

Barnsley Biodiversity Trust

Annual General Meeting, 27 November 2012

Trustees report



The Barnsley Biodiversity Trust is a voluntary body of individuals and representatives of organisations with an interest in promoting Barnsley's biodiversity - its landscapes, habitats, sites and wildlife. Together we raise public awareness of biodiversity issues and take action to conserve and enhance Barnsley's biodiversity. This benefits all those who live in and visit Barnsley.

The Trust's *biodiversity action plan*, highlighting the species and habitats in Barnsley that deserve conservation, gives a basis for individuals and organisations working to promote and protect biodiversity.

Trevor Mayne, Barnsley council's biodiversity officer, has now been in post for well over a year and, although now spending a lot of his time on work associated with the nature improvement area, has made a considerable impact on biodiversity issues across the borough in this time. His report to this meeting will tell us about some of this.

Derek Whiteley has been leading the development of the new *Barnsley Biological Records Centre*, under a contract funded by Barnsley council. The progress has been rapid and now, after a year, has around 100,000 records.

A need for bird records with six-figure grid references has been highlighted so they can be linked to specific fields, woods, marshes etc, especially those on the red and amber lists, so that further attention can be paid to these areas.

An additional initiative, which will be promoted by the Trust, will be to "go somewhere new" with people being asked to survey a previously unrecorded area which may be quite small areas or areas that may be candidate sites to become Local Wildlife Sites, or even hedgerows, streams or other wildlife corridors.

Trevor Mayne's report that the proportion of the 71 *Local Sites* reported as having positive management has risen in 2012 from the previous year is a good sign. We in the Trust can however be more proactive in identifying new sites that are or could be managed for wildlife, and in promoting the management of the existing sites, since there is some way to go.

It is pleasing to report that that work in the sub-region has resulted in a *South Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership* being recognised by the government in July of this year. Our response to the earlier consultation endorsed the approach and sought ways in which sub-regional activity would link to that which is borough based such as our own. This is through the South Yorkshire Biodiversity Forum in which we need to be more actively involved.

Equally pleasing and with more activity on the ground, is the Dearne Valley Green Heart *Nature Improvement Area*, in which the Trust is a partner. It in fact covers an area which extends from Brierley, Grimethorpe and Cudworth to Birdwell and Hoyland, as well as the lower Dearne Valley. It takes forward a range of actions in the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Pete Wall gives us updates at our meetings on activities in the Nature Improvement Area. These include the core ecological areas of Adwick wetlands, Houghton washlands and Wombwell Ings.

Trevor Mayne will give us an update later at this meeting on Barnsley council's work as part of the NIA including in the Carlton Marsh area and on council grass cutting management.

Other NIA activities include a community based hidden gems initiative run by Groundwork Dearne Valley and schools outreach.

A meeting is to be held in January to bring together the different environmental projects for schools to provide a more coordinated approach across the borough.

We look forward to the *Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership* funded work also in the Dearne Green Heart area.

Dan Wildsmith of Voluntary Action Barnsley is supporting *small voluntary and community groups* in environmental projects and in the recruitment of volunteers. This includes projects around Park Hill, and on growing plants and food on community plots. An environmental network of such groups has had its first meeting in which the Trust participated.

John Rodwell has undertaken a lot of ground work on the Wombwell 'i-wood' project using interactive technology and GPS to encourage people to learn about the woods and their cultural heritage. He was hoping to come to this meeting and would like further help from the Trust, particularly in connection with veteran trees, a potential bioblitz and the integration of biological records within the i-wood project's interactive webpages. John hopes to come to our next meeting and to show us the drone flight images of the woods recently taken.

Helen Walton from the Forestry Commission will give us an update later in this meeting on their work with volunteers and on conservation projects.

We have responded to the consultation held on Barnsley council's *Local Development Framework Sites and Places* Proposals. The recognised Local Wildlife Sites were identified on the interactive maps produced by Barnsley council and the council had strong statements on biodiversity issues being considered within the process. As it stands biodiversity assessments have taken place for a good number of the sites proposed for housing. However such assessments need to take place for the proposed employment sites, particularly those which are in the Nature Improvement Area, the chief one of which borders the Old Moor wetlands area.

We have also responded to the consultation on the South Yorkshire Green Infrastructure delivery programme. In our response we welcomed the approach to green infrastructure in

the Barnsley council's Core Strategy and their use of Concept Plans and Statements for particular neighbourhoods which include green corridors and spaces.

