the progress towards the Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The newsletter is also an opportunity to share ideas and to promote opportunities for involvement in the actions of the plan.

Communication is the key to the Biodiversity Partnership working in the Tees Valley, so please share this newsletter by emailing it to anyone whom you think will be interested, from those working in public authorities, businesses, community groups or volunteers. Share your biodiversity news and actions by contacting the Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator: santrobus@teeswildlife.org.uk

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Demystifying the "Biodiversity Duty"

All public and local authorities now have a duty to conserve biodiversity as part of their everyday actions and procedures. In 2006 the 'Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act' (NERC Act) came into force. Section 40 states that every public body must have regard to biodiversity, as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of their functions. The new "Biodiversity Duty" relates to all public authorities and their statutory undertakers, and it means that they must make efforts to conserve biodiversity in all of their activities.

What will the new duty mean?

Public authorities will need to ensure that biodiversity is at the heart of its organisation; that all departments, every team and every individual is aware of the duty. Defra in its guidance to public authorities, highlights four main areas where biodiversity should be incorporated: policies and strategies; management of land and buildings; planning; infrastructure and development; and education, advice and awareness.

Helping to deliver the biodiversity duty

The Tees Valley BAP Partnership is working to help public and local authorities to demystify their biodiversity duty. The Tees Valley Biodiversity coordinator is available to give presentations and advice. Funds, available from Natural England, are enabling the production of a post card, plus an information guide, for public authority staff and members.



Defra have published comprehensive guidance for public and local authorities on implementing the Biodiversity Duty.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/index.htm>

or email

defra@cambertown.com

for copies.

Handy guide

An excellent clear and brief accessible summary of the duty, with ideas for action, has been published by the UK Wildlife Trusts' head office. The free 6 page leaflet draws on existing good practice and will be a source of inspiration for local authorities to consider new and additional ways of integrating biodiversity conservation throughout their activities. Copies are available from Tees Valley Wildlife Trust santrobust@teeswildlife.org or download from <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/index.php?>

Tees biodiversity - on line plans

A new Tees Valley Biodiversity website is being planned. This is envisaged as containing information about, or links to, everything you might want to know relating to Tees Valley Biodiversity and Biodiversity Action planning.

The web site is being designed to appeal to a wide audience, from public enquires through to information for businesses and public authorities, with a detailed archive for biodiversity partners. When complete the website will be regularly updated and should be a valuable resource for anyone working on, or interested in, biodiversity in the Tees Valley.

If you have ideas on what type of information you would like to see on the website, please do contact Sue Antrobus.



Tees Valley BAP marches forward

Biodiversity Action Plans are living documents, regularly reviewed and updated, with targets changed and new ones added in response to the reality of changing conditions on the ground. The Tees Valley BAP was published in 1999. Priority habitats and species were selected and action plans produced. These were updated in 2004. We now have 23 'Habitat Action Plans' (HAPs) and 12 'Species Action Plans' (SAPs). Each has aims and objectives, targets and specific actions.

Eight years on, the Tees Valley HAPs and SAPs are now being reviewed to take account of new priorities, changes in legislation plus political and economic climate - locally, regionally and nationally. This will mean that they remain an effective focus in setting and guiding our joint conservation action in the Tees Valley.

The steering group of the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership is achieving this by having a rolling five year programme of updating individual plans. It starts this Autumn with 6 plans, two from each of the three action groups:- Urban, Rural, Coastal/wetland. This first round of action plan reviews will include industrial brownfield sites, hedgerows and unimproved grassland.

Successful heathland restoration on Eston Moor

101 acres of Eston Moor were declared as a Local Nature Reserve in May 2007 by Redcar and Cleveland Council. Thanks to a higher level 'Environmental Stewardship Agreement' with Defra, Site Manager David Spencer has been able to restore the site to a rich mosaic of lowland heathland habitats.

The patchwork of dry and wet heath, acidic grassland, wetlands, scrub and woodland is being maintained by selectively removing gorse and silver birch. The extent of bracken is also being reduced. Bracken is a particular problem in early spring when the dead fronds of the previous year's growth form a thick thatch that is vulnerable to arson attacks.

