

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

# Biodiversity Partnership



## Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership Newsletter May 2012

It has been a year of changes, both locally and nationally.

In summer 2011, the Government published the first white paper on the Natural Environment in over 20 years. Although short of firm commitments, it has none-the-less advanced the cause of nature conservation in England, by formally recognising that conserving nature and trying to maintain the status quo is no longer adequate. If we are to reverse the losses to biodiversity seen over the past century, then we need to move into an era of large-scale restoration of nature at a landscape scale and to properly value the services that the natural environment provides to our economy and lives. The new landscape scale approach to nature conservation can be simply summed up as “more, bigger, better and joined up”.

We can be proud in Cambridgeshire that the push for landscape-scale conservation, espoused in the Natural Environment White Paper, started locally. The idea for the Great Fen developed in the late 1990s and in 2001 the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership published our “*50 Year Vision for Wildlife and Habitats*”, the first public document to explicitly map the areas where nature conservation efforts were required at a landscape scale. Our vision was also the pre-cursor to the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of which was published in 2011 and clearly includes the Biodiversity Partnership’s landscape scale priorities.

The Natural Environment White Paper has named an area for landscape-scale conservation as a “Nature Improvement Area” (NIA). A competition has been held to select 12 pilot NIAs across England, to develop new approaches to landscape-scale working over the next three years. The Nene Valley has successfully applied to become one of the 12 pilot areas and, although mainly in Northamptonshire, it does cover the Nene Valley in Peterborough up to the start of the Nene Washes. However, it is recognised that there will need to be many more NIAs if we are to meet our nature conservation objectives. Elsewhere in our area, landscape-scale conservation work will continue in the Great Fen, Wicken Fen and the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds.

Another initiative from the Natural Environment White Paper is the suggestion that Local Nature Partnerships should be created to drive forward conservation and to operate at a strategic level. The key difference between this and how we and the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Forum currently operate, is that Local Nature Partnerships should operate at board level with senior officers and decision makers actively involved and be on a par with Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Health & Well-being Boards covering economic and social interests. An event for key stakeholders was held on 18<sup>th</sup> May and this may have implications for the future operation of our Biodiversity Partnership and the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Forum. Watch this space...

Martin Baker, Chair of Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group

## Biodiversity Projects Fund

We are pleased to announce that the Small Projects Fund will be running for another year. There is just over £10,000 in the budget for 2012/13. We are keen to hear about new local projects that will help deliver Biodiversity Action Plan targets, so please get in touch! More information and an application form can be downloaded from our website [www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk/downloads](http://www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk/downloads). There will be three rounds of applications in 2012/13 with the next deadlines on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> July and Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November.

## Funded Projects updates

### Coe Fen Planthopper project

This project was initiated after the rare planthopper *Ribaudelphax imitans* was found on Coe Fen in Cambridge City. This BAP species is only found on four other sites in the UK (and only seen on two of these sites in the last 35 years). Not only is this planthopper very rare, its ecological requirements are very poorly known. The project aimed to learn more about the population size at Coe Fen, the planthopper's life-cycle, and its food and habitat requirements.



*R. imitans* © A. Helden



Coe Fen © A. Helden

Researchers from Anglia Ruskin University systematically sampled the site between April and October 2011. Significant numbers of *R. imitans* were found in the samples. There were two generations of *R. imitans*: late April to early May and mid to late July. The species is most abundant in the northern part of Coe Fen. This corresponds with the areas which seem to have a greater coverage of the planthopper's probable food plant - tall fescue, *Festuca arundinacea*. Although this initial study

has finished, the researchers plan to continue their work and will aim to map the distribution of tall fescue and *R. imitans* density this year and hopefully confirm an association. They have also provided feedback to the City Council to update the management plan for Coe Fen and will continue to work with the Council to learn more about this species.

### Fens Biodiversity Audit

This project aims to use methodology developed and proven in the Breckland Biodiversity Audit to produce management guidance for the Fenland Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Area which targets multi-species assemblages to deliver the most benefit for the biggest number of species.

