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Highland LBAP Review

Easter Ross Implementation Plan 2006-2009

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Easter Ross Implementation Plan
2006-2009**

EASTER ROSS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2006 - 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

This implementation plan represents the next step in biodiversity action planning in Ross and Cromarty (East) and should be read in conjunction with the Ross and Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Action Plan (2004). It has been drawn up by the Ross and Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Group and EnviroCentre.

Like the Ross and Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Action Plan, this document forms part of a suite of LBAPs and associated Implementation Plans that have been produced for the Highland Council area by local biodiversity groups. It is anticipated that the Highland Biodiversity Partnership will be responsible for working on the strategic and cross-boundary issues identified in each of the LBAPs, and each local biodiversity group is represented on the Partnership. A Highland Biodiversity Action Plan is also underway, to draw out the main issues from the LBAPs and provide a work schedule for the Highland Biodiversity Partnership.

It is therefore envisaged that the Highland LBAP Implementation Plans will be the main tool for local biodiversity groups, funding bodies, other partners, community groups and individuals to make progress on biodiversity issues at a local level.

1.1 *Local biodiversity group*

The Ross and Cromarty (East) local biodiversity group is a body of interested individuals representing a number of public sector agencies, NGOs, businesses and Estates that was created to write the initial Ross and Cromarty (East) LBAP. The Group is not constituted, does not have its own bank account and is not affiliated to any other organisation.

Membership is as follows:

Aileen Mackay	Tarbert Primary School
Andrew Matheson	Brahan Estate
Cameron Ross	Novar Estate
Christel Smeets	Milton Community Woodland Trust
Dave Bruce/Shona Amos	Forestry Commission Scotland
Fran Lockhart	Highland FWAG
Gillian McKnight	SAC
John Miller	Independent
Kenna Chisholm	RSPB Scotland
Kenny Taylor	Independent
Martin Hind	Highland Council Countryside Rangers
Murdo Macdonald	HBRG
Shaun Meikle	Tain and District Field Club
Simon McKelvey	Conon District Salmon Fishery Board
Sue Scoggins	SNH
Tanya Ogilvy/Tim Sweeny	SEPA

1.2 *Habitats and species priorities*

The Ross and Cromarty (East) local biodiversity group has not identified the priorities in terms of habitats or species for the area. The Group concentrated their efforts on producing a set of project proposals that they feel they could deliver in the next three years.

The local biodiversity group has gone through the actions contained in the Ross and Cromarty (East) LBAP and identified a number of actions that could be taken forward by the Group. The Group made comments on each of the actions in the LBAP and further work by the Highland Biodiversity Officer and the Group is needed to refine this work. Please see the attached Annex 1 (R & C East LBAP actions) that contains a spreadsheet detailing this information.

2. **EASTER ROSS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PROJECTS**

The following three projects were agreed with the local biodiversity group as the priorities for action over the next three years (April 2007 – March 2010). A list of other potential projects and some general issues raised by the Local Biodiversity Group are set out after the project plans. The local biodiversity group have drawn up a list of other project activities that are happening in Ross and Cromarty (East) that are linked to the LBAP process. Please see Annex 2 (R & C East LBAP activity) for a spreadsheet with this information.

2.1 *Community Wildlife Audits*

There is a lack of information on the biodiversity in and around local communities and a lack of appreciation or involvement in the wildlife on people's doorstep. This can lead to the development or inappropriate management of greenspace and habitats within and around communities. This project aims to involve local people to collect data on the species and habitats present in up to five local communities (to be identified but the following are potential communities: Alness, Muir of Ord, Tain, Strathpeffer, Contin, Milton by Kildary and Seaboard villages).

Project aim: To identify important wildlife areas around Easter Ross communities through the development of community wildlife audits.

Project objectives:

- Identify important areas for species and habitats identified around up to five communities with surveys undertaken by local people (suitably trained); and
- To engender appreciation of wildlife on the doorstep of up to five Easter Ross communities.

Project lead: Highland Council Countryside Ranger.

Project partners: HBRG, RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, Muir of Ord Environmental Group, Inverness Bat Group, Invergordon Environment Group, Alness Environment Group, Tain and District Field Club, Inverness Botany Group and Highland Council Planning Department.

Project implementation and outputs:

Training will be provided, by local experts, for species identification and habitat assessment (Phase 1), and people will be encouraged to undertake recording of a range of species they could see in their garden or greenspace. The communities involved will be asked to identify areas that are important to them. Through this process, local people will have a greater understanding of the wildlife in and around their community.

Actions:

- Identify 5 communities that are interested (and have the capacity to become involved) and the key community contacts to undertake wildlife audit;
- Identify lead coordinator for each audit from the community;
- Hold initial public meeting in each community and also liaise with existing community groups to outline project and recruit volunteers;
- Organise training and events and field activities;
- Ensure programme of events/training widely publicised in each local community;
- Link up with national and local initiatives;
- Produce a report of the community wildlife audit; and
- Undertake presswork and publicity about the project as indicated by the local community.

