

Cheshire region

Biodiversity Partnership

'Working together to secure a Cheshire region richer in wildlife by 2020'

Newsletter December 2008

Volume One



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first newsletter for the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership. Our ten year report, published January this year, proved very successful so we thought we would keep the momentum going and start a regular newsletter. The aim of this newsletter is to keep the whole of the partnership better informed with what is going on. Hopefully, this newsletter will grow to contain articles and information from the wider partnership, as well as update you on the Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Since starting my role as the Cheshire region Biodiversity Manager, I am appreciating that the way we think about and plan conservation projects is changing. Increasingly, we are taking an ecosystem approach, looking at how everything connects within the ecology of core areas and then how we can link up areas to ensure the future dynamics of wildlife habitats. Together, with the local SMART targets set earlier this year, and the extended priority list after the UKBAP review 2007, we have plenty to try and achieve.

At a national level, habitats and species are becoming linked together in a more ecosystem approach. At the local level, the Cheshire region has already started to do this with the Ponds Working Group, focusing on ponds and all the species associated with them. Just recently, the Water Vole and Otter BAP groups have been combined to form the Riparian Mammal BAP Group.

Cheshire has taken the lead in other areas too. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are working in partnership with the CrBP to produce action plans for their landholdings for the benefit of biodiversity. A first for Cheshire. The Cheshire region is also ahead with regards to designing a strategy to deal with invasive non-native species. A GB strategy was launched in May this year, since then, forums at a Country level have been set up. Every region is different with regards to what invasive non-native species affect it and so it is important that at the local level we work together and in a coordinated approach to tackle this issue. Cheshire's first meeting was held in December with a second planned for next summer.

I hope you enjoy reading the CrBP newsletter. If you wish to put forward any articles towards the next issue of the CrBP newsletter please contact me by email: smorton@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk.



Sarah Morton
Cheshire region
Biodiversity Manager

CrBP Small Projects Grant Scheme

The Small Projects Grant Scheme, funded by a Service Level Agreement with Cheshire County Council, was re-launched this year following 3 successful years of the grant scheme. Again, more applications were received than could be funded. The 2008/09 successful projects were Daven Primary School's wildflower meadow, the Valley Park Community Orchard Project, the Blacon Greenway and Old Station Site Project, the Great Crested Newt Schools Project and the Mid Cheshire Barn Owl Conservation Group for materials for 40 more Barn Owl boxes.

What's new at Cheshire Wildlife Trust?

By Charlotte Harris, Director of Conservation, CWT

Cheshire Wildlife Trust is going from strength to strength with several recent new appointments. Firstly, a new Chief Executive, Dr Janel Fone joined the Trust in September and was soon joined by Charlotte Harris returning, after previously working as the Cheshire region Biodiversity Manager, in a new role as Director of Conservation. To complete the package Susan Perry joined as Grants Officer and most recently Mark Ambrose as Conservation Officer, responsible for Local Wildlife Sites and volunteer coordination.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) has developed a Conservation Strategy to help focus and prioritise their work for the years ahead. Initially covering a five-year period the Conservation Strategy builds upon the CWT's successes so far and brings plans for the future in line with the national Wildlife Trust Development Strategy.

CWT's Strategy is framed around four main aims designed to help achieve their vision of 'a Cheshire region richer in wildlife by 2020'. It incorporates their approach to tackling issues such as climate change, maintenance of healthy natural 'life-support' systems (ecosystem services) and the need to work in partnership to achieve a 'Living Landscape' for the Cheshire region. CWT's Strategy also considers how they can engage everyone in caring for and understanding our natural environment and how we might live and work in a more sustainable way.

Arising from each aim is a work programme of activities and projects, which will focus CWT on achieving its aims over the next five years. There is a lot of hard work ahead before the aspirations of the Strategy are realised but all the staff at CWT are looking forward to the challenge and to working with partners across the county.

You can download a summary of CWT's Conservation Strategy from their website www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk.

