

ISSUES ACTION PLAN: Species and Habitat Management

1. AIMS OF ACTION PLAN.

- To maintain and enhance species and habitat diversity throughout Birmingham and the Black Country;
- To promote and secure appropriate management of all nature reserves and other sites of importance for wildlife;
- To encourage and seek to establish sympathetic management where nature conservation is not the primary function but priority habitats and/or species are present or could be supported. For example on grazing land, agricultural land, land around industrial and commercial premises, parks and open spaces, golf courses, hedgerows, canals, railway embankments.
- To promote and secure habitat management and, where necessary, habitat creation or restoration for the protection and benefit of species of national or regional importance.

2. CURRENT ACTION

2.1 Introduction

Birmingham and the Black Country contains a great variety of land other than buildings, roads, railway tracks and other modern infrastructure. This can be nature reserves; parks and other open spaces; agricultural and grazing land, gardens and allotments; embankments of canals, railways, motorways, rivers and streams- but nearly all is of potential value for wildlife. Only a small proportion of this land, both locally and nationally, is in nature reserves where land is managed specifically for wildlife.

While many of our most important wildlife sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National and Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, biodiversity cannot be maintained, enhanced or even protected solely within existing nature reserves or within publicly owned land. Many important species and some key habitats exist within the wider environment. Therefore sympathetic management of land where nature conservation is not the primary function is also important for the overall protection and enhancement of biodiversity.

We cannot manage every piece of land for every species, but we can manage areas, both large and small, for their characteristic habitats and species, whether these are trees, beetles or snails. Management priorities will be set by the individual habitat and species action plans.

2.2. **What is managed and by who?**

The Black Country Nature Conservation Strategy and the Nature Conservation Strategy for Birmingham highlight nationally and locally important habitats and species- these are the priority for management. The development of Habitat and Species Action Plans will further inform management priorities.

Within Birmingham and the Black Country, sites have been given special designation because of their nature conservation value. These are:- National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs), also known as Wildlife Consultation Areas (WCAs) in Dudley. These designations apply both to local authority and privately owned and managed land.

Most sites which fall into the statutory categories (NNR, LNR and SSSI) have management plans in place and/or are being managed actively. The local, non-statutory designations of SINC and SLINC/WCA present a much less systematic picture. Most sites in these categories may not have a management plan nor any active management taking place, or if it is, this will almost only be on local authority controlled land with other sites largely inappropriately managed or neglected.

Recording and monitoring of habitats and species, important for management planning and review, is most prevalent on sites within the statutory designations but even here this is patchy and inconsistent and may not be focused on management operations. For species, non-statutory sites and on land not in local authority control, the monitoring picture is very patchy.

The majority of statutory sites, including all LNRs, are under the control of the five local authorities and are managed by teams of wardens/ rangers, often with the help of volunteers. Many SINCs in local authority control are managed by grounds maintenance staff, contractors, volunteers or by a combination of these. Others, however, are unmanaged. The management of privately owned SINCs and other sites of local importance is little monitored and extremely variable in nature and effect.

While local authorities are responsible for managing many of the designated sites, several voluntary organisations play a key role in nature conservation and in improving the environment of their local communities and, in doing so, can make a major contribution.

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) and its affiliated groups, the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, the National Urban Forestry Unit (NUFU), Groundwork, local wildlife groups, members' groups of neighbouring County Wildlife Trusts and special interest groups such as the West Midlands Bird Club undertake a certain amount of management for wildlife.

Volunteers are involved in the management of many sites and monitoring of selected species, sometimes as members of conservation organisations or community groups but also on an individual basis.

Outside of designated sites, much open space is managed, often by local authorities, primarily for recreation. In many cases wildlife benefits but there is much scope for improving management and/or targeting priority habitats and species.

Horse grazing is a significant land use within Birmingham and the Black Country. While this can be an effective tool for grassland management, it can also result in a severe reduction in grassland quality. On their own land, local authorities have power, through licences and agreements, to enforce appropriate grazing levels. Guidance and advice are available, from local authorities and nature conservation organisations, for private landowners.

