



Action for wildlife in Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Darlington & County Durham

A Busy Year!

This year has been a really busy year for the partnership. Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, SITA Trust, the partner Local Authorities and Northumbrian Water, two significant projects are now underway, further details are outlined in this newsletter.

We would like to thank Shonah Dobson for her excellent work as Implementation Officer over the last year, whilst covering for Helen Ryde who was on maternity leave. Shonah achieved a great deal for the Partnership and we wish her well in her new role with Durham Wildlife Trust.

The partnership will be holding our annual event early next year. This will be an opportunity to learn more about the work we are doing and how you can get involved in conserving biodiversity in the Durham BAP area. Look out for further details in January.

Rainton to Eppleton Water Vole Corridor

As part of the Living Waterways project, funding has recently been received from Biffaward to improve 6.5km of riparian habitat for water voles.

The Rainton to Eppleton Water Vole Corridor project will carry out a range of habitat work, including the installation of a vegetated coir roll on a hard engineered bank-side to encourage marginal vegetation growth, thinning of trees and scrub, de-silting of the river bed and planting of native marginal plant species. Two sluice systems will also be installed and used to stabilise water levels across 16 hectares of wetland. The project will also encourage community involvement in conservation task days such as stream clean-ups, Himalayan Balsam pulling and litter picking.

For more information contact Michael Rogers at Durham Wildlife Trust: 0191 5843112 or mrogers@durhamwt.co.uk

Bringing Back our Otters



© Keith Cunningham

The Durham BAP Otter Project is a three year project funded by SITA Trust which aims to strengthen the existing populations of otter along watercourses in Gateshead, Darlington, South Tyneside and Sunderland. This is being achieved by improving riverbank habitat, installation of artificial otter holts, improvements in connectivity to off stream breeding sites and installation of underpasses and mammal ledges to bridges at otter road kill hotspots.

Otter holts successfully installed

With the help of volunteers 15 otter holts have already been built in South Tyneside,



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Gateshead and Sunderland. We are hoping that these holts will be used by Otters for nesting and breeding in the not too distant future. Over winter work will start on installing the first mammal ledges and creating new areas of reedbeds and ponds.

To find out more about the Otter Project or to find out how you can get involved contact Karen Devenney on 0191 5843112 or email karendevenney@durhambiodiversity.org.uk

Industrial Otters

It seems that some north-east otters really don't mind where they hang out. A recent survey along the River Team discovered an otter spraint right in the centre of the Team Valley Trading Estate. The Trading Estate is home to approximately 1400 companies and over 25,000 people travel there each day, but there is certainly at least one otter that is not deterred by this. Habitat improvements along the River Team through the Trading Estate are due to take place in 2012. So if you are passing through keep an eye out, because you never know, you might spot an otter!

Veteran Trees Project

Growing Upwards and Onwards

The Heritage Lottery Funded Durham Veteran Trees Project has been up and running for almost a year, but it is not too late to get involved.

If you have a passion for trees, be it finding them, finding living things on them, growing them, tending them or even climbing them, then feel free to attend any of the upcoming Veteran Trees events happening around Durham, Darlington, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside. Survey training, guided walks and winter tree ID events are all planned for early next year.

Veteran Tree Calendar

The 2011 Veteran Tree Calendar is now available featuring 12 photographs - submitted by both volunteer and professional alike - of some of the most impressive trees in the remit area of the Durham Veteran Trees Project. If you would like a copy of the calendar contact Jesse Meredith.

Veteran Tree Management Guide

A Veteran Tree Management Guide is currently being compiled and will be published early next year. The main aim is to provide landowners who may have veteran or ancient trees (or potential veteran or ancient trees) on their land with information on how these trees need to be managed and maintained.

For more information and for details of events contact Jesse Meredith on jessemeredith@durhambiodiversity.org.uk or 0191 584 3112 or visit www.durhamveterantrees.org.uk



Right: Veteran pear tree



Why did the otter cross the road?



©Durham County Council

Otters are also expanding their range within County Durham and Durham County Council have been undertaking works to assist otters in re-claiming old territory.

When rivers are in flood otters can't swim through flooded bridges and culverts and so attempt to cross the road which sadly results in some of them being killed by passing cars.

At a central Durham site, the Council's engineers have fitted an otter underpass as part of the works to re-furbish a damaged culvert. This gives otters the opportunity to walk under the culvert in high flow conditions preventing road kill.

The added bonus is that the underpass is just as good for badgers - a double positive for wildlife conservation

Left: Otter underpass,

Biodiversity success at former sewage works

A trial to create a new area of magnesian limestone grassland has been carried out at a former sewage treatment works in Ferryhill.