The four main aims identified by Cheshire Wildlife Trust are:

- 1 To stand up for wildlife and the natural environment
- 2 To create and enhance wildlife havens
- 3 To inspire people about the natural world
- 4 To foster sustainable living

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer recorder, please contact Mark Ambrose at the

Cheshire Wildlife Trust on 01948 820728 or email

mambrose@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk



SBI Recording

By Mark Ambrose, Conservation Officer, CWT

There are approximately 680 designated Sites of Biological Importance (SBI) in Cheshire and Warrington and these play an important role in preserving the biodiversity of the county.

Whilst not statutory sites as such (unlike SSSI for example), the presence of an SBI must be taken into account in any planning application. It is for this reason that having updated surveys of these sites is so important. The vast majority of this work is done by volunteer recorders who

give up their time and energy to survey and report on new and existing sites.

In order to maintain a credible, current database, the Cheshire Wildlife Trust urgently needs new volunteers to get involved in survey work. Becoming a volunteer recorder will not only aid the preservation of Cheshire's biodiversity, it will also provide the opportunity to improve your survey and identification skills, as well as meeting some great new people with the same passion for wildlife as you.

EA Surveying

By Craig Higson, Biodiversity Officer, EA

In 2007/8, the Environment Agency's Fisheries, Recreation and Biodiversity Team (FRB) commissioned a number of Otter surveys. The surveys were designed to identify Otter's habitats and distribution across the south of the region.

The first survey was undertaken by Penny Anderson Associates who were asked to look at the factors that would limit, or encourage, the population of Otters in the Weaver catchment. They were also asked to record any signs of Otters they encountered, during their work.

The results of the survey are encouraging in many respects, with some stretches of the river having numerous signs of Otter activity, and habitat identified as being of good quality for this species.

The surveys also revealed a significant fall in the number of Otter signs north of Bottom Flash in Winsford. It is likely that this is due to changes in the channel morphology and the difficulty this creates for Otters when they are foraging for food. The report has also suggested a number of options that could help improve this situation, and encourage the spread of Otters through the Weaver catchment.

In August this year, FRB staff surveyed the catchments of the Rivers Wincham, Dane and Wheelock using the standard bridge



FRB Staff carrying out Otter surveys in August 2008

crossing survey methodology. These surveys found additional evidence of Otters on Smoker Brook, the first new record for a number of years. They also found a new spraint site on the Dane, and a completely new record of an Otter spraint on the River Wheelock. The last surveys of these areas undertaken in 2005, found no evidence of Otters at all. The new results, combined with other non Environment Agency records suggest the species is establishing a foothold to the east of the River Weaver. Further 'bridge crossing' surveys have been commissioned for other Cheshire river catchments; we are now awaiting the result of these.



Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Event

The next Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership Event is to be held at Chester Zoo on the 6th March 2009.

The event will be focused on the role of the Partnership, its achievements and what we should be focussing upon next. We would like to encourage all members of the Partnership to come along to this event and have their say.

If anyone would like to send suggestions of what they wish to know more about at this event then please email your comments to smorton@cheshirewt.cix.co.uk

NW Lowland Water Vole Project

By Richard Gardner, Water Vole Project Officer, CWT

The North West Lowland Water Vole Project is the culmination of 4 years work at a regional level under the guidance of the Water for Wildlife Programme. Early on the partners all agreed that a key issue was the status of the water vole in the North West.

Water voles have suffered a dramatic decline in the 20th century and, where once it was a common sight on Cheshire waterways, now it is a rare and welcome record. The main threats to the species are well documented and include habitat destruction and degradation, predation by American mink, population fragmentation, persecution, pollution, disease and competition.

The Local Biodiversity Managers from Cheshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Merseyside joined together to work with local Wildlife Trusts, and the Environment Agency to produce two successful grant proposals. One to SITA Enriching Nature and one to the Esmée Fairbairne Trust. Match funding came from UU and the 10 districts of Greater Manchester. In Cheshire, Halton BC, Macclesfield BC, Chester Zoo and the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership have all contributed to the project costs.

The funding is supporting two dedicated Project Officers, Richard Gardner based at Cheshire Wildlife Trust, and Helen Laycock based at the



Water vole sighted on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal

Wildlife Trusts for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside. Over three years, the project aims to promote the conservation and restoration of water vole populations, as well as other riparian species and habitats.