Much land is managed for agriculture within Birmingham and the Black Country, including a number of designated sites, notably grasslands. The degree to which this management is beneficial or damaging to habitats and species present is extremely variable. There is considerable scope for providing advice and support for landowners and managers to encourage and improve sympathetic management.

Organisations responsible for the infrastructure of roads, railways and canals also manage associated habitat including designated sites. The degree to which this management is sympathetic to wildlife varies. Various nature conservation organisations offer advice and lobby for improved management of these linear features. (Education is the subject of another Issues Biodiversity Action Plan).

2.3. **How is management currently secured?**

On local authority sites management is currently secured through the presence of dedicated site staff (most LNRs), through the implementation of management plans on many sites designated for their wildlife value, through one-off projects carried out by organisations such as NUFU, BTCV, the Groundwork Trust and local wildlife groups, through contracts for grounds maintenance and through grazing licences.

On privately owned land, management can be secured through management agreements with landowners. This occurs for some SSSIs within the region but is limited in its application due to the lack of resources for funding. This can be secured for selected habitat types through Countryside Stewardship, administered by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA). The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) offer advice to landowners on securing these incentive payments and nature conservation management in general.

A good deal of current management of designated sites, is *ad hoc* or stop gap and may not always be linked to regional or local priorities, strategies and objectives or even to a defined and agreed management plan. On other sites where management plans are in place they are urgently in need of review and may not be fully utilised.

Partnership projects, incentive schemes and grant aid have been very useful in directing funds to enhance land management for wildlife: These include:

- Countryside Stewardship
- Forestry Authority Woodland Grant Scheme
- English Nature Species Recovery Programme
- Wildlife Trust/ RSPB/ Woodland Trust etc. initiatives and projects.
- Groundwork and BTCV projects accessing European and national funding for environmental regeneration
- Neighbourhood Nature
- Black Country Millennium Forest Programme
- West Midlands Heathland Restoration Project
- National Lottery Charities Board Grants
- Landfill Tax credits
- Shell Better Britain Campaign;
- Learning Through Landscapes (school grounds);

3. **EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT ACTION**

3.1. **Site and species management**

Monitoring of sites and their management is carried out by staff of English Nature (SSSIs and NNRs) and local authorities (NNRs, SSSIs, LNRs some SINC, SLINC and sites with management agreements) or FRCA for Countryside Stewardship sites. Monitoring of particular species may be carried out by the above, but it is as likely to be done by site-based staff, volunteers and members of local wildlife groups. Many managed sites are not monitored and, together with unmanaged sites are subject only to infrequent survey and review. Where monitoring does take place, it is not always linked to management. This means that the effectiveness of current action can only partly be assessed.

English Nature site condition monitoring should measure the effectiveness of SSSI management. For other sites little is currently done to measure the effectiveness of management, though this is built into management plans for some sites.

3.2. **Factors which hinder effective management**

- lack of resources;
- management for nature conservation is not an economic land use and requires incentives to be an option for most private landowners;
- lack of statutory provision to compel appropriate management for most sites;
- lack of baseline data and monitoring;
- lack of a scientific approach to management based on a sound methodology;
- lack of a management strategy, policy or plan
- failure to follow management plans in the long-term due to personnel changes;
- lack of specialist knowledge;
- lack of communication between organisations and within local authorities.

