

Highland



BIODIVERSITY NEWS

Welcome

Welcome to the third issue of *Highland Biodiversity News*, the newsletter for biodiversity in the North. This short paper aims to provide an annual update of what's happening with regard to biodiversity across the Highlands.

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Introduction

Biodiversity or 'biological diversity' is a relatively new term that, although linked to traditional approaches to nature conservation, presents a more inclusive opportunity for action that focuses on sustainable and wise use of resources rather than designated sites and protection of rare species.

As a region, Highland is extremely important for biodiversity. From the high mountain tops to the deep muddy basins of the West Coast sea lochs, we have a tremendous variety of habitats and richness of species that is unequalled anywhere else in the country. Highland supports 192 of the 238 priority Scottish species and 40 of the 42 priority Scottish habitats identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

This presents us with a somewhat daunting responsibility, and the Highland Biodiversity Project represents a first step towards an integrated approach to the management of biodiversity in the area.

Highland Biodiversity Project Update

The Highland Biodiversity Project got underway in January 2002, and aimed to identify and initiate priority actions for biodiversity across the Highlands, involve communities in biodiversity, promote community based sustainable development and produce Local Biodiversity Action Plans for each of the Highland Council areas.

The project was funded by The Highland Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise and RSPB Scotland, with match funding from the Highlands & Islands Special Transitional Programme.

The project is now complete and the outputs are summarised on page 2. The funding partners are currently considering the options for a second phase which is hoped to start early next year. In the meantime, The Highland Council and Scottish Natural Heritage have extended the project officers contract to the end of March 2005 and are looking to employ a more permanent post thereafter.

Project Staff and Next Steps

Welcome to Alice Brown, who is covering the Highland Biodiversity Officer post while Janet Bromham is on maternity leave. Janet had a baby boy, called David, on 29th August.



Alice Brown, Highland Biodiversity Officer (Maternity Cover)

Over the Winter, Alice will be contacting the local biodiversity groups with the aim of prioritising and working up two or three projects from each LBAP for delivery next year. Applications have been made to both North and West Highland Leader+ programmes for funding, which along with funding from Scottish Natural Heritage and The Highland Council, and support from the RSPB, will make this possible.

More information on the Highland Biodiversity Project and the next steps is available at www.highlandbiodiversity.com

Summary of Outputs (2002-2004)

Local Biodiversity Action Plans

Local Biodiversity Action Plans have now been produced for the areas of Caithness, Sutherland, Skye & Lochalsh, Wester Ross, Ross & Cromarty (East), Lochaber and Inverness & Nairn.

The Inverness & Nairn Biodiversity Action Plan, was launched on 11 September at the Glenmoriston Millennium Hall and copies of the Plan will be available in the near future. This Plan builds on the 'Biodiversity: Do a Little, Change a Lot' Community Biodiversity Action Plan booklet produced in 2002, which has recently been updated and reprinted.

The Badenoch and Strathspey area is covered by the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The plans aim to raise awareness of local biodiversity and suggest projects and actions that could be undertaken by individuals, groups, communities and agencies in the next five to ten years. They also list the priority species and habitats for each of the areas, and together they form a strategy for future biodiversity work in the Highlands.



Attendees at the Launch of the Ross & Cromarty (East) LBAP, at the winning garden of the 2003 Milnafua Wildlife Garden Competition.

Community-Led Practical Projects

24 community-led practical projects were supported through a small implementation scheme. These projects have included farming and wildlife projects, habitat improvement, wildlife watching hides, clean-ups, school projects and invasive species control.

Awareness-Raising Events

20 awareness-raising events or 'Know Your Own Patch Events' across the Highlands have been supported. These projects have ranged from guided walks and open days to flora and fauna surveys, school projects and nature based activities.

Habitat & Species Work

The Highland Biodiversity Project helped fund a river habitat restoration workshop run by the Association

of West Coast Fisheries Trust; a Bumble bee survey workshop hosted by the Caithness Field Club; and an otter conference on Skye run by the International Otter Survival Fund. It also sponsored Butterfly Conservation (Scotland) to raise awareness on management requirements for the rare Chequered skipper butterfly in Lochaber.



Chequered skipper

Marine Innovation Award

The Marine Innovation Award Scheme was run on a pilot basis in 2002 and 2003. It aimed to reward projects and companies for innovative works that demonstrated best practice in the sustainable use of Highland's coasts and inshore waters.

Round One was very successful and four projects received awards. The second Round rewarded two initiatives under the General category:

- Portree High School received £1,500 for their project to carry out beach clean-ups and educate pupils about the wildlife of the coastal environment.
- Golspie Seafront Centre received £2,500 for their project to establish a cetacean rescue facility and educate people about the marine environment.

Following the success of Round One the Highland Council, with funding from Highlands & Islands Enterprise and the North Highland Leader + Programme, initiated a marine and coastal development scheme entitled HiMARCS (Highland Marine Resources and Communities Scheme). The Marine Innovation Award will continue to run through this scheme as an additional Award for projects that demonstrate innovation and best practice within the marine environment.

Hay Meadow Project

Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh contain the largest extent of traditionally managed hay meadows in Scotland. These rare flower-rich grasslands are used for pasture and making hay, and are particularly valuable in biodiversity terms for their rich diversity of plants and insects, as well as their importance for birds such as the corncrake.

