

Winter 2009/10
Volume 2 Issue 2

This newsletter is aimed at anyone in the Cheshire region with an interest in biodiversity including site rangers, planners, conservation staff, species recorders, local community groups, families and individuals.

The Cheshire region Biodiversity News is produced two times a year.

The Value of Biodiversity UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference 2009

The 7th Annual UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference took place at the University of York on Wednesday 7th and Thursday 8th October 2009. For this year only, the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference was combined with the English Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Seminar.

The programme, amongst other things, covered the weight to be attached to biodiversity valuation in any successor to the 2010 target; valuing biodiversity within an ecosystem approach; and how to incorporate valuation, scientific and social evidence into our delivery. Representatives of the four countries also provided updates on progress to conserve the species and habitats afforded conservation priority under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. For details go to www.keystone-group.co.uk/biodiversity.

Inside this issue:

UK News	1
Local and Regional News	2
Winter recording	3
Local Projects	4
Events	10

amphibian and reptile
conservation



Froglife and The Herpetological Conservation Trust (The HCT) have announced their intention to merge.

The new organisation will be called the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust and will continue the range of activities currently undertaken by Froglife and the HCT, while providing a stronger basis for conserving amphibians and reptiles in the future.

BARS Reporting Round 2008

As part of the 2008 UK BAP reporting round local biodiversity partnerships and lead partners of national plans were asked to answer a number of specific questions. The data was analysed and used for the UK and country level reports. All of the responses provided through BARS as part of the 2008 reporting exercise are available to download at: <http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/news/details.asp?X=55>

In summary, 126 LBAPs (73%) responded to the reporting round. The proportion of habitats and species with adequate monitoring is still low at 13%, whereas the proportion of species with adequate monitoring is 44%. The two major constraints to delivering LBAP's were lack of funding and inadequate research or survey information.

Summary results given in the presentation by Robin Wynde (RSPB) at the UKBAP Conference stated that since 1994, specific targets, plans and responsibility made a positive difference for some species and habitats but overall, there has been limited progress since 2005. Lead Partners and LBAP co-ordinators have provided much valuable information and these results will be use at a country level to guide improved delivery.

Irish Sea Marine Conservation Zones

The Irish Sea Conservation Zones are a project to help secure a healthy and productive future for the coast and waters of the Irish Sea. Over the next few years parts of the Irish Sea will be given further environmental protection. We don't yet know where the protected areas will be. The users and interest groups of the Irish Sea will recommend which areas should be protected, and what form that protection should take.

Anyone who can help identify which parts of the Irish Sea should be protected, including people who might benefit or lose out, have an important role to play. The process is open to all views and opinions, and people from all sectors.

To find out more visit www.irishseaconservation.org.uk.

Fifth Otter Survey of England 2009

Seven years on from the last national otter survey we were hopeful that otter coverage in England had improved. Volunteers across Cheshire helped support the Environment Agency to survey bridges for otter signs.

Ten bridges were surveyed in each 10km square throughout October and November 2009. Results for Cheshire were encouraging showing that otters were present in 48% of the 10km squares.



Otter spraint on the Trent and Mersey Canal

CrBP Small Projects Grant Scheme

The CrBP Small Projects Grant Scheme, funded by a Service Level Agreement with Cheshire West & Chester Council and Cheshire East Council, was re-launched in Autumn 2009 following previous successful rounds of the grant scheme.

The 2009/10 successful projects were the Nantwich Riverside Wetland Biodiversity Project, the Norley Hedgerow Project, the Wirral Barn Owl Nest Box Project, the Church Wood Hedgerow Project, and the Norley Orchard Project. Projects will be taking place over winter with final project reports due in March 2010.



Cheshire's Changing Climate CrBP Conference Oct 2009

The fourth Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership conference discussed the affect of climate change upon the region. Presentations were given by the Mersey Forest, Natural England, Environment Agency and Manchester University. Workshops included the value of peatland, green roofs, the Regional Delivery Plan and woodland Green Infrastructure. Future implications to the direction of biodiversity conservation in the region were considered. Together, with a taste of local produce, the event proved to be interesting and informative.

Thanks to the speakers for very informative presentations and workshops and thanks to everyone for attending. If you wish to view the presentations please visit www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/useful-resources/index.html where you will also find two of the workshop presentations.

