

Highland

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BIODIVERSITY NEWS

Welcome

Welcome to the fourth issue of *Highland Biodiversity News*. This short paper aims to provide a twice yearly update of what's happening with regard to biodiversity issues 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 just designated sites and the 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. The Highland Biodiversity Project (2002-04) represented a first step towards an integrated approach to the management of biodiversity in the area by setting up a number of local biodiversity groups and helping them produce Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) for their areas.

A Highland Biodiversity Partnership has now been set up to provide guidance and support to the existing network of local groups, and to make progress on the key strategic biodiversity issues in the Highlands.

More information on biodiversity
in the Highlands is available at
www.highlandbiodiversity.com

New Biodiversity Officer

Hello, I am Jonathan Willet the new job-share Biodiversity Officer who is working in tandem with Janet. Before starting at Highland Council I worked as a Biodiversity Officer for 5 years with Stirling and North Lanarkshire Councils. I am a Zoologist and Ecologist by degree and an Odonatologist (if it's about dragonflies then I'm your man) by inclination.



Jonathan Willet, Highland Biodiversity Officer (Job Share)

I grew up just north of Glasgow with an insatiable interest in the natural world and building Lego models. Later on a combination of Invernessian University flatmates, University field trips and a M.Sc. thesis on the footpath of Stac Pollaidh got me acquainted with the Highlands. This led to me volunteering for a winter at Beinn Eighe NNR and then working at Aigas Field Centre for two seasons. From that time I was hooked and I wanted to live and work in the Highlands. It took 8 years for me to return, but it was worth the wait.

Highland Biodiversity Partnership

The Highland Biodiversity Partnership comprises 20 - 30 representatives from local groups and key organisations committed to understanding, safeguarding, restoring and celebrating biodiversity within the Highland Council area. It aims:

- To identify and address strategic and / or pan-Highland biodiversity issues.
- To review and monitor biodiversity actions contained within the seven LBAPs, with reference

to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plans.

- To provide a link between local groups and national biodiversity strategies, action plans and reporting procedures.
- To raise awareness and promote biodiversity by championing individual LBAPs and biodiversity issues generally.

LBAP Review

Under the chairmanship of Cllr Ian Ross, the Highland Biodiversity Partnership has secured funding to review the LBAPs and identify the key issues that can be delivered at a Highland-wide or a local level in the next 3-5 years. The Review will:

- Identify the main strategic issues arising out of the Highland LBAPs and for each, identify simple, measurable, achievable, resourced and time limited targets, and present them in a single, simple Highland Biodiversity Action Plan that will act as a work programme for the members of the Highland Biodiversity Partnership.
- Review the habitats and species present in each of the LBAPs and produce an accessible table identifying which of the national priority habitats and species are present in each area, flagging up those where there is potential to 'do something' through survey work, awareness raising or habitat enhancement.
- Work with the seven local biodiversity groups to help them review their respective LBAPs and produce short, focused Implementation Plans that prioritise locally important habitats & species and suggest a range of projects or actions that could be taken forward to help restore or raise awareness of biodiversity at a local level.

Highland Biodiversity Forum

A Highland Biodiversity Forum is being set up to bring together everyone with an interest in Highland biodiversity, and give them an opportunity to find out about progress and input their views. Members will receive this newsletter and meet annually at a Spring event to hear about progress and feed in their thoughts to the Partnership.

The next Event will be held in the Town House, Inverness on Saturday 1 April. Please get in touch with the Biodiversity Officers if you would like to join us.

Highland BAP Implementation Programme

The Highland BAP Implementation Programme was set up earlier this year with funding and support from Leader+, Scottish Natural Heritage and Highland Council. Each of the seven local biodiversity groups in Highland was given £10,000 to spend on projects that help deliver their LBAP, plus £2,000 for events to help raise awareness of their projects.

We have funded 18 projects and 11 events so far. Most are past the half way stage and will be completed by the summer. There is still some money left in the budget, around £20,000, and we are looking for project ideas involving two or more LBAP areas. All projects must be completed by August 2006.

Here are a few examples of the projects and local groups that we have helped this year:



Wild flower border, Easter Ross

Easter Ross Cornfield Project

Farmers in Easter Ross have brought a touch of colour to their fields in a project that has seen wild flowers planted in fields that would normally have been left fallow for set-aside.

The project is led by Highland FWAG (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group), and is funded through the Highland BAP Implementation Programme. The effects on the biodiversity of these areas are being monitored, with a view to presenting a case to the Scottish Executive for the inclusion of similar measures in future agri-environment schemes.

It is hoped that this project will enhance local insect and plant biodiversity, as well as providing winter cover and a food source for farmland birds including Grey Partridge, Yellowhammer, Linnet and finches.

Local residents and school children are also involved through site visits with the Highland Council Easter Ross Ranger and the erection of Tree Sparrow and Tawny Owl boxes near to the trial sites.

Clunes Forest School (Lochaber)

On 9 October, 40 intrepid visitors came along to celebrate the opening of Clunes Forest School. There were lots of different activities on offer such as pole lathing, willow basketry, shelter building, bird box making, self-guided walks and marvelling at the images from the digital microscope. An artist was engaged to collect ideas and thoughts from people throughout the day leading to the creation of a wall sized interpretive map of the area round the Forest School.

