

Minutes of Lochaber Biodiversity Group meeting held on 9 November 2009 at 10am, at Fassfern House, Locheil.

Present: Lorna Anness (chair) Stuart Wilkie, Donald Kennedy, Eilidh Ann Madden, Henry Dobson, Dorothy Gibb, Jonathan Willet (from item 4), Ian Strachan (minutes)

Apologies: Christine Welsh, Alastair Stewart, Keith Hoole, Kenneth Knott, Sarah Lewis, Jim Manthorp, Jo Ferris

Dorothy Gibb, an ecologist living near Spean Bridge, was welcomed to the group.

1. Minutes of meeting of 17 August 2009

- item 3 – Willet not Willets
- Item 4 – Rhododendron project interim report produced, final report due by end of 2009 (DK). Noted that new leaflet on Lever & Mulch method is now available.

Subject to these corrections the minutes were approved, by IS & HD.

2. Action Points from last meeting

- AP1 re Corpach Community Woodland - no progress. IS offered to contact Paul Biggin to move this forward (**new AP1**). HD also requested Paul's contact details.
- AP4 re review of farming/crafting chapter – no success, see item 5.

3. Highland Biodiversity Action Plan: Consultative Draft – although written deadline for comments had passed, LA asked for comments to take to the HBP meeting on 2 December.

- SW felt that there was insufficient emphasis on the importance of landowners/managers. Agreed that it is vital to communicate with them. Need to approach directly and build relationships. Different approaches needed according to habitat/land use - larger owners through representative organisations but more local approach for small-scale managers perhaps. Most owners nowadays are interested/aware of biodiversity but need help with specific advice and funding. LBAP should be a clearer resource for SRDP applicants. Need stronger link between LBAP and SRDP/RPAC priorities.
- 2nd sentence of last paragraph on p6 is hard to follow – could be made clearer?
- 5.2 – needs strengthening re planning and biodiversity – EPS is only a minor part of this
- Biodiversity of Highland section – montane habitat ARE identified as a UK priority habitat (Mountain heaths and willow scrub). Add Upland oakwoods and Upland mixed ashwoods as important for spp too? [points added by IS]

AP2 any additional comments to Lorna ASAP.

4. HBG Co-ordinators – Capacity Building

Rowantree Consultants have been appointed to help local groups to take forward local projects. Unfortunately they had been unable to come to our meeting today. LA will meet them on 2 December (HBP meeting) but will also ask them to make direct contact with LBG members with suggested dates for a meeting (**AP3**) preferably using an online calendar.

One element of the project is training – LA questioned whether this needed for Lochaber Group, though in discussion it was suggested that GIS training might be useful. Could money be used for other purposes? See also item 5.

The following ideas were identified as possible priorities for the group:

- Communication/liaison/meetings with landowners/managers and/or their representative organisations on LBAP priority habitats and species, through a dedicated post (following discussion on item 3).
- Rhododendron control – Need for targeting of advice in key areas, also training in Lever & Mulch method (recognising that this is not always the best solution). Mapping/survey in north and east Lochaber would also be useful to complement work done in Ardnamurchan/Morvern/Sunart.
- Species-rich grasslands – Lochaber (also Skye) has an important resource of this habitat e.g. Strontian, Inverroy, Glencoe, but recent HBP survey showed decline/loss through mixture of improvement, neglect and development. SRDP options exist, but need for targeted management at key sites.
- Winkle harvesting – research project needed to assess impact of overexploitation locally, with a view to developing a voluntary management scheme and leaflet (see 1.3 in LBAP). David Donnan at SNH is possible contact.
- Urban/community project – to get communities involved in their local areas e.g. coastal/wetland/woodland areas around Caol/Lochyside/Inverloch & Glen Nevis. Knotweed was one issue that could be looked at around Fort William. Could base on successful 'Wildlife Counts' projects elsewhere in Highland. Should think beyond Fort William if possible. HD offered FE staff input to relevant LBAP projects, HC rangers also keen to help.

The group considered that an efficient solution for taking these projects forward could be through dedicated Lochaber-based post(s). LA to discuss our ideas with consultants – other ideas from the group welcome, including feedback from members not at the meeting (**AP4**).

5. LBAP review

The group is struggling to make progress, with only the Woodland chapter completed so far. JM is willing to pick up the Mountain & Moorland chapter again, and this would be welcome. LA proposed that we should investigate whether we could get funding from the Capacity Building project to help with the other sections (**AP5**).

6. Update from Highland Council (JW)

- Invasives - leaflets distributed, more available on request. Supplies to go to libraries and info points. Report on distribution of key species due early next year. Hoping to get info from FC native woodlands survey.
- Data sharing – meeting held of interested parties but key players poorly represented – need another meeting to address this, also gap analysis. Feedback to be given to SG.
- Training for planners to be provided on European Protected Species. Biodiversity officers have very limited capacity to do much more unfortunately (HC needs an Ecologist!).

7. Representation on local groups

- Lochaber Community Development Plan – letter received from Sarah Bentley of SNH, inviting representative from LBG to join group to review/develop environment section of plan. IS agreed to do this on temporary basis (any other volunteers?)

- Lochaber Environmental Group (LEG) – EAM is involved already through composting project so agreed to represent LBG as well. Noted that they are having problem with NZ flatworm.
- Outdoor Capital – would be useful to engage with this if opportunity arises.

8. AOB

- Knoydart update noted from JM.
- EPS guidance – no comments.
- LA to check with AS whether remaining money for Butterfly project has been spent (**AP6**).

9. Date of next meeting

Monday 15th February 2010 at 10am at SNH Fort William office.

Summary of Action Points:

AP1: IS to contact Paul Biggin re Corpach Community Woodland.

AP2: All to send additional comments on Highland Biodiversity Plan to LA by end of November..

AP3: LA to ask Rowantree Consultants to contact group members re date for meeting.

AP4: All to consider other ideas for Lochaber projects and feed back on suggestions above.

AP5: LA to discuss possibility of funding for LBAP review with consultants.

AP6: LA to check with AS whether remaining money for Butterfly project has been spent.