

Biodiversity News from Highland:

Biodiversity Action Planning

Biodiversity planning in Highland has always taken a different approach to elsewhere in the UK. Whilst other areas have produced suites of Local Habitat and Species Action Plans, the **Highland Biodiversity Partnership** agreed to focus on the key strategic issues facing biodiversity in this large and hugely diverse area.

The Partnership covers the Highland Council area of 26,484 km². This is 33% of Scotland, 11.4% of the Great Britain, ten times larger than Luxembourg, 20% larger than Wales and nearly the size of Belgium! With 51 UK priority habitats and 455 UK priority species it is one of the most important places for biodiversity in the country. However, with a population of 220,490 and just one Biodiversity Officer post, the Partnership was keen to focus its efforts where they would be of most use.

Seven **Local Biodiversity Groups** were set up, and Local Biodiversity Action Plans were prepared for seven of the eight local areas within Highland. Badenoch and Strathspey is covered by the Cairngorms National Park and as such, has its own Biodiversity Partnership and resources.

Some of these Local Groups have agreed constitutions, set up bank accounts and are delivering projects on the ground. Others are experiencing problems with a lack of capacity, and some are even struggling to agree what their main focus should be. Recognising this, the Partnership secured funding for a three year, £100,000 project: the **Local Biodiversity Groups' Capacity Building Programme**, which has now been running for two years with some success.

The Programme aims to produce LBAP Project Plans for each of the seven Local Groups, which will set out their aims and objectives, and include worked-up specifications for up to five local projects. Consultants are now helping some of the Groups draw together funding applications to deliver some of these projects. There is also funding for training and awareness-raising through events, websites and printed materials. The Programme has one year left to go, and we hope that by this time next year the Highland Biodiversity Groups will be in a stronger position.

In addition to the Local Groups and their LBAPs, the Highland Biodiversity Partnership produces its own Highland Biodiversity Action Plan and holds an annual Forum event to listen to views and update a wider audience on progress. Anyone with an interest in Highland wildlife can be a member of the **Highland Biodiversity Forum**, which meets in Inverness on a Saturday during March or April.

The second **Highland Biodiversity Action Plan** (2010-2013) was launched at last year's Forum event. It identified eight strategic issues facing biodiversity in Highland, and proposed 24 new projects to address these issues. Job-share Biodiversity Officers Jonathan Willet and Janet Bromham gave an update on progress made towards delivering these 24 projects at the last Forum event on 2 April. Highlights are as follows:

- **Invasive Species:** The Highland Invasive Species Forum came into being in 2009. Its formation arose from an interest in taking action on invasive non-native species in Highland. Several projects have been completed or are underway, including a mapping project which collated information on the top five invasive species in Highland; the co-ordination of Giant Hogweed control in the four areas of infestation in Highland; and the employment of a Project Officer to secure funding for *Rhododendron ponticum* eradication projects.
- **Biodiversity & Planning:** A Supplementary Planning Guidance Note on Statutorily Protected Species is currently undergoing consultation. Three 'Biodiversity for Planners' training events were organised in February and March, and further training is planned for the autumn.
- **Highland Wildflower Nursery:** BTCV Scotland is taking forward this project, and is currently seeking to secure a site in central Inverness. If a site can be found, there are high hopes that work can begin later this year. The Nursery will grow and sell wildflowers of local provenance and act as a training hub for garden centres and nurseries selling wildflowers elsewhere in the Highlands.
- **Nature Detectives:** Children from South Lodge Primary in Invergordon have been working with a local artist to produce a new, colourful booklet entitled "Nature Detectives: The Challenge". It is hoped this will encourage children throughout the Highlands to find out more about the wildlife on their doorsteps. Teachers and Countryside Rangers will help pupils to work towards bronze, silver and gold awards, and an annual trophy will be awarded for the best project.

Jonathan concluded by saying that although the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan is not delivering everything it set out to do, it is delivering projects for which there is support nationally, and this is having a positive impact on Highland's biodiversity.

Further information on these plans, events and the various projects that have taken place since the Highland Biodiversity Project started in 2002 can be found on our website www.highlandbiodiversity.com.

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Images to accompany article: Highland Biodiversity Action Plan front page
Nature Detectives front page
Press Photo from Nature Detectives Launch