Heathland (both lowland and upland) is one of Tees Valley's priority habitats. In the Tees Valley it is mainly restricted to the Redcar and Cleveland areas on Eston Hills plus parts of the North York Moors. It is a habitat that is nationally declining, with lowland heath being one of the UK's most threatened habitats. This makes the favourable habitat conditions on Eston Moor good news at both a local and national level.

David Spencer is happy to share best practice experience on heathland management: david_spencer@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk



Heritage trees vital to biodiversity

The threats facing ancient trees were discussed at a meeting of the 'Tees Valley Urban Action Group' and have grown into a successful two year campaign - "Trees of the Tees". The Tees Forest were awarded £50,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to actively involve people of all ages, in recording and celebrating our heritage trees.

Heritage trees include ancient or "veteran" trees, plus other special trees. These may have a name, or have a landscape, local or other notable significance, such as a commemorative tree or one planted by someone well known.

A post card survey was launched in Spring 2007 which is already revealing some interesting findings. For example, there is a historic parkland ash in Norton, Stockton. Over the summer there was a series of events throughout the Tees Valley, during which families and children were inspired by magical stories about trees. These are being followed by seed gathering events this autumn.

To spread understanding on how to care for ancient trees, The Tees Forest held a seminar in September for countryside and park managers, tree officers and local groups. Ted Green, President of the Ancient Tree Forum, shared his experience of managing ancient trees at Windsor.

Reservoirs of biodiversity

Ancient trees are incredibly important for biodiversity. A sustainable population of ancient trees in the landscape is vital for the specialised wildlife dependent upon them. Once the wood has started to decay, it becomes the habitat of other creatures such as rare insects and a succession of different fungi. It is believed that many of the rare species associated with these old trees can only colonise new trees if they are within easy reach, plus being the right age, or in the right condition. Nowhere else in Northern Europe can as many large ancient trees be found in such remarkable concentrations. This gives us a special responsibility to care for them

Taking action

By prioritising veteran trees within the Tees Valley BAP, the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership can look at ways of conserving this vital biodiversity resource. PPS9 requires planners to consider protection of ancient woods and veteran trees from further loss and damage while some trees are protected by tree orders.

First, we need to know the sites of our ancient trees. The Trees of the Tees Survey, along with others in North East England, will be integrated into a national 'state of the art', living on line data base, drawn up by the Woodland Trust and the Ancient Tree Forum. It will map and monitor our ancient trees. The Woodland Trust plans to use this data base to support their call to create a new designation of 'historic tree' in order to protect them from development pressures; also to make changes to 'Tree Preservation Order' legislation so that dying and dead ancient trees are eligible for protection. Records in the Tees Valley are sparse. Let's change this by encouraging everyone to put our trees on the map!



Contact Debbie Scott at the Tees Forest for information on the Heritage Trees of the Tees at debbie.scott@teesforest.org.

To get involved with the National Ancient Tree Hunt log on to:

www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk

Useful publications

Ancient tree guide No.1 Trees and Farming

A Planners Guide to ancient woods and trees

Both download from Woodland Trust website

www.woodland-trust.org.uk/publications/

Natural England on line publications provide a suite of veteran tree publications including risk assessment of ancient trees plus practical management advice and survey guidance. <http://naturalengland.twoten.com/>

NaturalEnglandShop/

Wildlife rich historic hedgerows revealed in Redcar and Cleveland

The results of a 20 month investigation into the hedgerows of the borough of Redcar and Cleveland, by the Wildflower Ark, have just been published.

The project, funded by the Heritage Lottery, involved three community groups and over 30 individual volunteers. They carried out hedgerow surveying and learned about the hedgerows in the area through exhibitions, guided walks and talks.

A mammoth 1500 hedgerows were surveyed and extensive historic research was undertaken, with the results plotted on to a GIS system. This has revealed that the borough contains hedgerows of considerable heritage and biodiversity value. In particular, a third of all hedgerows surveyed are rich in tree and scrub species and a quarter contain woodland ground flora species.

Hedgerow partners

The interest in hedgerows raised by the Wildflower Ark's research has resulted in an active new 'Tees Valley Hedgerow Forum'. This is a partnership of individuals and organisations who have an interest and/or responsibility in the conservation and management of hedgerows. It has been created to enable the sharing of information and expertise, and allow the pursuit of practical solutions to hedgerow-related issues.