3.3. **Means of ensuring appropriate management is carried out:**

- by having strong, clear policies and management plans in place that are readily understood by land managers and others, and regularly monitored and reviewed;
- by providing information, training and advice on management priorities and techniques;
- by making use of management agreements with landowners/managers based on well-defined management objectives and set targets;
- by working to secure grant-aid for both local authority and privately owned sites;
- by encouraging community involvement and the training of volunteers;
- by promoting partnership action

3.4. **Means of assessing the effectiveness of management:**

- by setting targets and measuring their achievement
- by monitoring the quality and extent of priority habitats
- by monitoring the population levels and distribution of priority species
- by monitoring key or characteristic species associated with target habitats

4. **LEGAL ASPECTS, RESEARCH AND GUIDANCE.**

4.1. **Legal Aspects**

At present, even the statutory designations of NNR, SSSI and LNR carry no legal requirement for management. Inappropriate management or neglect is often cited as the reason for loss of wildlife interest and the decline of headline species. Due to the national scale of the problem, and high profile lobbying by many conservation organisations, it is likely that legislation under current consideration will include requirements for appropriate management to be tied into statutory site designation.

The timescale of legislation is unknown and non-statutory sites are unlikely to be affected. Therefore it is unlikely that statutory powers can be relied on to achieve a great deal of management.

Local Authority Planning Departments can secure management and enhancement of sites through the development control process, by the application of planning conditions and the use of management agreements. These powers can only be exercised as part of the development control process and are therefore limited in application.

Species protection legislation does not extend to protection of their habitat by ensuring appropriate management.

4.2. **Research and Guidance**

Of the statutory organisations, English Nature publishes a wide range of materials including scientific papers, 'hands on' management articles, glossy magazines and both site and topic-based leaflets, and also commissions much research relevant to conservation management. The FRCA offers advice to farmers and landowners and the Forestry Authority undertakes a similar role for woodland owners and managers. The Environment Agency also publishes a range of advisory documents and commissions research in the nature conservation field.

Other national organisations, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the National Trust, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, FWAG, Butterfly Conservation and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers all publish useful information on aspects of management. Many special-interest societies such as the British Dragonfly Society, Pondlife, Plantlife, and the Mammal Society provide information relevant to their particular interest groups.

The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country has been dealing with wildlife issues in the urban context for many years and is a source of information and advice. Nature Conservation Officers employed by the local authorities, local organisations such as badger and bat groups, local BTCV offices and wildlife groups are among other sources of advice.

A considerable body of research is carried out by staff and students of local universities and further education institutions. This includes UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) commissioned research into urban habitats and their importance for a range of species.

5 Action Plan Objectives and targets.
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Objective	Target
1. To maintain and secure appropriate management for all NNRs, SSSIs, LNRs and SINCs, using Habitat and Species Action Plans to prioritise action.	Ongoing
2. To develop management strategies for priority habitats and species which are found primarily outside of designated sites or cannot be protected by site management alone.	2006
3. To ensure that management operations on designated wildlife sites take place within the framework of an appropriate scientific methodology and management plan which comprises survey work, consultation with experts, assessment of the options available and their risks, recording of work implemented and monitoring after implementation.	2006
4. To consider the roles of habitat restoration and creation in habitat and species management and to identify and encourage best practice in these disciplines.	Ongoing
5. To promote and develop partnerships for site management, including with private landowners, community groups and others.	Ongoing
6. To encourage community involvement in site management and to promote public access where this is consistent with nature conservation.	Ongoing
7. To secure the resources required for habitat and species management.	Ongoing
8. To ensure that those involved in site and species management have access to training and advice where needed.	Ongoing
9. To monitor and review the effectiveness of site and species management.	2006
10. To raise the profile of management as an important nature conservation issue amongst the public and politicians.	Ongoing

