



Beds BioNews



BedsLife
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership



Working to help our ancient woodlands
by Claire Wardle, Ancient Woodlands Liaison Officer



Claire Wardle is Bedfordshire's new Ancient Woodlands Liaison Officer

An ancient semi-natural woodland site can be defined as any woodland which has been in recorded existence since 1600 and has been affected by human activity. These sites can contain a complex mix of dense vegetation and open spaces such as rides and glades which may need to be maintained through active management.

When bringing these important and often neglected sites into appropriate management, the biological diversity should be maintained and where possible increased. With the help of various funding bodies, we are trying to ensure the future of these important sites by working towards the relevant targets indicated by the Woodland BAP.

My job as an Ancient Woodland Liaison Officer is to provide a service to woodland owners and managers where they can gain information and advice regarding sustainable woodland management. Contact details can also be given for a wide range of organisations that have the expertise and experience to manage our ancient woodlands.

Organisations involved with the conservation of Ancient Semi-natural woodland in the Bedfordshire area include the Forestry Commission, The Woodland Trust, FWAG, Bedfordshire Woodland Forum, local authorities and various other conservation groups.

If you've got a woodland and would like some advice or information on how to manage it, Claire can be reached on 01234 228191, ext. 42191 or claire.wardle@fwag.org.uk

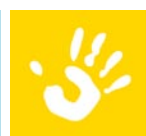
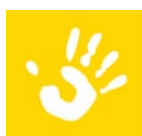
BedsLife joins global partnership to halt biodiversity loss

We're excited to report that we have recently joined the Countdown 2010 Partnership. This coalition of over 200 organisations is working to stop the loss of our habitats and species. BedsLife is the 23rd partner from the UK. And we're in good company: Plantlife International, Earthwatch Institute (Europe), Association of Local Government Ecologists, RSPB and the British & Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria are all partners with us!



So what does this mean? Joining Countdown 2010 means that we have pledged to take specific actions to conserve biodiversity. In our case, it means implementing the county Biodiversity Action Plan, **thinking globally while acting locally**.

To find out more about Countdown 2010 and what you can do, log on to www.countdown2010.net.





Chalk up one for the Record Centre!

The Beds & Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC) has just completed a detailed survey of the county's chalk grasslands. Located around Luton is an arc-shaped band of chalky soil, which supports rare and unique plant and animal communities. Grasslands growing on these chalk soils are a national priority habitat. And as "keepers of the chalk" it's up to us to make sure that our chalk grasslands are as healthy and robust as possible.



A chalk grassland in Studham. Photo by Becky Ward

In November new UK targets were released for all national priority habitats. There are now targets for maintaining, improving condition, restoring and expanding each priority habitat. But in order to set our own county targets, we needed to know not only where our chalk grasslands are, but what kind of condition they are in.

With the help of a grant from the Chilterns Conservation Board, the BRMC compared 20-year old detailed (Phase I) habitat surveys of the area with current aerial photos. Each patch of land was studied in this way. The difference between the old survey and the new photos showed what the trends were. This allowed the record centre to allocate each patch of land to one of the new UK target types. Some of the sites were then visited to confirm the results.

This seems to be a good and inexpensive way to map habitats. It also seems to be a good way of finding out where the habitat conservation opportunities are. Work on other habitats has already begun. We hope ultimately to have a map of conservation opportunities for every priority habitat in the county.

So congratulations to the BRMC for the great work! If you'd like to find out more about what they do, log on to www.bedsbionet.org.uk. The chalk grassland mapping project report is now online. It can be downloaded from www.bedslife.org.uk.

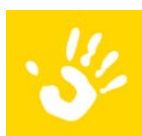
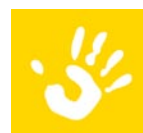
Natural England sponsors local conservation work

Local conservation groups were in for a winfall when Natural England sponsored over £13,400 worth of projects! This much-needed funding has paid for a range of work, including:



- mapping lowland meadows in Bedford Borough (BRMC)
- a tree sparrow nest box scheme in Sharnbrook (Beds Bird Club)
- otter and water vole surveying and monitoring (Beds Otters and Rivers Project)
- scrub clearing at Flitwick Moor (Wildlife Trust)
- a brochure on the new Flit Valley Project (The Greensand Trust)

The tree sparrow, one of the beneficiaries of Natural England funding. Photo by Sergey Yeliseev





Woodlands and marshes and meadows, oh my!

Work is underway to review the county Biodiversity Action Plan. We will shortly have a plan to conserve and enhance our wet woodlands. Plans for fens and other wet habitats, wood pasture and parkland, and traditional orchards are well underway. And we're just about to start on chalk grasslands, lowland meadows and farmland habitats.