Resources needed:

- Coordinator in each community to organise project;
- Posters for events, meetings and activities;
- Trainer fees and T and S;
- Hall hire including tea/coffee/biscuits;
- Adverts for local press;
- Photocopying and printing for relevant leaflets, recording forms, posters, newsletter; and
- Limited number of ID guide books/leaflets.

Outputs:

- 3 – 5 community wildlife audits undertaken;
- Data collected on local wildlife and important areas of habitat identified in each community;
- Expertise in surveying, identification and recording of local species and habitats increased within each community involved in project;
- Increased awareness of local biodiversity within each community;
- Data collected incorporated into appropriate dataset and uploaded to NBN; and
- Report produced on the results of each community wildlife audit.

Proposed timetable:

Launch two community audits in April 2007, activities run each month until March 2008. Newsletter and report completed in April 2008. Launch another 2 community audits in January 2008, activities run each month until December 2008. Newsletter and report completed in January 2009. Launch another 1 community audit in January 2009, activities run each month until December 2009. Newsletter and report completed in January 2010.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List:

The project has no prior direct link to a specific UK BAP or Scottish BAP species. However, once the audit work begins around the five communities, it is likely that UK BAP and Scottish BAP species priorities will be identified.

Indicative costs:

The costs estimated below are per community and may vary depending upon the activities and events each community group decides to pursue. As a guide, each community wildlife audit should have £1,200 to spend on its own audit process. Five audits over the course of the 3 year period 2007 – 2010 would cost a total of £6,000.

Task/Effort/Materials	Cash
Trainer Fees	£700
Hall hire and refreshments	£150
Press adverts	£100
Newsletter	£150
Photocopying/printing	£50
Guide books	£50
Total	£1,200

Total costs for 5 Community Wildlife Audits: £6,000 for the three years.

All budget costs are estimates based on the provision of professional services and some costs maybe provided in-kind by partners or volunteers. The costs for a Project Coordinator are not included in this budget and would be an in-kind contribution by partners.

2.2 *Single Species Survey*

Project aim: To survey one high profile butterfly species annually in Easter Ross for three years.

Project objectives: Undertake a survey across Easter Ross for an easy to identify butterfly species (peacock or orange-tip) involving local people to encourage recording and local involvement.

Project lead: Highland Council Countryside Ranger.

Project partners: HBRG, Butterfly Conservation Scotland and local groups.

Project implementation and outputs:

Aim of the project is to get people involved in a simple recording scheme as the basis of encouraging more people to undertake species recording. The project will also raise awareness about biodiversity and local wildlife. A postcard with the picture of the butterfly (peacock or orange-tip) on one side and a return address, with a few details about the butterfly and recording questions, on the reverse will be produced. People will be asked to record where they saw the butterfly and return it to the countryside ranger. Records will be collated by the LBAP Group,

entered onto the appropriate dataset and a short report and map of records produced. The project is to be supported by posters, press advertisements and media articles organised with local groups/schools to search for the butterfly. This project would last for one year raising the awareness of a particular species, followed by another two species during the next two years.

Actions:

- Produce an ID postcard for the species with a picture of the butterfly and return address, survey questions on reverse;
- Launch survey with press adverts, media article, posters etc.;
- Further media article on survey results so far with call for more records; and
- Collate results at end of flight period and produce brief report, map and media article.

Resources needed:

- Coordinator to produce postcard, poster, media articles and organise events;
- Colour species postcard;
- Colour species posters;
- Adverts for local press; and
- Coordinator to produce report and map of results.

Outputs:

- Postcards produced for 3 different species for a public survey;
- Public survey undertaken for three species, with report and map produced for each species;
- Data collected incorporated into appropriate dataset and uploaded to NBN;
- Local people more aware of species in the survey and the value of recording; and
- A number of local groups and/or schools involved in species recording activities.

Proposed timetable:

Postcards and poster designed and printed in February 2007. Species survey launched in April 2007 with events over butterfly flight period. Final report and press article in October 2007. Repeat procedure in 2008 and 2009 for a different species postcard survey.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List:

Orange-tip and peacock butterflies are not on either the UK BAP or Scottish BAP lists. Any additional species should target UK BAP or Scottish BAP species.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task/Effort/Materials	Cash
Design and printing of poster	£200
Design and production of postcards	£500
Distribution costs	£200
Total	£900

Costs are for one postcard survey in 2007, so with a further two surveys, one in 2008 and another in 2009, total costs would be £2,700.

All budget costs are estimates based on the provision of professional services and some costs maybe provided in-kind by partners or volunteers. The costs for a Project Coordinator are not included in this budget and would be an in-kind contribution by partners.

2.3 Easter Ross Cornfield Project

Project aim: To raise the profile of wildflowers, particularly the cornflower in Easter Ross.

Project objectives:

Raise the profile of cornfield annuals through the demonstration of wildflower friendly management. Areas of set aside land will be sown with cornfield annuals mixed with wild bird cover and promote the biodiversity benefits to the wider farming community.

Project lead: Highland FWAG.