'Cheshire's Changing Climate'

Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership
Conference 2009

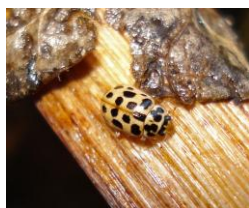


www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk

North West Shoreline Management Plan 2 Consultation

Working with others, the Coastal Group has been pulling together plans for how we think the North West England and North Wales coast should be managed over the next 100 years. They need your views and knowledge to make sure that the final plan sets out the right course of action for people, their homes, business and the environment. For more information and to comment on the plans go to www.mycoastline.org.

The closing date for consultation responses is 14th February 2010.



The Ladybirds of Cheshire

Cheshire may seem an unlikely candidate for being one of the more species diverse counties for

ladybirds in the UK, but the data held by rECOrd and the NBN Gateway suggest otherwise. In fact of the UK's 26 species of 'true' ladybird, Cheshire has records of at least 22, most of which are readily found with a little effort.

Ladybirds are amongst our most charismatic invertebrates and make an ideal study group in which to involve the general public. To this end I am currently in the process of building up the recording effort for ladybirds over the next three years. I intend to do this by utilising the efforts of an army of potential volunteers and educational establishments, with the intention of producing a Cheshire atlas of ladybird distribution.

Even the commonest of species show large holes in their known distribution, which can only be due to a lack of recording, the project will hopefully put this right and engage and inspire a whole new generation of recorders into the bargain.

One of the great advantages of studying this group of invertebrates is that many species can be found with minimal effort even in the winter months.

Below you will find a table indicating the best tactics and habitats for a selection of species.

Several species have been omitted because their winter habits are either unknown or their presence in the recording area is in doubt.

rECOrd has a validation list and a photo gallery for the ladybirds of Cheshire viewable on its website www.record-lrc.co.uk/, some of the rare species require a photo ID, or in a few cases the retention of a specimen may be essential, to get a record accepted. Thankfully in most cases the species are common and easy to identify. If you have a digital image of a ladybird that you would like help in identifying please send it to the email address below.

If you would like to become involved in the Cheshire Ladybird Recording Project please contact Jeff Clarke (Cheshire County Recorder for Ladybirds).

Email: jeffclarkeecology@sky.com,
Telephone: 01925 790753.

Jeff Clarke
Jeff Clarke Ecology



Species	Wintering Sites	Search Methodology
24 Spot Ladybird	Low herbage in rich grassland, preference for grass tussocks.	Tease apart tussocks away from areas liable to excessive flooding.
Adonis Ladybird	Plant litter in free draining areas.	Sieving leaf and plant litter.
Water Ladybird	Between leaves and stems of typha and phragmites	Carefully open furled leaf where it abuts the stem
Larch Ladybird	In bark crevices, notably on Scot's Pine	Careful searching of bark crevices or beating low pine branches
2 spot Ladybird	In buildings, Gorse, tree trunks, under bark etc.	Visual searches well above ground level
10 Spot Ladybird	Plant litter, Gorse, beech nuts and on Scot's Pine.	Beat Pine and sieving plant litter.
7 Spot Ladybird	Gorse and Scot's Pine other evergreen plants.	Beating.
11 Spot ladybird	Plant litter and evergreen plants.	Beating.
Hieroglyphic Ladybird	Gorse and Broom	Beating.
Cream-streaked Ladybird	Scot's Pine between buds and bark crevices.	Beating.
Orange Ladybird	Scot's Pine, Sycamore, Beech, Gorse.	Beating and visual searches.
18 Spot Ladybird	Crown of Scot's Pine.	Search recent windblown pines.
22 Spot ladybird	Dense vegetation close to ground and evergreen hedges e.g. Box.	Beating hedges.
Kidney Spot Ladybird	Close to the base of sallows, birch and poplar.	Visual searches especially near waterside sallows.
Pine Ladybird	Scot's Pine and Gorse	Beating

Photos:

Left: Water Ladybird by Jeff Clarke,
Right: Eighteen spot Ladybird by Jeff Clarke
Page | 3

Cheshire Green Shoots

As a Biodiversity officer for the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) one of the most common questions I get asked is "how can shooting and conservation go hand in hand?"

Green Shoots, the beginning.

It all started in July 2000 when BASC launched the Green Shoots programme as a Biodiversity Action Plan for the shooting community. BASC wanted to highlight the work being done by shooters and ensure that through a co-ordinated approach shooting could contribute enormously to meeting BAP targets across the Counties.

So how does it work?

Cheshire was the first county to get a full time BASC Green Shoots officer in 2003. One of the first jobs to do was survey members in the county asking them where they shot. It also asked them about species and habitats they had on the area of land, all of which were found on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for Cheshire. The results were astounding. Out of a total of nearly 800 recipients over a third (34%) returned the form, providing valuable information on 500 parcels of land throughout the county which equated to around 27% of Cheshire.