The method involves an extensive search of data archives using a range of sources to create a definitive collection of species records for the target area. A team from the University of East Anglia then analyses the data in order to identify species groups based around the Guild classification methodology which groups species by their broad

ecological requirements e.g. species requiring bare ground & grazing is one guild while those requiring bare ground without grazing form another guild.

One million records have been collated, which cover 12-13,000 different species. A workshop was held with recorders to identify specialist species. The University of East Anglia is now working on defining the guilds and identifying the critical guilds for the key species associated with the fens (Red Data Book, BAP, Nationally Rare / Scarce, Fenland specialists). These will then be used to develop detailed evidenced-based management guidance that can be implemented through site management and habitat creation projects.

## Strategic Projects

### Pond Restoration Project

In the last newsletter, we talked about the Pond Restoration Project funding bids to WREN and HLF, through which we hoped to restore 30 ponds over the course of 2 years across all districts in Cambridgeshire.

Unfortunately, our funding bid applications were not successful. However, the partnership had identified some “quick-win” ponds to restore as part of the preparation for this project. We decided to go ahead with these under our own steam and using the funds that had been set aside for match funding a larger bid. Although much of the work has been completed, some will be undertaken this coming winter.

The target ponds:

Isleham Village Pond – work including desilting and tree thinning to be done winter 2012.

Barham Village Pond – tree work to allow more light to reach the pond has been completed. Dredging and de-silting works will be carried out this coming winter.

Cherry Orton pond and Debdale pond in Peterborough – These two ponds have been desilted and overhanging trees cut back.



**Photos: Debdale pond in Peterborough before and after the restoration work.**

Parson Drove, Fenland – This pond is the focus of a broader habitat enhancement project for which the Partnership will be providing match funding.

We hope to be able to come back to this project in the future and are monitoring grants for a suitable opportunity.

### **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Chalk Rivers Project**

This is another strategic project that was prioritised by the Projects Group. We are holding off on an overarching funding bid for now, but different aspects of the project are being taken forward by various group members.

A habitat enhancement project on the River Shep at How Moor is being led by the Friends of the River Shep and South Cambridgeshire District Council and was funded by the Small Projects Fund. Habitat improvement work has been carried out along the river bank and gravel has been added in places to the river bed to increase fish spawning habitat. Flow deflectors will be installed when the water levels have stabilised.

There are two habitat enhancement projects which have received funding through the Water Framework Directive; on the River Shep and River Mel. Through the combined efforts of local volunteers (Friends of the River Shep and River Mel Restoration Group), South Cambridgeshire District Council and contractors the project is creating in-stream features such as gravel shoals and woody debris, stabilising banks and adding flow deflectors. The project also ran a well-attended riverfly monitoring training day with the Riverfly Partnership on the 5th May 2012.

There is also work going forward on the Bourn Brook and the River Rhee funded through the EA Environment Programme and DEFRA funding for Local Action Groups. This is being led by the Countryside Restoration Trust and the Wildlife Trust. This project is engaging with the landowners along the Bourn Brook and River Rhee, offering surveys for key species and advice on river management and building up a network of contacts to help identify future possibilities for habitat enhancement work. Species being surveyed for include water vole, mink, and the invasive plants Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed.

Funding through the DEFRA Catchment Restoration Fund is being explored to continue this work and take forward identified opportunities for habitat restoration.

The Wildlife Trust and Cambridge City Council are also looking at a potential project focusing on the brooks in the City and several Local Nature Reserve sites next to the River Cam.

### **Churchyards Project**

This is a new potential project being led by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and the diocese of Ely. A funding application is being submitted by NBN to the Heritage Lottery Fund to fund three pilot projects including one in the Ely Diocese. This project would employ a national co-ordinator and a local officer for each project. Local officers would be closely involved with the local records centres. The overall goal of the project is to engage people in species recording in their local churchyards. Those involved with the Ely project

are looking to use the data gathered to inform the management of the churchyards and potentially identify sites of County Wildlife Site quality.