We drew attention in our response to the benefits of widening the proposals for Barnsley Western Moors and the links there could be to other moorland areas and to neighbouring areas and river catchment valleys beneficial to wildlife. There are further examples of links that could be made to develop truly landscape-scale green infrastructure and wildlife corridors. We look forward to the publication of the Barnsley Green Infrastructure Strategy in this respect.

A highly successful first Barnsley Bioblitz took place between 21st and 23rd September, organised by Sorby Natural History society, and, at the last count, 1034 species were identified. Over 2000 records were generated and five schools were involved with BBT support. Events and recording took place at Scout Dyke reservoir, Old Moor, Wharncliffe Chase, Rabbit Ings, Carlton Marsh, Barnsley canal, and Stainborough Park.

A film has been produced by Bob Britain and Dearne Media to explain and promote the work of the Barnsley Biodiversity Trust with schools.

This work involves presentations to classes of school children and classroom activities based on biodiversity and surveys of the school grounds, with a written report to the school advising them how the school grounds could be developed to help biodiversity. A whole school assembly follows later, when an appropriate selection of tree sparrow, hedgehog, bee and bat boxes are presented to the school. David Allen and his staff help to erect the boxes, dig and line ponds or erect bird hides. Thanks particularly to Colin Graham for leading this work with 20+ schools.

Location files have been set up for some schools sites in the Barnsley Biological Records centre system so it is possible to manage school datasets and provide feedback to schools.

During the year trustees and other members gave talks to various bodies to highlight the importance of biodiversity and wildlife within the Barnsley area and have been involved with a number of events to engage with the general public at Old Moor, Stainborough Park and Rabbit Ings.

Wider work promoting biodiversity and the development of appropriate habitats is being led by the RSPB, Wentworth Castle and Stainborough Park Trust, Groundwork Dearne Valley, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and other voluntary sector organisations and this, together with work by statutory bodies support the biodiversity action plan, which highlights species and habitats in Barnsley that deserve conservation.

What do we know about some of the species identified in the biodiversity action plan?

We are promoting more being done to find out the numbers of hedgehogs seen in Barnsley. This follows about 75 hedgehogs, orphaned or injured, being released earlier this year. Instigated and led by Janet Mason, the release scheme had never before been attempted on such a large scale. The hedgehogs were released at three sites: Rabbit Ings country park, Dearne Valley country park and Dave Allen's nature reserve close to Locke Park. Barnsley council and Groundwork Dearne Valley collaborated in this venture and there was an excellent turn out of volunteers to help at the three locations.

The sites were chosen because of the types of habitat in them and the support and monitoring that could be offered.

Jill Hayler with others has been monitoring the glow-worm site near on the transpennine trail near Thurgoland. The most we have had this year was 42, following 57 last year. This gives cause for concern as we had 118 in 2008. More habitat management needs to be done.

The Barnsley Bird Study Group has continued its work recording birds and nesting sites in Barnsley. Further information on the use this year of the nest boxes installed by the Trust will be available in the near future. As last year it is expected that *barn owls* have suffered because of the weather conditions. *Kestrels* however have used a number of the boxes.

There are a number of colonies of *tree sparrows* around Barnsley and these have benefited from the nest boxes provided.

A great achievement for Old Moor and Barnsley was the successful breeding of a pair of *bittern* in the new reed bed. Three birds had over wintered there.

Trevor Mayne's surveys of local water courses for the native white-clawed crayfish show that the *non-native signal crayfish* has made further inroads and that native *white clawed crayfish* has retreated further. There is evidence however that *bullheads* are still fairly widespread in Barnsley and there are *crest crested newts* in a number of locations, including in the Barnsley canal and Wilthorpe local wildlife site.

The work of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust in the Wildlife on the Waterways project is improving habitats for riparian mammals in a number of locations especially water voles. Carys Hutton will update us on this project later in the meeting...

There are still gaps in *bat* records across the borough, especially with regard to roosts. The Trust is planning to run a campaign over the winter to encourage the public to tell them if they think they may have a bat roost in one of their own buildings, particularly in farm buildings. These reports then can be further investigated and surveyed if necessary.

The Trust's biodiversity action plan is due to be updated. We have undertaken some initial work to review what has been done, what is taking place and what needs to be done. We intend having a workshop session in the new year to progress this work and would like you to participate.

This report, together with any additional information coming from this meeting, will be available on the Trust's website, which also includes information on the biodiversity action plan.

Peter Roberts
27 November 2012