

Barnsley Biodiversity Trust

Annual General Meeting, 27 January 2014

Trustees Report for 2013



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

A workshop held in 2013 brought partners together and started the work in revising the biodiversity plan. The findings of the workshop are available on the BBT website which has been developed to include the facility for individuals to leave comments and suggestions.

Work promoting biodiversity and the development of appropriate habitats is taking place through the actions of partners including the RSPB, Groundwork, Wildlife Trusts, other voluntary groups, and statutory bodies, such as Barnsley Council, the Forestry Commission and Natural England.

The activities within the Nature Improvement Area (NIA), now in its second year, bring a number of these partners together in projects in the (lower) Dearne Valley to link people better to the landscape they live in, create new green infrastructure, undertake education outreach, and improve and create new habitats across the area. The Barnsley Biodiversity Trust is a partner in NIA developments.

Barnsley Council has submitted a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership scheme for activities in approximately the same area as the NIA with an emphasis on issues including archaeology, the built heritage, and wide community involvement. The BBT was pleased to support the bid for full funding and endorse the Landscape Conservation Action Plan produced for HLF. Although we would have wished for an even stronger emphasis on biodiversity and natural heritage, we realise that a balance needs to be struck and that projects on these themes are taking place through the NIA.

Wetlands, reedbeds, and other fens

The habitats identified as a priority for conservation in Barnsley in the existing BAP include reedbeds and floodplain grazing marshes. In the revision of the Biodiversity Plan we wish to widen the scope of the wetland local priority habitats to include fens and other types of swamp.

DVGH NIA schemes to enhance wetland priority habitats include creating and restoring floodplain habitat at Adwick Washlands, Houghton Washlands, Wombwell Ings and Carlton Marsh; and reversion of arable fields to wetlands, further reedbed creation, and linking existing nature reserves along the river Dearne corridor.

Notable achievements for the RSPB and the Nature Improvement Area have been the successful breeding of a pair of *bittern* for a second year, and breeding *avocets*; these the result of reedbed creation, the release of elvers, and other habitat improvements.

Rivers and other running water courses are a priority habitat in the BAP.

Volunteers led by Voluntary Action Barnsley have done a survey of invasive species along the Dove river; work is taking place with the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and Barnsley council to improve Carlton Dyke, the worst water course in Barnsley for water quality, and projects to enhance the environment of the Upper Don are being formulated by the Don river catchment trust.

Woodlands are priority habitats in the BAP, including the two natural woodland covers of wet woodland and mixed broadleaved woodland, and the managed habitat of veteran trees and parkland.

Barnsley council is leading a project within the NIA to create new woodland and there is a proposed project within the Landscape Partnership led by South Yorkshire Forest and the Woodland Trust to create new woodlands, restore ancient woodlands which have been over-planted and help landowners bring neglected woodlands back into sustainable management. In addition the project will help the general public get to know their local woodlands. The BBT has stressed that the creation of new woodland habitat is to be encouraged where other valuable habitats like heath and grassland would not be damaged.

More promotion of management of woodlands for conservation of wildlife needs to be done, with more examination of the wildlife species they support, and of course there are woods in the west of the borough.

Unimproved or semi-improved neutral or acidic grassland is a priority habitat, one of the most under threat in this area. Barnsley council has introduced a new approach to grass-cutting for more than 75 hectares of grassland as a contribution to the NIA and a project within the Landscape Partnership focuses on the verges of highways.

The moorland habitats of heath and bog are priority habitats. Where identified as SSSI work is taking place to conserve them by Natural England. Moors for the Future has also been working in the wider Dark Peak. The BBT has recently supported its application for an extension of its community science project. Voluntary Action Barnsley is also submitting bids for projects on the moors. On the moor edge uptake of environmental schemes by farmers has increased the numbers of ground nesting birds like lapwing.

Open-mosaics on former industrial land is another priority habitat. A proposed project within the Landscape Partnership will examine the habitats and species found on former pit stacks with a view to conservation of any important features. Some of the sites have had extensive reclamation and some are designated for development.

Records

The *Barnsley Biological Records Centre*, is now in its second year of development by Sheffield Council Ecology Unit in a contract funded by Barnsley council, with well over 100,000 records. Its records are increasingly in demand for planning policy and planning application decisions. A successful second Barnsley Bioblitz took place in July 2013, organised by Sorby Natural History society and the RSPB, and a number of schools were involved with BBT support.

Biodiversity in Schools project

The BBT has been successful in a bid for funding to the HLF for a biodiversity in schools project which started with an event for volunteers in September 2013. More volunteers have been recruited and training and eight schools have started with the project. A meeting was held to bring together the different environmental projects for schools to provide a more coordinated approach across the borough. More can be done in this regard.

Community

NIA activities include a community based hidden gems initiative run by Groundwork.

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

Hedgehogs. We are promoting more being done to find out the numbers of hedgehogs seen in Barnsley, the conditions that suit them, and for appropriate release schemes for orphaned or injured hedgehogs.

Glow-worms. Jill Hayler with others has been monitoring the glow-worm site near on the transpennine trail near Thurgoland. There was an increase in 2013 but the numbers were far less than those counted in 2008. More habitat management is needed and more needs to be known about local conditions that suit them.

Birds. The Barnsley Bird Study Group has continued its work recording birds and nesting sites in Barnsley and will publish its breeding birds atlas later this year.

Riparian mammals. The work of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust in a project supported by the DVGH NIA is improving habitats for riparian mammals in a number of locations especially water voles. There is a need to collect records of water voles and other riparian mammals outside the NIA.

Planning and development

The BBT is attempting to respond, where appropriate, to planning applications that may have an impact on biodiversity. This will complement the responses made by the council's biodiversity officer.

Where planning applications are not required even more vigilance is sometimes required. We are looking into collating advice for land owners and others on the requirements for change of use of land, the demolition of buildings, etc These involved a number of agencies.

We responded to the consultation held on Barnsley council's *Local Development Framework Sites and Places* Proposals. We recommended that ecological assessments need to take place for the proposed employment sites and this has now been completed.

The Local Plan proposals for employment and housing allocated land to be published this summer will be a crucial point for a further response.

Sites

Trevor Mayne reported last year that the proportion of the 71 *Local Sites* reported as having positive management had risen in 2012 from the previous year. However the 2013 report showed no further improvement and there is some way to go to reach a satisfactory position.

We in the Trust can be more proactive in promoting the management of sites for conservation and in identifying new sites that valuable as habitats and are or could be managed for wildlife.

Partners in the BBT can contribute to following up the recommendations in the ecology reports produced following surveys in 2010.

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 January 2014