Cheshire Green Shoots officer Ben Gregory with a BASC member deploying a mink raft on the River Gowy

The survey enabled the project officer to select specific members for a project, depending on the species or habitats relevant to the LBAP targets they were working on at the time. It also



The British Association for Shooting and Conservation

provided a very valuable resource to partner organisations such as the Wildlife Trust in the form access onto land that may have otherwise been inaccessible.

With a list of six priority species and two priority habitats identified in the Cheshire LBAP we thought the shooting community would be best suited to working with, it was time to get out into the field and make good use of the 27% of the county we could gain access through BASC Green Shoots members.

After just over two years in post as Green Shoots Cheshire project officer I'm pleased to say we've made some fantastic progress. Some of the successes include:

- seeing water voles return back to a section of the River Gowy after a programme of targeted mink control
- the planting of nearly 16,000 square metres of native broadleaf woodland and over 150 metres of new hedgerows through funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund
- the building of two artificial otter holts on shoots with another two planned for the new year thanks to funding from Chester Zoo and Shell UK
- erecting a further 45 dormouse monitoring tubes on shoots across the county
- engaging 10 shoots in the county in the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trusts Grey partridge counting scheme

Green Shoots; the future.

Those people involved in countryside sports generally have empathy with the countryside and its wildlife which can be turned into active assistance. Biodiversity thrives where it is important to people. Therefore, with the help and direction of a Green Shoots officer in the biodiversity process, the shooting community can make even more headway towards meeting LBAP targets in Cheshire.

Ben Gregory
Cheshire Biodiversity Project Officer, BASC

FWAG Water Vole Project

Operation Delivery's reduction of riparian maintenance from low-risk, rural catchments will mean landowners, the majority of which are farmers, are responsible for the maintenance of watercourses on their land. Working in partnership with us, FWAG have carried out farm visits and provided riparian maintenance advice, and encouraged water vole habitat creation through Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). This has included the installation of electric fences to reduce cattle poaching and damage to water vole habitat and our own flood bank assets.

In the UK, water voles have suffered a catastrophic decline in the last 25 years, but they are thriving in some South Area catchments. We do not wish to see inappropriate riparian habitat management, which may have an adverse impact on these species.



Buffer strips on Back Brook

This project will therefore seek to safeguard existing populations of water vole and enhance their habitat in Cheshire.

The project will also benefit other protected species and habitats such as otter, lesser silver water beetle and reedbed.



Buffer strips on the Gow to prevent cattle poaching, siltation, and safeguard water vole habitat

Several farmers across Cheshire have reacted positively to the farm visits, and we are hopeful of an increase in HLS applications. This will result in farmers receiving payments from Defra to create water vole habitat and enhance floodplain grazing marsh and wet grassland. This may also have flood risk benefits too, such as increased flood water storage.

Duncan Revell, Biodiversity Officer
Environment Agency



Implementing Ecological Networks in Cheshire

Habitats and Hillforts is a Landscape Partnership Scheme, (LPS) having grown from the wider Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership.

Habitats and Hillforts is a geographically focused implementation phase of the planning and design work carried out under the European Union LIFE- Environment Programme. The concept of ecological networks relate to the human environment and its development. Changes in social, scientific and technological sectors have been rapid and multiple leading to land-use change and fragmentation of the natural environment.

The planning and design phase was first undertaken in Cheshire some thirteen years ago to provide a long-term vision of sustainable ecological networks. To deliver such a vision a number of considerations were taken into account: Natural, Cultural, Social and Political.

Following its conception in Cheshire a great deal of work was focused on the spatial distribution and cohesion of five ecosystems: Meres and Mosses, Heathland, Rivers, Woodland and Grassland.

The vision is to improve and restore connectivity and connectedness. This will allow species to disperse and migrate by the mitigation of barriers created through land-use change such as agriculture, forestry, housing and infrastructure. There are many opportunities to do so by utilising and expanding core areas, creating buffer zones, stepping stone patches and restoring linear corridors such as hedgerows.