The Implementation Programme, along with Forestry Commission Scotland, has funded display boards, an interpretive leaflet as well as equipping the classroom and a mobile tool store.

Picture © Charlie Phillips.



Prospective resident of a bird box.

[Boleskine Environmental Network \(Inverness & Nairn\)](#)

This project aims to raise awareness of the local community of the biodiversity around them. To do this several identification training days have been run looking at fungi, butterflies, mammals and wildflowers and grasses. Identification guides, hand lenses and a butterfly net have also been purchased. Now that they are trained up, the group is itching to use their new found knowledge and skills to recognise and record the biodiversity around them.



Garden Tiger Moth

[What Lives in Our Sea? \(Sutherland\)](#)

Over 200 children from Primary Schools, Nurseries and Play Groups in three coastal locations in Sutherland took part in a project led by the Highland Council Rangers to find out 'What lives in our seas and who needs it anyway?'

The children learned about coastal ecology on their doorstep, and about the important link between the sea and the livelihoods of people who live on the coast.



Oystercatcher

Outputs from the project include a mural at Lochinver Hall, a DVD including a short film of the project at Melvich, art-based activities at Helmsdale, as well as leaflets, cookery demonstrations, coastal excursions and classroom visits to coastal sites all over Sutherland.

[Inverness Bat Group](#)

The Inverness Bat Group has had a busy and enjoyable summer watching, monitoring and surveying bats in Inverness-shire. We ran a number of public events, all of which proved to be very batty and the group saw both species of Pipistrelle bat as well as Daubenton's and Brown long-eared bats.



Pipistrelle Bat

We received a small grant from the Highland BAP Implementation Programme to purchase new equipment including bat detectors. These have been a great help as everyone can have a go at listening to the bats' echo-location calls as they hunt for insects. Our walks give people the opportunity to find out more about bats and to see and hear them hunting.

Please contact Jonathan Watt at the Inverness Museum on jonathan.watt@highland.gov.uk if you would like to find out more about the Group or receive regular email updates about events.

Other Funding Opportunities

There are a number of other funding opportunities currently available for small biodiversity projects. Some examples are given below.

- [Awards for All](#)

Awards for All gives small grants of £500 - £5000 for projects that get people involved in their community. They can help if your group helps people to take part in arts, sport, heritage, social, environmental, health-related, educational and other community activities.

It's easy to apply, you can apply at any time, the application form is simple and you'll hear the result quickly. Visit the Awards for All Scotland website for further information and an application pack www.awardsforall.org.uk/scotland or call 0141 242 1400.

- [Your Community Your Environment](#)

Grants of between £1,000 and £5,000 are available for not-for-profit community groups who need assistance with the cost of carrying out relatively small, one-off pieces of capacity-building or development work. No match funding required. Contact the Scottish Community Foundation on 0141 225 6670.

www.scottishcf.org/page8613.cfm

- [Landfill Tax](#)

Funding available for projects that "Deliver biodiversity conservation for UK species and Habitats". Requires 10% match funding. Contact Neil Downie at Highland Council on 01463 702651.

www.highland.gov.uk/protos/waste_management/landfill_tax/landfill_tax.htm

- [Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme](#)

Up to £15,000 available, match funding preferred. Projects need to be linked to the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. In 2005, 8 of the 31 projects were based in Highland. In 2004, 3 out of the 33 projects were based in Highland.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/16118/BAGS2005 or call 0131 244 6602.

- [Tubney Trust](#)

The Tubney Charitable Trust aims to support high-quality projects that will deliver a long-term impact on the protection and enhancement of the natural environment of the United Kingdom through the achievement of UK Biodiversity Action Plan targets for practical action. Applications over £30,000, match funding required. www.tubney.org.uk or call 0118 958 6100.



HBRG is pleased to have been invited to join the Highland Biodiversity Partnership, and we hope to be able to play a constructive role in its work.

We are about to complete one of our long-term projects - to produce a book on the bumblebees of the Highlands, with information on their ecology and advice on conservation. As last year, we are working with the Natural Heritage Data unit of Scottish Natural Heritage to add more taxon records to the Recorder 2002 database, and from there to NBN gateway.

But, most importantly, our members have continued to discover new wildlife in unexpected places. A Noctule turned up in Strathpeffer, there were several finds of solitary bees and wasps far north of their previously known range (no - not global warming, just people becoming aware of what has probably been here for a long time!). The Red Slave-making Ant *Formica sanguinea* was found near a picnic site at Garve. As its name suggests, it captures the workers of other ant species to do its hard work. The UK BAP bee *Osmia uncinata* now has several more sites, including one found on the edge of a very popular forest walk in E. Ross, passed by hundreds of people who little suspect what lurks nearby.

We have acquired our own web domain, so our website address is now www.hbrg.org.uk.

Murdo Macdonald (Chair, HBRG)

Contact Details

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

Jonathan Willet, Highland Biodiversity Officer
Planning and Development Service
The Highland Council
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness IV3 5NX

Telephone: 01463 702274 / Fax: 01463 702298
E-mail: jonathan.willet@highland.gov.uk

A date for your diary!

Highland Biodiversity Forum Event
Saturday 1 April 2006. 10am - 4pm.
Inverness Town House