6.0 Proposed action with partners to meet objectives

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011	
6.1. Policy and legislation										
Seek the inclusion of appropriate site, species and habitat management measures in Unitary Development Plans and/ or other policy documents.	LAs	WT, EA, EN	As Unitary Development Plans and other policy documents are prepared.							1,2
Seek the inclusion of appropriate site, species and habitat management measures in Local Environmental Agency Plans and/ or other policy documents.	EA	LAs, WT, EN	As Local Environment Agency Plans and other policy documents are prepared.							1, 2
Secure management of habitats and species through planning/ legal agreements, where appropriate.	LAs	WT, EA, EN	Ongoing							1, 2
6.2. Site safeguard and management										
Management plans in place and being implemented for all SSSIs in public ownership and LNRs.	EN, LAs			•						1, 3
Management plans in place and being implemented for all publicly owned SINC's supporting priority habitats and/or species	LAs	WT, BTCV, GW, LCG			•					1, 3
Management agreements in place for all privately owned SSSIs and SINC's supporting priority habitats and/or species	EN, LAs, WT,	LO						•		1, 3
Seek resources from funding organisations and other sponsors to fund the preparation of management plans and agreements and their implementation.	LAs, EN, WT, EA	Public, private and voluntary sectors.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	7

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number	
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011		
Consult with appropriate experts, interest groups and stakeholders to ensure consideration of all aspects when preparing management plans and agreements.	All								•		3, 5, 6, 7.
Establish management staff and volunteer training requirements; identify appropriate training courses, work in partnership to develop training opportunities to fill gaps in existing provision.	LAs, EN, WT, EA	Education Sector, BTCV GW							•		7, 8
Consult, recruit, contract partners/ individuals to undertake management operations on sites not currently under management.	LAs, EN, WT, EA		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 4, 5, 6
Encourage the involvement of community groups and other volunteers in site management	LAs, WT	BTCV, GW, LCG				•					5, 6
6.3. Advisory											
Establish forum to encourage good management practice and dissemination of information comprising public, private and voluntary sectors.	LAs, EN, WT, EA	Public, private and voluntary sector.				•					3, 5, 8
Identify information needs, develop management advice database	All								•		8

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011	
Seek resources from funding organisations other sponsors to publish good practice notes and guidelines.		Education Sector.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	8
6.4 Future research and monitoring										
Establish extent and quality of current management operations on designated wildlife sites Identify problem areas.	LAs, EN, WT, EA		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 2, 9
Monitor the management status of all SSSIs once every 5 years.	EN	LAs, WT						•		1, 2, 3, 9
Monitor the management status of all SINC's once every 5 years.	LAs	EN, WT						•		1, 2, 3, 9
Gather data on management status of sites on central database.	LAs, EN, WT, EA ER		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 2, 8, 9
Gather data on the effectiveness of habitat creation and restoration measures on central database.	LAs, EN, WT, EA		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 2, 9
Encourage research into the effect of management on the wildlife resource in the urban setting.	LAs, EN, WT, EA	Education Sector.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 2, 8, 9
Encourage research into habitat restoration and creation techniques	LAs, EN, WT, EA	Education Sector.	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	4
6.5. Communications and publicity										

ACTION	POTENTIAL DELIVERERS		YEAR							Meets objective number
	Lead	Partner	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2011	
Provide feedback to grant aiding bodies and local politicians on the cost-effectiveness of incentive schemes, and opportunities for their application.	LAs, EN, WT/ EA		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 2, 9, 10
Include management information in all new site-based leaflets/ handbooks.	LAs, EN, WT, EA		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	5.10

6.6 Links to other action plans										
Include management/ habitat creation requirements from other Species, Habitat Biodiversity Action Plans in Site and Species Management Action Plan.			•	•	•	•	•	•	•	1, 2, 4, 9

7. **CO-ORDINATION AND REVIEW**

This Biodiversity Action Plan will be implemented over 10 years with a first review after 5 years. A group will be set up to co-ordinate implementation and to report to the Biodiversity Steering Group. This group will meet at a minimum on a yearly basis.

Review will be carried out in conjunction with related Habitat and Species Action Plans as appropriate.

Review will consist of measuring achievement of targets. The group will, with the support of the Steering Group, develop and implement appropriate monitoring methods which will inform the review process.

The Action Plan will be revised and updated in the light of review results and any relevant changes in circumstances and/or additional information which becomes available during the review period.

In line with national guidance, the Steering Group will report to the UK Steering Group.