For the Habitats and Hillforts LPS implementing ecological networks in Cheshire translates into four programmes of work:

- **Habitats of the Ridge**
- **Hillforts of the Ridge**
- **Interpretation and Access**
- **Training and Volunteers**



Using horses at Willington Fruit Farm

The first year of the scheme is now coming to a close and it has been a particularly busy and productive year. Habitats restoration and creation work can be summarised as follows:

- **Native Woodland** - Woodland management 4.25ha Expansion: New Planting - 0.4ha Conversion of plantation to native woodland 0.15ha
- **Meres & Mosses** - Fen habitat restoration initiated - 1ha
- **Grassland** - Restoration of neutral grassland - 0.5 ha
Restoration started of 2ha of meadow (reintroduction of livestock grazing, Himalayan Balsam and Ragwort control)
- **Lowland heath (expansion)** - Work continued on converting 5ha of former improved grassland
- **Hedgerows** - 1434m restored - combination of laying, planting and coppicing
- **Dry Stone Walling** - 290m sandstone walling restored

If you would like to know more about the Habitats and Hillforts LPS, please visit the website at: www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk or about the habitats work in particular, please contact: Colin Slater, (Ecology Project Officer) on: 01244 973387.



Habitats and Hillforts

The Gowy and Mersey Washlands Project



Cheshire Wildlife Trust is thinking big. The Gowy and Mersey Washlands Project will realise our landscape-scale plan to restore, recreate and reconnect floodplain grazing marsh in the River Gowy and River Mersey corridors creating a Living Landscape.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust will work with partner agencies and landowners to create a resilient network of wetland habitats that will benefit local wildlife as well as people and the economy. By reducing the fragmentation of wetlands key species such as curlew, redshank, lapwing, water vole, great crested newt and mud snail will have the opportunity to thrive. Wetland restoration will mitigate the likely impacts of future flooding and a changing climate providing environmental, social and economic benefits for people living and working in the Gowy and Mersey Washlands.



Red Poll cattle and scrapes, Grange Farm, Mickle Trafford

Three phases of work will forge the wetland vision:

Wetland Landscape Creation – supporting ambitious agri-environmental schemes to secure the long term positive management of the washlands. Species and habitat fragmentation will be mapped and monitored to chart the changes in the landscape and species range. (Funded by Wetland Vision www.wetlandvision.org.uk)

Site Management - using our herd of traditional English cattle to manage 266Ha of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, maximising its potential to support key species and wildlife communities (Funded by WREN www.wren.org.uk/)

Community Engagement – enabling everyone who lives and works in the Gowy and Mersey Washlands opportunities to experience the Living Landscape and understand why it matters. We will work with schools, community groups and volunteers to inspire them about these habitats and ecosystems. (Funded by Heritage Lottery Fund www.hlf.org.uk)

Together these efforts will make a real difference for nature conservation by creating space for wildlife but also by providing essential ecosystem services such as floodwater storage, carbon capture and tranquil places for local people to visit and enjoy.



The Mersey Washlands. Photograph: The Forestry Commission

To offer your support for the project or for more detailed information please contact Richard Gardner, Living Landscape Manager, rgardner@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk or telephone 01948 820 728.

The Shocklach Area: Cheshire's Hidden Hedge Gem?

The Shocklach and Tilston area in South West Cheshire has a high density of field systems classified as Ancient Landscapes. Field systems such as these date from the medieval period (before 1600AD) and survive in only 15% of the modern landscape of Cheshire. Characterised by irregular field patterns the average field size is small at 4 ha or less. The area is immediately adjacent to the landscape in Wales known as Maelor Saesneg and classified as nationally important in Wales due to its very similar landscape. The Cheshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Cheshire Landscape Trust (CLT) with the help of volunteers surveyed 104 Shocklach hedges using the standard procedure for local surveys as set out in the 2nd edition of the Hedgerow Survey Handbook, produced by Defra.

The main objectives of the project were:

- To establish if the parishes with a high percentage of ancient landscapes also had a high proportion of species rich hedgerows.
- To obtain some data on the quality of the hedges in the Shocklach area

Previous surveys have been undertaken in Cheshire and the results have been compared with those for the Shocklach area. Some main summary findings were:

	Cheshire	Shocklach
Length	251 metres	177 metres
Height	2 metres	2.44 metres
Width	1 metre	2.71 metres
Number of trees	7	9.5

- Shocklach hedgerows are on average higher and wider than those surveyed elsewhere in Cheshire

- Shocklach hedgerows have more connections than those surveyed elsewhere in Cheshire
- Shocklach hedgerows are generally in good condition with 59% classed as "trimmed and dense" and only 3.8% having gaps of 20% or more. There is also less elder and sycamore than those surveyed elsewhere in Cheshire
- There are good numbers of hedgerow trees with an average of 1.6 hedgerow trees per 30 metre section
- 29% of Shocklach hedgerows are classed as species rich with 5 or more species. This is not significantly more than that recorded in previous Cheshire surveys



copyright Julian Whitehurst
Cheshire hedgerow

The percentage of species rich hedges being similar to that of previous volunteer surveys was disappointing. However it is believed previous surveys have been heavily biased towards known "interesting hedges" usually parish boundaries and those known to be species rich. When undertaking Higher Level Scheme surveys all hedges on the farm are surveyed with an average of 10-15% of hedges found to be species rich, 29% would be considered high. A full report of the project can be obtained from Cheshire FWAG.