Helen and Richard started in April 2008, and supported by volunteers, will conduct and coordinate surveys across the region. Information recorded will include habitat management practices and signs of mink. This data will then be used to develop landscape and habitat management strategies and site-specific management plans to aid the targeted practical habitat management for the benefit of voles and many other species.

Summary for the Cheshire region so far:

47,000m of streams, ponds, canals and ditches, and 94 500m surveys have been conducted between April and October this year. Of those 94 sites, 46 had signs of water vole, although it should be noted that many of these sites only contained old burrows or sporadic feeding remains. The important figure, is that roughly a quarter (22 of the 94 sites) have active breeding colonies of water vole present. This might not sound like a species that is under threat in Cheshire and that has suffered a significant decline in numbers, but the majority of sites visited have had water voles present in the last 20 years. Over the next two years, the Project Officers will begin to survey sites that have not been surveyed before in order to broaden the knowledge of water vole presence in the North West's waterways.



Volunteer surveying Blackburn's Brook



Warrington Borough Council Phase 1 Habitat Survey

By Helen Lacy, Natural Environment Officer,
Warrington Borough Council

In early 2007 Warrington Borough Council commissioned Cheshire Wildlife Trust and rECOrd to carry out a Phase 1 habitat survey of the whole borough. CWT took on the rural wards and rECOrd surveyed the urban areas during the 2007 and 2008 season.

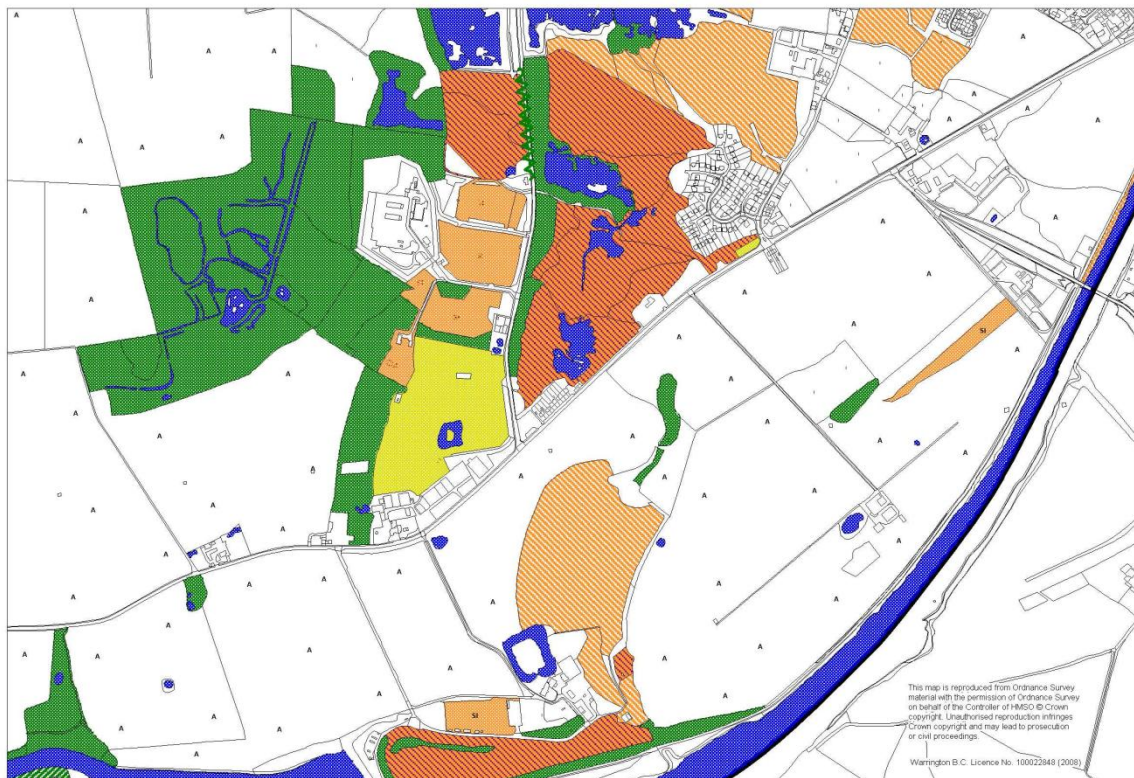
The survey was carried out to the national JNCC standard using codes and colours as indicated in the guidelines with the general aim of mapping vegetation types and habitats across the whole of the town. Any species or habitats of particular interest were recorded as target notes.

