

Devon Biodiversity Monitoring Framework BIRG meeting summary:

A BIRG meeting was held at the end of July to discuss the Devon Biodiversity Monitoring Framework document. There was a lot of enthusiasm for the project and none of the problems was seen as preventing the overall project.

There were three sessions consisting of presentations summarising the current approach of the Devon Framework, followed by discussions. These sessions focussed on:

- 1) The general approach to biodiversity monitoring and to see if there were any additional drivers or indicators that had been overlooked or needed to be added at a regional level. Also discussed was whether the indicators did indeed fulfil the requirements of the drivers.
- 2) The individual work programmes themselves, whether they were practical for other counties and the region, or indeed Devon, and if they would provide the indicators needed.
- 3) Some other general issues over sampling and statistical significance at sub-county and regional levels and the specific methodology and statistics as well as possible risks

Discussion 1 Summary of the Framework

Drivers, indicators, work programmes, how each relates to the others, selected habitats, costs.

Drivers:

No additional county level drivers were identified, so those seem to be covered well in the report. From the list of 14 drivers in the report, six were identified as being most important: BAP reporting, EU directives, NERC Act, Strategic Environment Assessments and Sustainability Appraisals, LDF Annual Monitoring Reports and NI197.

The discussion moved on to Regional level drivers and these were:

Climate change (species important here)
RSS (possibly through an aggregate of county monitoring)
Green infrastructure

AONB/NP management plans

Marine monitoring
Nature Map/BioSW
Individual organisations (Wildlife Trusts)

State of the South West (although this is mostly a way of reporting information and analysis to support policy development rather than a driver as such in the case of biodiversity.)

Indicators

Species indicators came up, but there was a suggestion that some form of monitoring might be done through BAP action plans. Regional suggestions of water voles, dormice, bats and great crested newts were made, in addition to individual county lists. There was

also the possibility of community/volunteer monitoring of species but again the issue of recorder bias came up. Also the fact that there are long term national recording schemes for some groups such as birds and butterflies fills this indicator to some extent.

An indicator based on habitat fragmentation or patch size was raised as a possible regional indicator with Nature Map and the RSS as the drivers

Other issues on the suitability of the indicators were:

The need to sell them to potential funders/stakeholders

Teasing out cause and effect in terms of relating indicators to drivers

The timescale of the monitoring and the fact that it would be up to 7 years before even a baseline was established for all the habitats

Additional Habitats:

Each county present came up with individual habitats for their county and there was additional discussion over two regional level issues, which were: “problem” habitats – those which are regionally important but are possibly too spread out to be identified as important at the county level. Dry acid grassland and lowland fens were given as examples of this.

Again maritime habitats were identified as poorly represented at county and regional level.

Discussion 2 Work Programmes

We had a discussion on each of the work programmes, which are:

- 1) Assessment of loss from BAP Inventories
- 2) Assessment of loss and gain from planning
- 3) Assessment of gain from BAP initiatives
- 4) Assessment of gain through management schemes
Matt Low is looking into this.
- 5) Assessment of spontaneous BAP habitat gain
- 6) Local Wildlife site monitoring
- 7) Assessment of changes in site designation

Discussion 3: Issues

Risk assessment

In addition to those risks raised in the original report, the following were discussed:

Regional consistency of monitoring tools

Overall regional coordination (monitoring cycle)

Managing expectations

Interpretation of indicators (matching to drivers)

Some of the work programmes are more ready to go than others

Integration into existing work programmes, such as LWSs

Getting regional agreement this is needed

Changes in drivers or importance of drivers (eg LDF AMRs)

Pre-empted by alternative framework (eg by Defra)

Next Steps

Ray Perrins is putting together a fuller report to send round for comments as well a more specific brief for a regional version of the framework, for example integrating regional drivers and assessing how regional coordination would be achieved (eg the cycle of habitat surveying), appropriate planning tools currently used if its possible to achieve consistency. Ray will also look into getting an agreed estimate of costs for each county and the region.

Matt Low is looking into LWS condition monitoring for a regional consultation

Naomi Brookes is to consult with Defra regarding possible parallel work on biodiversity monitoring

Sarah Jennings will keep everyone up to date with how Devon CC are taking it forward in a possible trial next financial year.

SERC is looking at training for their IHS tool.