In 2008 seed was collected from species-rich grassland at Durham Wildlife Trust's Blackhall Rocks reserve and stored for drying. Ferryhill Sewage Pumping Station was then prepared by strimming and removing existing vegetation followed by scarification of the soil surface. The dried material was then scattered over the site and lightly raked. In 2009 a grassland management programme was initiated with the site mown and raked in an attempt to increase species diversity. A survey carried out in July 2010 found that a number of key indicator species for magnesian limestone grassland have already become established.

Grazing Wanister Bog

The Wanister Bog is situated within Waldrige Fell SSSI and is one of only two valley mires in County Durham; the habitat is listed both on the UK and Durham Biodiversity Action Plans.

The site is owned by Durham County Council, who along with Natural England have had concerns over the degradation of the Wanister Bog. This has been due to two factors, breaches in the existing wooden bund and a lack of grazing.

In 2009 County Durham Environmental Trust funded a management project to address these issues. This involved replacing the existing wooden bund with a new clay bund with sluice and introducing grazing to the site. A new bund was created in July 2009 and the 2.8ha site fenced ready for grazing. Three highland cows were introduced to the site in September 2010 and will be allowed to graze over the winter months.

©Stuart Priestley



Improvements to the bog are already being seen, the new bund is retaining water and the bog is re-wetting. Grazing with Highland cattle will ensure that the habitat is improved through scrub control and breaking up of the litter layer which will provide opportunities for wildflower seed germination.

The project is funded by CDENT from funds received under the Government's Landfill Communities Fund, from the Premier Waste Management Company.

For more information on the project contact Stuart Priestley, Durham County Council on 0191 3834016 or stuart.priestley@durham.gov.uk

'New' wildflower meadow discovered in South Tyneside

A valuable meadow has been revealed near St Paul's Church in Jarrow, South Tyneside.

Up until the 1950s the River Don meandered through the site, but the river was subsequently diverted to the north and the site was land-filled. Since then it has been managed as close-cropped amenity grassland, with the plants given little opportunity to flower and set seed.

This year the Council has experimented by taking a 'Parks to Larks' approach at the site. It has allowed the meadow to flower all summer, with the plan being to cut and rake it off in the autumn. Council staff knew that the soils were of low fertility and could harbour some interesting plants but the outcome has exceeded all expectations.

One of the first flowers to show was the bird's-foot trefoil which, as well as being a beautiful deep yellow colour, is the food plant for the common blue butterfly. This was followed by such attractive blossoms as meadow vetchling, fairy flax, great burnet and eyebright. To cap it all an impressive four different types of orchid were recorded at the site, benefiting from the new management

A bumper year for Hay Time!

Species-rich hay meadows are a rare habitat, having declined by more than 97% in the UK over the past 60 years as a result of progressive agricultural intensification.

The meadows found in the North Pennines are a special type, characteristic of the harsh conditions typical of hilly and mountainous regions across Europe. These 'upland' or 'mountain hay meadows' are now very rare with little more than 1,000ha thought to remain in the UK. With 400ha of these meadows, the North Pennines AONB is an important place for this special habitat.

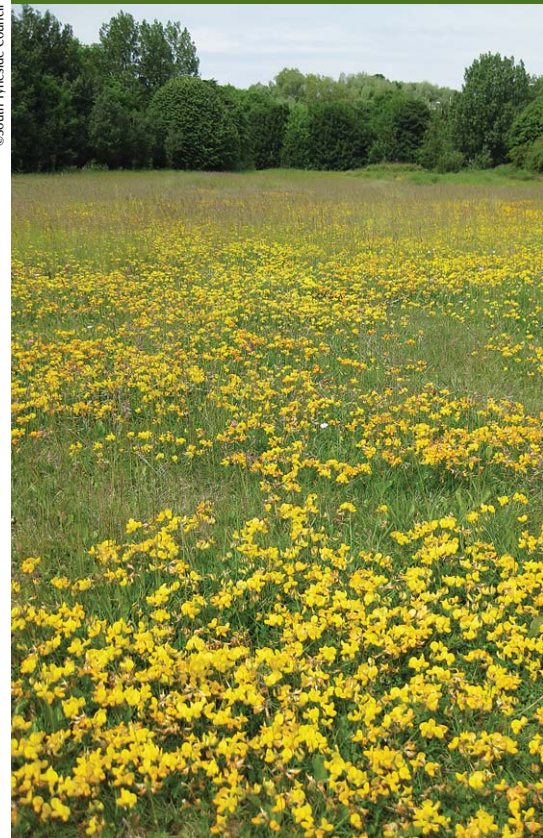
Through its Hay Time project, the North Pennines AONB Partnership works closely with farmers and colleagues from Natural England to restore hay meadows that have lost their characteristic plant species. Using special machinery, we harvest either the seed-bearing top of the hay crop or the entire crop and then spread it as 'green hay' on a nearby meadow. Not only does

this approach enable the effective transfer of seeds, a process that would take decades to occur naturally, but it ensures that the unique genetic integrity of these meadows is maintained. 2010 was a record-breaking year, with seed spread on 45ha of meadows on 14 farms, including six in Teesdale and two in Weardale. This means that since 2006 the project has spread seed on 139ha of meadows across the AONB.

