

Biodiversity Information and Reporting Group

03/10/07

Present:

Ray Perrins (SWO), Naomi Brookes (BSW), Tim Corner (BRERC), Neil Sherwood (NE), Nick Michael (N Somerset), Imogen Davenport (DWT), Liz Byron (SERC).

Apologies:

Matt Hamilton (Avon LBAP), Bill Butcher (SERC), Craig Dixon (DCC), Basil Greenwood (NE), Carolyn Steele (DERC), Eleanor Bremner (DBRC).

Notes: version

1. Notes from meeting of 19 June.

The main point of discussion concerned the proposed regional survey and monitoring of a sample of BAP Priority habitats. TC said there was a clear need for a solid proposal as LRCs across the country have been discussing various similar proposals on e-groups and there was a concern that a coordinated approach could get lost. The possibilities of this project being of use within a wider theme, such as climate change or environmental limits was also raised. TC made the point that much of the mapped BAP habitat survey was either within SSSIs or under agri-environment schemes, so that the focus of new survey work and monitoring might be focussed outside of these areas. Later in the meeting LB said that SERC is to trial a sample based approach using volunteers and that some statistics had been done on the sample size needed. The volunteers will test how this works in reality. SERC have also been commissioned by Devon County Council to produce a biodiversity monitoring framework for the county, a key part of which was to establish what the monitoring needs are and provide a costing of these. Since the needs should not vary too much across the region, DCC might make the results known for a wider audience, as a starting point.

Nature Map guidance. RP has sent the Nature Guidance for LDFs to the SIP group (see: <http://www.swo.org.uk/planning/sip/strategic-informatio.shtm>) and asked if they wanted an agenda item, but had heard nothing as yet. The group was keen that this avenue for information should be kept open and **RP will contact SIP again**. TC said there had been lots of interest in the work BRERC are doing in mapping SNAs for opportunities for habitat restoration/recreation, although there was generally a lack of funding for such work.

2. State of the South West and South West Barometer.

The group discussed the biodiversity information presented in the South West Observatory's "State of the South West" document. Online and PDF versions can be found here:

<http://www.swo.org.uk/SoSW2007/indexSoSW.asp>

All section numbers here refer to the web version. The group's remit was how to add value to the existing data. The existing figures, put together by Annette Carr at the Environment Agency, were taken from national headline indicator data which is available at a regional level. Currently, these are:

Wild bird populations

Fish: Commercial sea fishing; salmon catch; rivers meeting salmon management objectives. SSSI condition

As well as a section on Nature Map which has not received much in the way of annual updates as yet.

RP highlighted the lack of maps which might focus attention on biodiversity at a LA level. One thing that could be mapped was the rivers mentioned in 7.46 as predicted to meet/fail management objectives for salmon.

The graph showing bird populations between 1994 and 2004 was said to be a bit difficult to use/interpret as the main reasons for the fluctuations in the short term are likely to be sampling variability and the weather. These fluctuations could be smoothed by taking several years average or using a running mean. The main point to illustrate should be the long term decline since 1970 and this should be shown on the graph. One possibility for county scale maps could be to use data from Butterfly Conservation, although any species information broken down to county level is in danger of being misleading due to recorder bias.

NM pointed out that one possibility would be to use a figure to show the lack of up to date information to highlight the need for additional funding and data. TC pointed out that he thought in some LAs the majority of their sites had not been surveyed for over 20 years. It might be possible to map showing, for example, the number or percentage of sites within each LA surveyed in the last 5/10/20 years. ID suggested a report on BAP habitat for each LA but then define most of it as in poor condition due to the lack of recent survey work. The general idea was discussed as a possibility to show most data as out of date and in need of funding to improve it.

To update the section on Nature Map NB suggested that until a proper NM indicator was available a new map identifying projects using NM could be printed. This was discussed as not showing if any improvement (in terms of biodiversity) had happened, simply that work was going on. There was a need to show how much has changed, for example how would a particular project impact on heathland within an SNA? It was agreed that as long as some text could be added on habitat improvements then a new map showing projects would be a good thing. By showing a selection of projects known to be going on, hopefully any wanting to be added would come forward, giving BSW a more complete knowledge of Nature Map-led projects.

The group then discussed the South West Observatory's Barometer, due out soon, which shows key data as indicators showing (1) how it is doing compared to targets (red, yellow, green) and (2) in which direction the figures are going (up/down arrow). It was noted that in some cases an up arrow was good (e.g. amount of waste recycled) and in other cases bad (e.g. number of pollution incidents). Despite this the Observatory had decided to use actual figures rather than "getting better/worse" to avoid confusion. The barometer is used to illustrate a wide range of regional data from all Observatory Modules (business and economy, environment, planning, skills and learning and health) in one sheet. This could highlight links between trends in data and give an easy to use "snapshot" of the region to complement the full report.