Project partners: SAC, RSPB, BCS, Highland Council Countryside Rangers and SCF.

Project implementation and outputs:

The initial cornfield annual project involved sowing areas of set aside land with a cornfield annuals mix. The project raised the profile of cornfield annuals and promoted biodiversity benefits to the wider farming community, agencies and non-farming public and had schools participating in some planting/seed gathering. The project aimed to enhance the floral diversity of set aside ground in particular. Other species to benefit from the project included species of bat, bird and insect. A variety of demonstration sites were established to pilot a prescription potentially suitable for incorporating into agri-environment schemes.

The next stage of the project is to trial the sowing of a modified cornfield annuals mix with game or wild bird cover (similar to RSS). (A pure cornfield annuals mix of wildflowers is prohibitively expensive.) The seed to be used for the cornfield mix should be of local origin or at least of Scottish local origin. It is proposed to continue with the current number of sites and to include some interpretation. A key action is to monitor the sites over a three year period to determine the benefits to biodiversity through this type of management. If shown to be successful this project will be used to target agri-environment funding for this prescription, through agency site visits and an open event.

The Local Biodiversity Group felt that this project should really be taken up as a PAN-Highland issue.

Actions:

- Identify sites for sowing cornflower seed/bird cover mix;
- Source appropriate seed varieties;
- Contracts agreed with farmers and seed mixes sown;

- Set up several transects for recording/monitoring a number of sites and establish a recording programme;
- Design, produce and distribute interpretation material;
- Run an event targeting the farming community and Agency staff on cornfield annuals including field visits to project sites;
- Collect local origin seed from project sites, roadside verges, field margins using local groups/schools for use in subsequent years (if this is feasible);
- Promote sowing of cornfield annuals and publicise results of site monitoring; and
- Liaise with SEERAD on the project and its outcomes, and promote beneficial policy change.

Resources needed:

- Coordinator(s) to organise sowing, monitoring, farm contracts, interpretation and events;
- Purchase of seed;
- Management payments to farmers for sowing;
- Recorders to monitor sites;
- Interpretation material; and
- Publicity for events (posters, press ads).

Outputs:

- Areas on farms sown with cornfield annuals and wild bird mix;
- Project sites monitored, benefits to biodiversity identified and results published;
- Interpretation material produced;
- A number of farms involved in demonstrating wildflower management; and
- Farm event held and project benefits raised with SEERAD for inclusion in a future agri-environment prescription.

Proposed timetable:

Identify sites by March 2007, source seed and sow by April 2007, monitor sites and hold event over summer 2007. Liaise with SEERAD over opportunities for agri-environment schemes during summer 2007. Identify interpretation needs by June 2007 and produce/distribute interpretation material by March 2008. Continue project, using same sites and established recording methodology in 2008 and 2009.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List:

Some cornfield annuals are UK BAP Priority species e.g. Cornflower and this project will help deliver practical conservation action for them.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task/Effort/Materials	Cash
FWAG/SAC management fees	£1,800
Purchase of seed	£600
Management payments to farmers	£900
Farm event	£250

Interpretation material	£400
Surveyor fees	£2,400
Report write up/dissemination	£350
Total	£6,700

All budget costs are estimates based on the provision of professional services and some costs may be provided in-kind by partners or volunteers. The costs for a Project Coordinator are not included in this budget and would be an in-kind contribution by partners.

2.4 Implementation Plan Budget (estimates)

Community Wildlife Audits	£6,000
Single species survey	£2,700
Easter Ross Cornfield Project	£6,700
Total	£15,400

2.5 Other project suggestions raised by the group

- Biodiversity Champions – identify individuals within the LBAP Group who will champion either a habitat complex (woodland, farmland, marine, freshwater, upland) or a species group. Main point of contact for specialist issues and for assisting project coordination. 3 taxon/ habitat specialists who could advise on design, implementation and writing up projects, and would add to the identified lack of capacity within the groups.
- Non-natives species especially giant hogweed on Balnagowan River;
- Road verge management and audit of important sites;
- Reintroduction of extinct flowers (twinflower and one-flowered wintergreen);
- Wildlife Guide for Ross and Cromarty – easy to read guide for all ages to enable identification of local species;
- Riparian woodland restoration (Dunglass Island); and
- Species surveys/management on swifts, tree sparrows, newts, bats, barn owls, and squirrels.

2.6 General issues raised by the group

- Need for a part-time LBAP Coordinator;
- Fully functioning Local Biological Record Centre;
- Funding for local projects;
- Co-ordination of action happening across whole LBAP area by different partners, organisations and communities; and
- Engagement with UKBAP and linking UKBAP priorities with action on the ground at a local level.

3. SUMMARY

The Ross and Cromarty (East) Biodiversity Group have proposed, worked up and developed three local area projects for implementation: (i) Community wildlife audits, (ii) Single species surveys, and (iii) Easter Ross cornfield project. Depending upon how these are implemented, all three costed projects should deliver a range of benefits for UK and Scottish BAP targets.