The Highland Biodiversity Project supported a re-survey of these grasslands and hay meadows in Skye, Lochalsh and Lochaber last summer. Information was also collected on management, and it is hoped that the results will feed into the future development of the Rural Stewardship Scheme in these areas.

The Caithness Collection

The Caithness Collection is a set of over 400 images of the wildlife, landscapes and land uses of Caithness. The project was managed by the Highland Biodiversity Project and the Caithness Wildlife Tourism Project Group. The pictures were commissioned from wildlife and landscape photographers Ken Crossan and Ian Sarjeant, and underwater photographer Sue Scott.



Loch Watten

A calendar and set of schools posters were produced, and circulated around schools and businesses within Caithness.



Hare

The Collection is available to anyone - communities, businesses, organisations, agencies or individuals - to use, as long as their use is not profited from directly. The images are accessible in both slide and digital format, and a catalogue can be viewed at www.caithness.org.



Common urchin

Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act

The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on all public bodies and individual office-holders to further the conservation of biodiversity. In addition the Act requires Scottish Ministers to publish lists of species and habitats considered to be of principal importance within Scotland. This will help to identify and target biodiversity priorities specifically in Scotland, as at present the focus is the UK priority species and habitats lists identified by the UK Biodiversity Steering Group.

Scottish Biodiversity Strategy

The Scottish Executive launched the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, entitled 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands' on 25 May. This important new document sets out a 25 year strategy to conserve and enhance biodiversity for the health, enjoyment and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. It presents an ambitious vision for the future, explores Scotland's biodiversity and the issues affecting it and sets out objectives for species and habitats, people, landscapes and ecosystems, integration and co-ordination, and accessing knowledge.



The Strategy will be supported by Implementation Plans which are currently undergoing consultation. These Plans will work to prioritise action and deliver the aims and objectives set out in the Strategy. They cover Interpretation, Communication and Education, Urban, Rural, Marine, Local Delivery and Cross-cutting Issues. The closing date for comments is 30 September. Both the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and the Implementation Plans can be accessed at www.scotland.gov.uk/biodiversity.

Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme

At the launch of the Strategy, the Executive announced a new Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme. This scheme is intended to stimulate and encourage a range of projects that will protect and enhance Scotland's natural environment.

Voluntary bodies, local groups and public bodies are invited to apply for support for projects that benefit biodiversity locally or nationally. Applications will be assessed against criteria covering:

- Ability to deliver the objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy;
- Inclusiveness of approach;
- New approaches to partnership working;
- Potential to deliver wider social or economic benefits; and
- Replication potential.

More information is available on the Scottish Biodiversity website at www.scotland.gov.uk/biodiversity or by contacting Elaine McCall (Tel: 0131 2446602) or John Ramsay (Tel: 0131 2446519). The deadline for applications this year was 1 September, but the scheme will run for three years and notifications of when applications can be sent next year will be posted on the above website in February/March.



Highland Biological Recording Group Update

The Highland Biological Recording Group has had a challenging year trying to find a way forward in the current climate of increasing

importance of 'biodiversity' with the development of the Highland LBAPs and the introduction of the Nature Conservation Act and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. I deliberately put that word 'biodiversity' in quotes, as it has achieved the dubious distinction of being the buzzword of the moment, used by many but properly understood by many fewer.

HBRG knows well that 'biodiversity' in the Highlands and Islands - in old-fashioned language, our wildlife in the widest possible sense of that word - is, for all its national and international importance, very poorly documented. We had the discovery this summer of a new species of wolf-spider for Scotland at Abernethy Forest, and the finding of the Spotted Rock-rose on Coll, both of which hit the headlines in the national media.

Both these sites are among the better-known parts of Scotland, being RSPB reserves. How much more of interest is lurking out there in the vast wider countryside of Highland? The answer, based on the frequency with which HBRG members make significant finds, is 'A great deal!' Admittedly not all are in the most user-friendly groups of flora and fauna, but 'biodiversity' does not just cover the colourful, photogenic and cuddly. Gall-mites, parasitic flies and visually insignificant algae are all part of that rich tapestry that is 'biodiversity'.

These more arcane groups require specialised knowledge and technical skills not found in the general community groups that are usually the target of funding under the 'biodiversity' umbrella. The success of the Scottish Executive's aspirations for their strategy relies absolutely on the involvement of the wider community, but HBRG hopes that support for old-fashioned ground-breaking natural history will come to be seen as still very important in the process, so that wildlife as well as the human community, will benefit.

Elsewhere, the work of the group in preparing an atlas of Highland bumblebees is well advanced, with publication planned for spring 2006. In conjunction with SNH we are looking to consolidate the Local Records Centre, beginning with the organisation of our backlog of data, especially that for the mammal atlas, and its conversion to the latest electronic format. We will be looking to play a full role in the implementation of the Highland LBAPs, through advice, survey and other means.

Information on the work of HBRG can be found at www.highlandbiodiversity.com, and on The Syrphus Pages at <http://syrphus.mysite.freemove.com>.

Murdo Macdonald (Chair, HBRG)

Finally...

If you are interested in the Highland Biodiversity Project or any of the articles featured in this edition of *Highland Biodiversity News*, please contact:

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