The current figure for biodiversity was bird populations which was yellow with an up arrow (as population figures have gone up over the last year, if only slightly). This was discussed as being misleading, again because yearly variations mean little in terms of species. Habitats should be used for preference, but the only habitat figure available is SSSI condition and under the current system would be green with an up arrow. This wholly positive message would not be accurate in putting across the state of the region's wildlife. It was decided that bird populations could be used, with suitable

interpretation of the data. **RP will add a note on long term declines to the barometer.**

Returning to the SotSW, LB said that one thing that could be added was deposition of nitrogen as this was nationally and regionally available, was a known driver of biodiversity change and that information was available as to critical levels/loads of this. This forms part of indicator 10 in Biodiversity Indicators in your pocket 2007, which can be downloaded from here:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070612b.htm>

Other points were that in 7.34 the second sentence could be misleading as the volume of sea fish landed is not just dependent on the state of fish stocks but also the total number and type of fishing sailings/trips. A minor typo in 7.46 - the last sentence needs to add the word "main/principle" before "...reasons are thought to be poor survival.." Another regional map is being produced by Defra to assist targeting of Agri-environment schemes. This could be included in future SotSW if it would be of any use. The group will discuss this at the next meeting.

RP will discuss these possible changes and additions with Annette Carr.

3. Biodiversity Activity Reporting System (BARS)

Neil Sherwood introduced the regional reporting that is possible through BARS, the web based information system for the monitoring requirements of BAPS. The system is not currently very well populated but Megan Ellershaw from NE is encouraging everyone to input appropriate information. Regional and sub-regional information is available in the "area outcomes" section:

<http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/outcomes/default.asp>

But the usefulness of the information depends again on the data available on BARS. An additional issue is that the targets are not in consistent units, some using hectares of habitat restored/created, others might be metres of hedgerow created or hours of recording. TC would like to see new/improved hectares of habitat separated from other actions. The issue of validation of data put into BARS was discussed, a process which should be done by the LBAP coordinator. NB mentioned that LBAPs are being encouraged to consider putting BAPs onto BARS and do away with any paper copy. These would then be more flexible and have easily available actions and targets. The conclusion was that the data was currently difficult to use due to gaps, variety and concerns over validation. However since it is used nationally and as more data becomes available we should keep looking into how it might be used in the future. **The question of how HAP groups use BARS was raised and RP/NB will look into this.**

4. Biodiversity South West reporting.

Having taken this to the Biodiversity SW Steering group RP reported that the recommendation was to look into a three level approach of:

- 1) Reporting available "facts and figures", such as those in SotSW.
- 2) Gathering expert opinion in the form of simply asking site managers "how is your site doing, and why?"
- 3) Publicising some "case studies" from across the region.

The two main reasons for any reporting from Biodiversity SW were discusses, and these are mainly:

- 1) To show progress by the Biodiversity SW partnership
- 2) To show the state of biodiversity across the region.

In terms of specific species, LB mentioned a SERC biodiversity monitoring strategy in Somerset. They have good data on water voles (water courses occupied, for example) but that this might be too specific and was only currently available for the county, not regional. TC also talked about he could provide figures on butterfly extinctions and reappearances in Avon but that they were pretty much irrelevant to how biodiversity overall was doing. Again basing it on BAP Priority Habitat was talked about as the ideal, and this might be covered by the proposed large regional survey (see notes from meeting of 19/06/07 and agenda item 1).

The expert opinion option was then discussed more fully in terms of using threats to the region's biodiversity or a form of risk assessment. LB preferred a risk assessment in terms of severity of what might happen; the impact of any risk. RP asked the group how this could be done. TC would commission someone to do this, ID would get a small group of experts together to generate a draft report for wider comments. There would be the need to select experts who would be as neutral as possible. LB said we would need some measure of confidence in our confidence concerning each risk and that it would be best done by getting individual opinions first and then holding a workshop. NB showed the group a "report card" produced by the marine climate change impacts partnership. This report addresses:

What is the current state of scientific understanding of marine climate change in our oceans and seas?

What changes have been observed and what could happen in the future?

How much of this is hard fact and how much is interpretation?

This would provide a useful starting point for getting some form of expert opinion. RP and NB will take this back to the BSW steering group. There is a need to be clear on whether the "confidence" is in terms of if X might happen, of if X does happen what the impacts will be.

ID mentioned that case studies were often available at the local level (from Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities), but not regionally, so this might be a good approach.

RP and NB will take this back to the BSW steering group.

5. Date of next meeting: 2.00 pm, 20th February 2008. Venue and agenda to be confirmed.

Actions:

RP to continue to contact SIP regarding a Nature Map guidance agenda item.

RP will add a note on long term declines to the barometer.

RP to contact Annette Carr on possible alterations and additions to SotSW

RP/NB to find out how/if HAP groups use BARS

RP/NB to continue to work on BSW report card through the Steering Group.

Abbreviations:

ALGE	Association of Local Government Ecologists
AMR	Annual Monitoring Report
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan (Habitat)

BRERC	Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre
BSW	Biodiversity South West
DBRC	Devon Biodiversity Records Centre
DCC	Devon County Council
DERC	Dorset Environmental Records Centre
DeWT	Devon Wildlife Trust
DoWT	Dorset Wildlife Trust
LA	Local Authority
LBAP	Local Biodiversity Action Partnership
LDF	Local Development Framework
LRC	Local Records Centre (environmental/biodiversity information)
NERC	Natural Environment and Rural Communities (Act)
NM	Nature Map
SCC	Somerset County Council
SERC	Somerset Environmental Records Centre
SIP	Strategic Information Providers
SNA	Strategic Nature Area (from the South West Nature Map)
SotSW	State of the South West
SSDC	South Somerset District Council
SWO	South West Observatory