The Shocklach area has also been the focus for a Barn Owl Project in conjunction with Broxton Barn Owl Group, Cheshire West and Chester, CrBP and FWAG. Outputs will follow in due course.



Jane Atkinson
Cheshire FWAG

Partnership working: Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service



Biodiversity Duty

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service has been involved with Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership (CrBP) since 2007. Public bodies have a key role to play in conserving biodiversity, through their role in: developing and influencing local policies and strategies; planning and development control; owning and managing their estates; procurement; education, awareness raising and advisory functions.

Public bodies have a duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. This duty was introduced by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and came into force on 1 October 2006. The duty affects all public authorities and aims to raise the profile and visibility of biodiversity, to clarify existing commitments with regard to biodiversity, and make it a natural and integral part of policy and decision making.

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service are embracing this duty and as such are undertaking a Biodiversity Audit of all Service landholdings and receiving recommendations on the best way to manage the grounds and what can be done to increase the biodiversity of the land. This covers the planned introduction of wildflower meadows on some Stations and including native planting and altering hedge maintenance on the Grounds Maintenance contract.

Community Garden

Runcorn Fire Station and the local community have started work on a Community Garden at the Station. This initiative is to provide an access facility to be utilised by CFRS and community partners to attract members of the community into the fire station and will be used to compliment wider community activities appertaining to sustainability and biodiversity education and from a Service perspective, arson and anti-social behaviour.

The Community benefits include:

- Promotion of a greater level of understanding of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Reinforced awareness of our place in our partner's community.
- Promote integration & communication between partners.
- Educational benefits from the practical to environmental.
- Encourage healthy eating amongst partners.
- Active involvement promotes increased levels of physical and psychological fitness at all levels.

Environmental Benefits:

- The creation of a variety of natural and manufactured sustainable habitats.
- The creation of similar projects within the area, through setting an example within our community.
- A Fire Service led example of custodianship for the natural environment.
- A Fire service led example of natural recycling.
- Gardening is a universal language that brings many communities together, even those not in partnership.

It is envisaged that this type of community garden will be developed on other Station throughout the county.

Selina Greenow
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

Events

Cheshire East Council

www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/anger_service/ranger_events.aspx

Cheshire West & Chester Council

www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk/
www.discovercheshire.co.uk

Halton Borough Council

<http://www2.halton.gov.uk/pdfs/tourismandleisure/parksevents0910>

Warrington Borough Council

www.warrington.gov.uk/images/WBC%20Warrington%20Parks_lowres_tcm15-34324.pdf

Wirral Council

www.wirral.gov.uk/events/



2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity are you doing something to promote it?

If so, contact sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk to add it to the Cheshire list.

Can you help make this events section better?
To advertise your countryside events in the next issue of this newsletter contact sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk.

The work of the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership is coordinated by the Cheshire region Biodiversity Manager who can be contacted at:

c/o Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Bickley Hall Farm,
Bickley, Cheshire, SY14 8EF
Telephone: 01948 820 728

Email: sbennett@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk



*Vipers Bugloss growing at
New Ferry Butterfly park*

View the video on
YouTube

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLxamd56Ufg

New Ferry Butterfly Park Threatened with Closure

New Ferry Butterfly Park, a community-run nature reserve on Wirral is threatened with closure. Brock plc have told the Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), which holds the lease, to vacate the Park by the end of January 2010, and have refused repeated offers by CWT to buy it. The Park site, already a nature reserve and Site of Biological Importance, was sold at auction in 1997, when British Rail was told by the then Government to sell much of its land.

The Butterfly Park is one of the best butterfly sites in Cheshire. It is used for education and training, from infant schoolchildren up to post-graduate professionals, as well as quiet recreation and enjoyment of wildlife. Its unusual management has featured in national scientific journals.

Sign the petition to save the park:
www.ipetitions.com/petition/savethebutterflypark/

DO YOU WANT TO SEE THE PARK STAY OPEN? YOU CAN HELP!

Please write to your Wirral councillor (the local councillors are Bob Moon, Alan Taylor and Steve Niblock) at Wallasey Town Hall, Brighton Street, Wallasey. CH44 8ED, asking Wirral Council to use all measures in its power to save the Park, or, sign the online petition.