At the next meeting (21st November at Billingham Beck) we shall be getting to grips with producing a new Hedgerow Action Plan for the Tees Valley LBAP. To find out more contact Jessica Harrison at wildflowerark@hotmail.com



Download the 'Heritage Hedgerows of Redcar and Cleveland' report and a guided walks leaflet from www.wildflowerark.org.uk

A copy of the GIS shapefile containing all data collected during this project can be obtained by emailing Jessica Harrison at wildflowerark@hotmail.com

Hedge Cutting: Answers to 18 common questions is published by Natural England. Copies available free by ringing 0870 1206466 or download from <http://naturalengland.twoten.com/NaturalEnglandShop/>



Browse with BARS

You can keep up to date with progress on Biodiversity Action Plans by browsing the BARS website.

BARS is an information system that supports the planning, monitoring and reporting requirements of national, local and company BAPs. It also allows users to learn about the progress being made with local and national BAPs.

If you register as a BARS user you can also produce simple to view reports and can input data on the activities of your organisation towards the Tees Valley BAP.

Having up to date information on BARS from the Tees Valley is vital. It enables us to measure progress against our biodiversity targets and actions and is used by Natural England to report on the country's biodiversity. Funding organisations such as SITA are increasingly asking for data to be entered onto BARS. Tees Valley Biodiversity co-ordinator Sue Antrobus is working to enter data and needs up to date details of progress and activity from all the biodiversity partners.

Due to popular demand a half day training course on BARS is planned. To book your place, to register as a user, or simply to find out more about getting your work on to BARS, contact Sue Antrobus santrobus@teeswildlife.org Take a look at BARS on <https://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/>

Practical solutions for grazing biodiversity grassland

Flexigraze is a regional grazing co-operative. It is a group of conservation site managers who, by pooling resources, can help to make specialist grazing of conservation sites more attractive to farmers and graziers throughout the region.

It works by land managers joining and using the partnership to achieve grazing on areas that would benefit from it and for which they are unable to find suitable graziers at present. For more information contact Stephen Comber, the Regional Grazing Coordinator, at stephen.comber@necf.org.uk

Middle Beck management plan goes to community consultation

The Environment Agency, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and Middlesbrough Council are working together to draw up a new beck side management plan for Middle Beck. The purpose of the plan is to put in place a grass cutting regime which will be beneficial and enhance wildlife, but also reduce concerns from residents about the appearance of the area. The plan is in draft form for comment and will be put to the community later in the year in order to start work in the spring



A Breeding Bird Atlas for Cleveland is nearly hatched

The Teesmouth Bird Club has completed entering all their field notes into a computerized data base for the forthcoming publication of the "Breeding Birds of Cleveland". Printing is easily anticipated for 2008. This atlas, showing both distribution and abundance, will provide a vital benchmark for monitoring populations of priority BAP and other species of breeding birds in Cleveland. In the meantime the 'Cleveland Bird Report for 2006' has been published and is now available from John Fletcher, 43, Glaisdale Avenue, Middlesbrough TS5 7PF

Why not take a look at their web site

<http://www.teesmouthbc.com>

Recorders required for British Bird Atlas

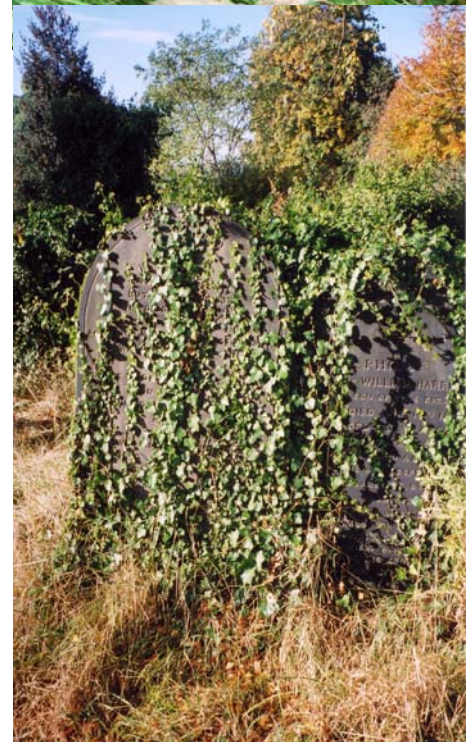
If you need an excuse to go bird watching, why not join the Teesmouth Bird Club and make a valuable contribution to field work for the National Bird Atlas 2007. The British Trust for Ornithology will be using these records to produce maps of distribution and relative abundance for all bird species breeding and wintering in Britain and Ireland.