Are the flowers coming back? To help answer this question, Hay Time project officers, supported by a band of skilled volunteers, carry out monitoring surveys each year to assess the number of wild plants found in the meadows. Over the winter we will be analysing the data collected to date and so will be able to assess the real impact of our work on this precious habitat.

For more information contact Rebecca Barrett on 01388 528 801 or Rebecca@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

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Left: Spreading hay meadow seed

Right: Church Bank wildflower meadow near Jarrow

The Million Ponds Project

Helping you help freshwater wildlife

Digging ponds is a perennial favourite for anyone wanting to help wildlife, and creating the right ponds in the right place is a proven way to conserve freshwater biodiversity. In fact, pond creation can be so effective that a single scheme can provide a home for over 20% of our freshwater species.

Now, everything you need to know about creating the best possible wildlife ponds has been distilled down into the Pond Creation Toolkit, a series of factsheets available free online. There are also

Project Officers who can offer tailored advice and share their experience with you, including an amphibian and reptile specialist able to help with pond creation or management projects for great crested newt, common toad, grass snake or natterjack toad.

The Million Ponds Project can also help find financial support, and for projects that deliver benefits for Biodiversity Action Plan species, such as flat sedge or grass-wrack pondweed, there is the Biffaward Pond Digging Fund. The third and final application round is now open, the deadline for applications is 23rd December.

Also online is a brand new tool called the BAP Species Map which will help you to target pond creation efforts for key species, or to find out what pond-associated BAP species occur near your site.

To find out more, contact Becca Cleaver on 0300 060 2411 or beccacleaver@pondconservation.org.uk or visit www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds



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North Pennines Lapwing Project

The North Pennines Lapwing Project is now entering its final stages having collected four years worth of data.

The project which is supported by Natural England and SITA Trust has monitored breeding lapwing on 55 farms encompassing 356 fields and an area in excess of 2,000ha. In 2010 alone 467 hours and 25 minutes were spent surveying.

SITA Trust funded rush control and scrape creation, which has improved over 250ha of breeding habitat. Two sites receiving this management had no breeding lapwings in 2007 but by 2010 a total of nine pairs were nesting and rearing chicks on managed fields.

The highest number of breeding lapwings was recorded in 2008. Since then there has been a decline each year which is likely to be linked to adult mortality during the harsh winters however there may be other contributing factors such as habitat deterioration. Preliminary findings indicate

that while the North Pennines is a stronghold for lapwing, this species is generally experiencing low breeding success and is far from recovery.

Environmental Stewardship such as Entry Level Schemes (ELS) and particularly Higher Level Schemes (HLS) are key in continuing positive land management and reversing the decline of this charismatic species.

For more information contact Helen Quayle on 0191 233 4304 or email helen.quayle@rspb.org.uk.



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Putting Biodiversity into the Heart of Durham

A major new conservation project is proposed in the heart of County Durham.

The high ridges and enclosed valleys of the coal measures of mid-Durham contain important and fragile habitats. These habitats support a wide range of wildlife, including some rare and declining species protected by both European and English law. The value of this mosaic of habitats and its potential for improvement through restoration and habitat creation has been recognised by the England Biodiversity Group, who have recommended that central Durham should be one of the country's first Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Areas.

A new partnership is proposed to help conserve biodiversity at a landscape scale, create new opportunities for wildlife and for local communities and visitors to enjoy this unique resource. This partnership will build on the work of Durham Wildlife Trust's Living Landscapes project which is already focussing on identifying opportunities where particular species and habitats can be conserved and expanded and examining opportunities in the landscape for restoration by working with landowners and communities.

Limestone Landscapes steps up to Stage 2

The Limestone Landscapes Partnership has submitted a £2.8m programme to the Heritage Lottery Fund for an innovative three year piece of work on the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau.

The programme involves delivery of 25 wide-ranging projects focusing on geodiversity, biodiversity and the historic environment. These include improving the coastal grasslands for biodiversity, and training landowners on how to manage land for wildlife. Work is due to begin in March 2011 with a decision on the bid expected in early December.



Durham
Biodiversity
Partnership

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The Durham Biodiversity Partnership includes local government, national agencies, local NGOs, statutory bodies, community organisations and individuals all working together to meet the targets of the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan (DBAP).

The Partnership can be contacted through the Implementation Officer: Helen Ryde, telephone 0191 584 3112; helenryde@durhambiodiversity.org.uk

Further information about the Partnership and the Action Plan is available on the website www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk.