



## Update Bulletin Number 3

September 2007

Welcome to the latest update bulletin from the North East Biodiversity Forum. This bulletin is intended to provide a digest of information relevant to biodiversity partners and I hope you will find the content useful. Please feel free to pass on copies to anyone else who think may find it of interest.

### UK Biodiversity Action Plan Revisions

Earlier this month the Government signed off a revised list of UK BAP priority habitats and species. The list now contains 1149 species and 65 habitats.

Among the new list contains a number of habitats and species of particular relevance to the North East, and now includes ponds, rivers, calaminarian grasslands, upland fens, flushes and swamps, and open habitats on previously developed land. Among the new priority species included on the list are common toad, dingy skipper butterfly, small pearl-bordered fritillary, hedgehog, pine marten and grass snake.

The list can be downloaded from the [UK BAP website](#).

### Biodiversity Duty

In May Defra published two sets of guidance on implementing the 'Biodiversity Duty' contained in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. One set of guidance is generic for all public authorities, while the other is aimed specifically at local authorities. Both guidance documents look at how organisations can incorporate biodiversity conservation into all of their functions. Copies of both documents are available to download from the [Defra website](#) or from the [publications section of the North East Biodiversity Forum website](#).

### Welcome to Flexi-graze

Flexi-graze, the regional conservation grazing cooperative, has been launched by the Regional Grazing Project. The cooperative aims to find grazing stock for site managers and to spread the risks associated with any loss of stock while on difficult sites.

The Regional Grazing Project will be organising a day visit on 16th October to look at three sites that demonstrate the different types of grazing issues encountered in the North East. The visit will also look at how Flexi-graze might help to address these problems.



For more information on Flexi-graze and the trip on the 16th October then contact Stephen Comber, the Regional Grazing Coordinator.  
Email: [Stephen.comber@necf.org.uk](mailto:Stephen.comber@necf.org.uk)

## **Changes to Habitats Regulations**

On 21 August an amendment to the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 ["The Habitats Regulations"] came into force. This has consequences for the licensing of European protected species (such as bats, great crested newt, otter and dormouse).

The changes remove a number of legal defenses that have previously existed for disturbance of European protected species (EPS) but the threshold above which a person will commit the offence of deliberately disturbing an EPS has been raised. Amongst the defences removed by the amendment is the 'dwelling house' defence for bats in houses.

The forestry and agricultural sectors are likely to be especially affected by the changes. Operators will need to consider the presence of EPS, or the risk of them being present on the site and follow good practice to minimise the possibility of committing an offence against an EPS. If they cannot avoid EPS then operators may need to apply for a license to remain within the law. This will involve conducting surveys, reading guidance, filling in the license application form and possibly obtaining professional advice.

Full details of the amendment and its implications can be viewed on the [Defra website](#).

## **North East Veteran Trees Group**

A North East Veteran Tree working group is being set up to coordinate work across the region on veteran, rare or heritage trees. For more information contact Andy Lees, the Durham BAP Implementation Officer on 0191 584 3122 or [andy Lees@durhambiodiversity.org.uk](mailto:andy Lees@durhambiodiversity.org.uk)

## **Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE)**

VONNE, Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE), is the regional Third Sector infrastructure organisation for North East England. It was set up to facilitate links between Third Sector groups across the whole of the North East Region with the key regional stakeholders. They promote the role and potential of the sector in regional matters.

VONNE are managed by the sector and seek to add value to important work already being undertaken by sector groups throughout the region and is not dominated by any particular sectional or geographic interest.

They aim to:

- inform the sector about issues impacting at the regional level;
- support the active involvement of the sector in regional and national developments;
- promote effective and beneficial partnerships within and between the sector and other sectors throughout the region;

- ensure that the sector receives the support that it requires to play a full role in regional developments;
- To advocate effectively for the sector at regional level to ensure that it is consulted and recognised as valuable in different policy areas across sectors

VONNE have recently refocused their areas of policy development whilst retaining their role in cross cutting issues, and will now focus on six broad areas:

- Communities
- Economic Regeneration (urban and rural)
- Environment and Climate Change
- Equalities
- Health and Social Care
- VCS Infrastructure and cross-cutting issues

Further information on our work can be found at their website [www.vonne.co.uk](http://www.vonne.co.uk)

Should you have any queries about the work of VONNE please feel free to contact John Main by telephone on 0191 233 2000 or via email [john@vonne.co.uk](mailto:john@vonne.co.uk).

### **What people really think about biodiversity**

A number of pieces of research have recently been published which throw light on how biodiversity is viewed by the British public.

The headline results from the [2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours Towards the Environment](#) were published by Defra last month and showed that, amongst other things, between 30 and 40 percent of people said that they had given a great deal or a fair amount of thought to biodiversity loss.

Defra have also recently also published a [research report into public understanding of ecosystem service and the natural environment](#). The research used focus groups (including one based in Newcastle) and contains interesting background information about how people view the importance of the natural environment. One of the less surprising conclusions of the report was that the public found many of the terms used by conservationists to be a barrier to understanding. For example: [The phrase] "Biodiversity was not understood, and even when explained was still not engaging. While respondents understood that 'variety is the spice of life' and, as such, biodiversity might be important, the term lacked any real sense of benefit without providing extensive detail (which they found too boring)."

The Wildlife Trusts have published the results of a survey into public attitude to the seas and their protection. The poll was conducted as part of their campaign for a Marine Bill. The results can be downloaded from the [Wildlife Trusts website](#).

The Biodiversity Forum is currently commissioning its own research into public attitudes to biodiversity in the North East. The results of this should be due in November.

## Conferences

Two upcoming conferences in the region may be of interest to Biodiversity Forum members:

**Save our Red Squirrels: A Conference to Promote Working Together** will be held at Stannington Village Hall on 5th October. The conference is organised by Castle Morpeth Borough Council and the Save our Squirrels project. For further details and conference booking contact Jane Taylor at Castle Morpeth Council. Email: [scrutiny@castlemorpeth.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@castlemorpeth.gov.uk)

**Wild About the North Pennines: Encouraging Tourism in the AONB**, a conference organised by the North Pennines AONB in conjunction with the County Durham Tourism Partnership, Cumbria Tourism and Northumberland Tourism will be held on 6th November in Teesdale. The event is aimed at the tourism industry, tourism support providers and environmental or conservation organisations. For more information contact Paul Everson (Office Manager) at the North Pennines AONB Partnership. Email: [paul@northpenninesaonb.org.uk](mailto:paul@northpenninesaonb.org.uk)

## Funding update

Enriching Nature fund: the closing date for the next round of Enriching Nature is 14 September, for the SITA Board meeting in December.

SITA have now set application deadlines for 2008:

20th December 2007 (Board meeting 20th March 2008)

27th March 2008 (Board meeting 17th June 2008)

25th June 2008 (Board meeting 16th September)

More information is available on the [SITA Trust website](#).

British Ecological Society: The closing date for the next round of School Grounds for Practical Ecological Science grant (which provides up to £1000 to support initiatives to enhance school grounds as ideal places to teach practical ecology) is 31st January 2008.

The BES provide a number of small education grants for teachers involved in primary, secondary or tertiary education, including grants for field equipment and site visits. Details of all these grants can be viewed on the [BES website](#).

## Local BAP update

The Durham Biodiversity Partnership has published revised and updated habitat and species action plans on its [website](#).

Sue Antrobus has started work as the new coordinator for the Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plan. Sue was previously working for Middlesbrough Council.

## **Defra/LGA Joint Environmental Prospectus**

Defra and the Local Government Association have published a Joint Environmental Prospectus which sets out a shared commitment to "work together to instil a strategic approach to the environment." The prospectus identifies three environmental aims: 1) tackle climate change; 2) protect the natural environment and resources; and 3) improve the local environment; and sets out how local authorities can take leadership in addressing these issues.

A copy of the prospectus can be downloaded from the [LGA website](#).

## **New information on the North East Biodiversity website**

The following have been added to the Download Publications section of the North East Biodiversity Forum website:

[Valuing the Benefits of Biodiversity](#) - a report from Economics and Funding Strategic Implementation Group of the England Biodiversity Strategy

[Conserving Biodiversity in a Changing Climate](#): guidance on building capacity to adapt - Defra/UK BAP Partnership publication on the role of biodiversity in climate change adaptation.

The following links have also been added:

[Neighbourhoods Green](#) - A project aimed at highlighting the importance of greenspaces to residence of social housing and to raise the quality of their design, management and safe use within social housing providers.