### Orchards Group update

The Orchards group continues to meet throughout the year to address orchard related biodiversity matters. Members have provided advice and support to a number of community groups wishing to create orchards in villages.



*Hygrocybe conica*. © V. Perrin

Throughout 2009-11, a phase three survey was undertaken on 20 orchards across Cambridgeshire. This was a huge task but has generated valuable species data on this threatened habitat. A full report will soon be available to download from the Biodiversity Partnership website.

To complement this survey, the Orchard group has helped with the identification of orchards that may meet the criteria for a County Wildlife Site. There are now eight sites designated under the orchard criteria. In order to promote the value of orchards and their selection as Wildlife Sites, the group is producing a leaflet for owners of orchards. This will be available later in 2012.

### Orchard Mapping Project

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre has been working to improve the extent of knowledge of our traditional orchards. Over the last few months they have been working on producing a map of this habitat within the fenland character area in Cambridgeshire. The task has utilised existing knowledge from the traditional orchard habitat inventory (compiled by the People's Trust for Endangered Species and available from Natural England) and the recent Cambridgeshire orchard surveys. Using these sources, alongside up to date aerial photography and ordnance survey mapping, they identified 627 sites to check (about 60% came from the PTES orchards). Of these, 69% have been ground-truthed and about half are definitely traditional orchard, and another quarter probably are. There are still a lot of sites to visit, if we get time, in the late summer or autumn. The aim is to complete the site visits in the spring and autumn when the blossom and fruits will make the task easier. An additional 25 orchards have been found whilst out and about, these were not evident from aerial photography or maps, either because they are a bit overgrown and being forgotten about, or because they are small sites within, for instance an allotment complex or similar.

Of the land surveyed so far, 195 hectares of traditional orchard have been confirmed but there are still more sites to check and there are definitely other traditional orchards out there waiting for us to find.

### CPERC update

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre is now one of the first two Record Centres in Britain to obtain accreditation. The new accreditation standards

were set by the Association of Local Record Centres (ALERC) as part of a project to improve data quality standards and services.

To meet the accreditation standards, Record Centres had to meet at least 16 criteria out of the 20 set out by the accreditation system, whilst showing a continuing commitment to fulfill the remainder. The criteria included: working with wide range of partner organisations such as local authorities, statutory agencies and non-governmental organisations; and holding data on the diversity of wildlife that exists in the county from birds and butterflies to beetles and bryophytes.

The accreditation is being rolled out nationally in May 2012.

In another new project, CPERC is now hosting a Biodiversity Outreach Officer, Jane Andrews-Gauvain. Jane started in January 2012 and will spend eighteen months working on the "Recording Wildlife Near You" project. She will be working with small groups of volunteers from communities to generate interest in surveying for local species and also gathering some new records. This project is concentrating on areas of the county near Fenland and Peterborough, where we have fewer existing wildlife records. She will be able to provide advice, survey and identification guides, and help with submitting records.

Finally, we are sad to say goodbye to John Cornell, who has been managing CPERC since early 2010 and has helped set the Records Centre up on strong footing to ensure it will continue over the years to come.

### Contact details/ email changes

The Wildlife Trust has changed its name slightly and is now the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire (we have dropped the Peterborough from our name – but don't worry, we still cover Peterborough!) This means our emails have changed a bit as well. They are now all at "wildlifebcn" instead of at "wildlifebcnp."

To remind you, the contacts for the Biodiversity Partnership are:

**Local Biodiversity Partnership work in general:** Laura Osborne and Sian Williams, [biodiversitypartnership@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:biodiversitypartnership@wildlifebcn.org), 01954 713530

**Biodiversity Steering Group:** Martin Baker, [martin.baker@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:martin.baker@wildlifebcn.org), 01954 713508

**Traditional Orchards Group:** Sarah McConnachie-Kessel, [sarah.mckessel@mypostoffice.co.uk](mailto:sarah.mckessel@mypostoffice.co.uk)

**Biodiversity Partnership Website:** [www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk](http://www.cpbiodiversity.org.uk)