Vic Fairbrother is recruiting volunteers to provide the data for the Cleveland 10km squares. For more information contact Vic Fairbrother at www.birdatlas.net

Churchyards and Cemeteries contribute to biodiversity

Churchyards and Cemeteries can be closely mown manicured areas or attractive places where nature can gain a foothold. The Tees Valley BAP recognises the importance of sacred ground as a wildlife habitat in its 'Churchyards and Cemeteries Habitat Action Plan'. We have two sites that are local nature reserves - Linthorpe Cemetery in Middlesbrough and Spion Kop in Hartlepool. 2007 has seen further enhancements to churchyard wildlife. The 'Friends of North Cemetery' in Redcar have just received an award from the Northern Echo for environmental improvements. These have included planting nectar rich flowerbeds and installing bird boxes with the local authority's Tree Officer. Owls have returned to Spion Kop where they hunt for the small mammals that live in areas where the grass has been left long. At Linthorpe Cemetery, ecologically sensitive tree management continues. They employ specialist foresters and traditional horse power.

If you would like advice on how to make a churchyard or cemetery a better place for wildlife, whilst maintaining it for visitors, contact Tees Valley Biodiversity Coordinator Sue Antrobus at santrobus@teeswildlife.org



Clean Becks campaign raises profile of Middlesbrough's Becks

The Environment Agency's 'Clean Becks' project, working in partnership with Middlesbrough Council and Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, has been working to provide a richer environment for wildlife plus recreational opportunities for local people along the town's becks. Middlesbrough's becks are important wildlife corridors. The water vole, which is a protected species and declining nationally, is thriving in urban Middlesbrough. Also, kingfishers and herons can be regularly seen.

Following the transfer of flood risk management responsibility from the local authority to the Environment Agency for some becks (those classed as critical ordinary water courses), the Environment Agency saw this as an opportunity for them to take an active role in developing environmental improvement schemes.

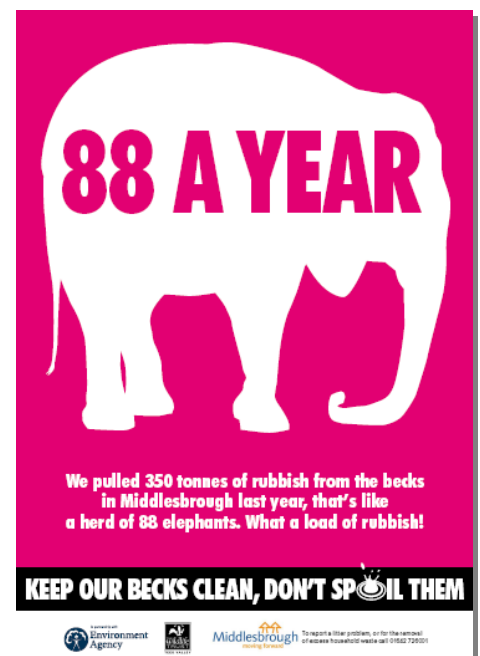
A steering group was established to support and advise on the project. Technical consultants carried out a scoping report to help identify improvement opportunities and in October 2006 they produced an initial report that highlighted the beck locations with potential for enhancement.

Communicating with local residents

Communications are an important aspect of this project. Residents have been targeted at the same time as raising the profile of the Environment Agency in the area. The Agency commissioned a 'door-to-door perception survey' of 1005 residents in May 2007 in order to ascertain the resident's attitudes toward the becks. Findings showed an overwhelming dissatisfaction with the poor condition of the becks, a perception that they were polluted, plus some safety fears. The survey is being followed with a series of focus groups to creatively explore the desires of residents and the improvements they would like to see.

High profile campaign

A campaign focused on reducing waste and debris in the becks was launched, using eye-catching art work. Posters were distributed across Middlesbrough; postcards sent to houses in key areas; advertisements placed in the regional media and the Council's newsletter. The Clean Becks Campaign links directly with the agencies flood-risk management responsibilities because the blocking of trash screens by debris is the biggest potential cause of flooding in the beck valleys.