[The BioDiversity Code](#) - Short animated spoof of the Da Vinci Code from Countdown 2010. The film promotes the importance of biodiversity and leads on to a web page containing some useful case-studies.

A new links page for [Other Environmental Organisations](#) (i.e. organisations who are not members of the Biodiversity Forum) has also been added.

## **Update on North East Biodiversity Forum**

New Chair for Biodiversity Forum: At the next meeting of the Regional Biodiversity Group Andrew Smith (Government Office North East) will be stepping down as Chair of the Biodiversity Forum after three years in the role. The Biodiversity Forum has increased in both size and activity during these three years. Following on from nominations from the Biodiversity Forum membership, Mike Pratt of the Northumberland Wildlife Trust will take over as Chair at the end of September.

### Marine and Coastal Group:

The Biodiversity Forum's Marine and Coastal group has submitted responses on the recent [Defra consultation on coastal access in England](#) and on the Government's [Marine Bill consultation](#). Both of these responses can be viewed at the Biodiversity Forum website.

The Group is also currently working on an event for early 2008 to promote the NERC Biodiversity Duty to marine and coastal public bodies.

Regional Biodiversity Group: The Regional Biodiversity Group is the steering group for the North East Biodiversity Forum and has a core membership of around twelve people, selected to represent the full range of interests within the wider Forum. A number of open seats are made available at each meeting so that members of the wider Biodiversity Forum can attend and take part if they wish. If you would like to come along to one of the future meetings then please contact [Nick Brodin](#). The next two meetings will be held on September 27th (at which communications will feature on the agenda) and on December 5th.

### **Update on regional plans and strategies**

Regional Spatial Strategy: The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is the regional planning guidance for the North East. It sets out principles and policies that local planning documents, such as Local Development Frameworks should adhere to. A consultation has recently closed on the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and on the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) of the RSS. The changes were made in response to the Inspector's report from last year's Enquiry in Public. The Appropriate Assessment is required by the Habitats Regulations and examines the potential impacts of the RSS on European nature sites (i.e. Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation).

The Biodiversity Forum worked closely with Natural England, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and the RSPB in compiling its response. [This can be viewed at the Biodiversity Forum website.](#)

Overall the Secretary of State's proposed changes strengthened the document and the Forum particularly welcomed the inclusion of new policies on climate change, Green Infrastructure and air quality. The main concern was that not all of the changes recommended by the AA and SA were included by the Secretary of State.

Integrated Regional Spatial Strategy: The Integrated Regional Framework (IRF) for the North East is the overarching framework for economic, social and environmental development in the region, and is used to inform the production of other key regional strategies such as the Regional Spatial Strategy, Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Housing Strategy and many others. It is also widely used throughout the region in the preparation of smaller local plans.

The IRF is currently being revised and a consultation draft of the new document was published in August. Full details of the consultation can be downloaded from [www.sustaine.com](http://www.sustaine.com). The closing date for comments is Wednesday 7th November 2007. The Regional Biodiversity Group will be submitting a response on behalf of the North East Biodiversity Forum. One initial concern is that the revised IRF Appraisal Matrix (the tool used to help assess the impacts of plans, programmes and policies) does not contain any questions relating to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity or the natural environment.

There will be a joint meeting of the North East Biodiversity Forum and the North East Environment Forum to discuss the IRF revision. This will be held on September 27 at the Environment Agency offices in Newcastle between 12.30 and 13.30 (with lunch provided from 12.10). This is open to all Biodiversity



Forum members but if you would like to attend then please let [Nick Brodin](#) know in advance so that the Environment Agency can be informed of numbers.

Regional Climate Change Action Plan: A workshop was held in July to form the regional climate change partnership. As a result of this workshop a number of smaller working groups have been set up to develop individual strands of a regional Climate Change Action Plan. This includes a Natural Environment working group which contains representation from Natural England, the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts amongst other. It is anticipated that the regional Climate Change Action Plan will be launched in March 2008. For more information about the plan contact Adrian Hilton, the Regional Climate Change Coordinator. Email: [adrian.hilton@sustaine.com](mailto:adrian.hilton@sustaine.com)

North East Strategy for the Environment (NESE): The NESE document is currently undergoing revision by a sub-group of the North East Environment Forum following on from the consultation held earlier in the 2007. A final version of the document is expected by the end of the year.

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