The last survey of this nature was done in the 1990's and in order for the council to have up to date baseline information a new survey was commissioned. The maps are in the process of being digitised into mapinfo

format and once this is complete the data can be analysed to find out what habitats make up the town and areas which have changed over time either through development or natural succession. This will provide valuable information and help to inform development decisions as well as aid BAP targets and plans.

As with many surveys there are some constraints- not all land was accessible to surveyors but despite this the results should provide an excellent baseline and gaps in data can be filled in where future access can be arranged.

Early indications show that there are some very interesting areas with good potential for wildlife corridors as well as possible local wildlife sites. Some of the target notes have highlighted priority species which requires further investigation or communication with land owners. More information will come to light as the base maps are digitised and there will be plenty of actions to take forwards. Watch this space!



Digitised Example of the Phase One Habitat Survey in the Rixton Clay Pits area.

Count Me In!

By Eric Fletcher, rECOrd.

rECOrd and Chester Zoo are embarking on a unique project working in close partnership to deliver a comprehensive environmental training programme for the Cheshire area. Called Count Me In!, the project will run over two years; delivering 26 diverse training activities at Chester Zoo and in the borough of Crewe and Nantwich. These will be widely advertised and bookable through the rECOrd website, and will compliment other events across the area providing greater public access to the natural environment and a coordinated approach to this type of training in the county.

Of our twenty six activities, twenty will take the form of day workshops in which small groups will benefit from expert tuition on a wide variety of subjects; from species identification and recording techniques, to geodiversity and survey methods. The main focus will, of course, be species identification. In addition, six larger events will offer a range of activities, providing an opportunity for new wildlife recorders to get together and try something new.

The first event is planned for the 24th January 2009; at Chester Zoo. The Count Me In! Big Bird Day will link with the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and will be one of our larger events. Guests on the day can join local bird experts and record the bird life in and around the zoo. There will be advice on attracting birds to your garden and techniques on identification to suit all levels of experience.

The Count Me In! Project has been kindly supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. All of our Count Me In! events are free of charge and open to all members of the public. Look out for more information on the rECOrd website www.record-lrc.co.uk or contact Countmein@record-LRC.co.uk.

RECORD



rECOrd Conference Terrestrial Invertebrate Workshop

Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership Update

By Ellie Soper, Cheshire County Council

The Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership (SREP), led by Cheshire County Council, is located on the mid Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. The aim of SREP is to create an interconnected network of woodlands, heathlands, peatlands, wetlands and grasslands along the Ridge for the benefit of people and wildlife. The creation of this landscape scale 'ecological network' is based on an approach common in the rest of Europe and which is now receiving more attention in the UK.

Since 2005 over 125 ha of habitat has been restored/created in partnership with landowners, NGOs and community groups, supported by a CCC grant aid programme.

Examples of recently funded projects include new planting to extend an existing ancient woodland site, removal of Himalayan Balsam from an area of semi-improved grassland and the creation of new ponds.

Cheshire County Council and its partners have recently started the "Habitats and Hillforts of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge" project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund through their Landscape Partnership Scheme. The project aims to conserve the Ridge's Iron Age hillforts and surrounding wildlife habitats, and to encourage more people to access, learn about and become more involved in the area's landscape heritage. Over 40ha of habitat will be restored or created as part of the project.

For more information contact Ellie Soper (01244 973195) www.cheshire.gov.uk/srep



BARS Reporting Round 2008

The new results of the 2008 triennial reporting round are now available to download from the BARS website, so too are the new Cheshire region habitat and species SMART targets. To access the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) please visit: www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk

For further information on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan please visit: www.ukbap.org.uk

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

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