For information about the project contact Annie Zijlstra at annie.zijlstra@environment-agency.gov.uk

A full report of the public survey downloadable from www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/leisure-and-culture/parks-and-countryside/becks-and-beck-valleys/

Mixed fortunes of water voles on Teesside

Water voles are both a UK and a Tees Valley priority BAP species. Whilst water voles are thriving in some of Middlesbrough's Becks, according to a detailed survey by Kenny Crooks of the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust this summer, there is serious cause for concern in many other areas of the Tees Valley. The Northumbria Mammal group report no sightings this year from unusual haunts at Drinkfield Marsh in Darlington, nor along the Rockwell stretch of the River Skerne. In Hartlepool, there were no signs of water voles in their strongholds at Greatham Beck during surveys carried out by countryside warden Robert Smith. This follows a survey by student Emma Glisters in 2006, which showed water vole activity at only four of eleven sites where water voles had been recorded in 2002. Ian Bond, Ecologist with Hartlepool Council, fears that in Hartlepool this decline could be related to a colonisation by Mink, after sightings of them at Greatham Beck and Seaton Common.

It would seem that water voles are faring no better throughout the north east. A study commissioned by the Environment Agency in 2006 visited some 265 sites throughout the north east at, or near to, areas where water voles had been previously recorded. Of these only 39 still had water voles. In addition, the survey looked at 100 new sites that had suitable water vole habitat. Of these only five had water voles present.

Breeding birds are benefiting from wetland management at Saltholme

RSPB staff at the Saltholme International Reserve have been carrying out habitat management to benefit wetland birds. This autumn they are cutting 45Ha of wet grassland in the south of the reserve to create an ideal grassland structure for breeding Lapwing next spring. They are now able to finely tune the flow of water so that in 2008 they will, for the first time, be able to keep the wetland grassland area wetted throughout the bird breeding season. The main pool by the new visitors centre is under development and this winter a Sand Martin nesting bank and a bank suitable for Kingfishers are being constructed.

This year 420 pairs of Common Terns nested at Saltholme making it the largest on-shore colony in the North East. This was an increase on the 350 pairs that bred there in 2006. The numbers of Common Terns breeding at Saltholme now represents about 90% of the Teesmouth population and is monitored by Allan Snape at Northumbria Water, as part of a long term, on-going study. Apprentices at ConocoPhillips have built a small, but beautifully formed Dingy. This will allow reserve staff and volunteers to get out to the small islands and undertake important habitat work in order to create prime condition for the Common Terns when they return in spring. Contact Site Manager: David Braithwaite For more information at david.braithwaite@rspb.org.uk or visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/s/saltholme/index.asp>



National news

UK review of priority habitats and species

The long awaited 'UK Review of Priority Biodiversity Habitats and Species' has been published. This is the first full revision of the UK BAP list and now covers 1149 species and 65 habitats. This includes new priority species such as the house sparrow, grass snake and hedgehog. It also gives new priority habitats such as orchards.

The list has increased dramatically in its numbers since the original one was compiled. This is because the review involved a more rigorous analysis of a wider range of species and habitats, in particular less well known species such as invertebrates (235 new species) and lower plants (230 new species). Species and habitats are included in the list because they are internationally important, in rapid decline, or under serious threat.

'Conserving Biodiversity-The UK Approach' was published in 2007 by Defra on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Action Partnership. It sets out an updated strategic framework for conserving biodiversity in Britain and outlines the shared priorities of national BAPS.

'Biodiversity in your Pocket 2007' is a handy little guide full of charts, graphs and fascinating trends in wildlife conservation. The 18 indicators track the UK's progress against international biodiversity targets. This is the first time that a comprehensive set of biodiversity indicators has been published for the UK. Both publications are available from Defra <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/>



Dairy dates

Tees Valley BAP Action Groups

Urban Group: Tuesday 20th November 2007, 10am at the Jewish Prayer House, Linthorpe Cemetery, Middlesbrough.

Rural Group: Tuesday 11th December, 2007, 10.00am at Stewart Park, Middlesbrough.

Coastal & Wetland group: 19th January 2008, 10am at Billingham Beck Visitor Centre
Further details: santrobus@teeswildlife.org

ALGE (Association of Local Government Ecologists): Annual Conference "Working with and beyond NERC" Wednesday 28th November 2007, in London. Of particular interest to Local Authority Officers: <http://www.algae.org.uk>