We're also working on updating our species plans. The hazel dormouse action plan has been completed. And action plans for otter, water vole and bats are on the go. Overall, however, the species plans will come a little more slowly than the habitat plans. We are currently awaiting a new UK list of priority species and until that is released, some of our species work is on hold.

Each of the action plans will be posted on the BedsLife website as they are completed.

Nature nuggets

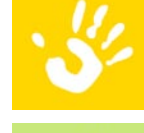
It looks like traditional orchards are going to become a new UK priority habitat. Bedfordshire is a historic hotbed of fruit breeding, so we're jumping the gun and working on an action plan for our orchards. However many of the "local" orchard experts aren't local at all, but are located all over East Anglia. So to save on car trips while getting the expertise we need, we're trying **internet-based habitat action planning!** A special website has been set up for the Beds & Luton orchards plan group. This will be our "virtual meeting room", allowing us to share views and discuss issues without having to spend hours on the road!

Local biodiversity partnerships around the UK are eagerly awaiting a **new list of national priority species**. The current list has over 400 species on it, and rumour has it that the new list tops out at over 1200 species! We were hoping to hear more during the winter but there's been no news yet. For now we'll just have to sit tight and wait for this much-anticipated document.

Helping dormice find love: you may recall that last year we conducted a census of the hedgerows of Studham Parish. Studham is a county hotspot for the hazel dormouse. One purpose of the census was to find places to connect dormouse habitats. Well we did, and thanks to a conservation-minded farmer and a grant from Natural England some hedgerows between two dormouse woods have been replanted. As the hedges mature we hope the dormice will use this "lovers' lane" to find happiness!

And speaking of hedges, Bedfordshire FWAG Officer Becky Ward gave a well-received **presentation on the Studham census at a recent national hedgerow conference**. The conference gave us a chance to learn about how other survey teams work. And it also gave us a chance to talk to members of the national hedgerow action plan group. We learned a lot; hopefully we'll get to put this knowledge to work on another survey this summer!

The BedsLife steering group has two "new" members! **Welcome to the Chilterns Conservation Board**, who has rejoined us after a too-long absence. And **welcome to the Zoological Society of London**, a brand new member!





New publications

BedsLife, The Greensand Trust and Bedfordshire County Council recently completed a summary of environmental indicators in the county. Find out how things are looking for the quality of our water, land and wildlife. The summary and complete report can be downloaded from www.bedslife.org.uk/publications.

Upcoming events

Apr 18-20: The River Restoration Centre is hosting their 8th Annual Network Conference at University College Chester. This year's conference is entitled **River Restoration as a Means to Deliver Sustainable Flood Risk Management (FRM) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) Objectives**. A booking form and draft programme are available at the Centre's website: www.therrc.co.uk/conferences.htm.

Apr 17-19: A **High Value Grasslands Conference** will take place at the University of Keele, Staffordshire. The conference will cover a broad range of topics, with a significant number of papers on management of grassland biodiversity. Those who attend will be brought up to date with a wide range of science, practice and policy relating to grasslands. For further details and booking information contact the British Grassland Society on 01285 885166 or email office@britishgrassland.com.

May 8-10: The BRASS Centre at Cardiff University is proud to announce the first Ecological Footprint conference to be held in the UK. **Stepping Up the Pace: New Developments in Ecological Footprinting Methodology, Policy and Practice** will take place at City Hall, Cardiff. Information and registration is available at www.brass.cf.ac.uk/events/International_Ecological_Footprint_Conference.html.

May 25-28: The **Fourth International Conference on River Basin Management** including all aspects of hydrology, ecology, environmental management, flood plains and wetlands is being held in Kos, Greece. The conference will aim to communicate recent advances in the overall management of riverine systems, including advances in hydraulic and hydrologic modelling, environmental protection and flood forecasting. The deadline for papers is February 21. Secure registration is available through the conference website: www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2007/rm2007/4.html.

Jun 12-14: The 2007 FACT/GAP conference **Tools & Techniques for Pastoralism and Wild Lands** will be held at The University of Stirling, Scotland. This conference aims to broaden our thinking and challenge our dogma over land management practices which meet nature conservation objectives for individual nature reserves, farms and woods as well as for whole landscapes. For further information or to provisionally book a place please contact Adam Cormack on 01636 670095 or adam.cormack@grazinganimalsproject.info.

Jun 24-30: The **10th European Heathland Workshop** will take place in central and northern Norway. The theme for this year is "Threats, Management and Conservation". Numbers are limited so register soon! To register please contact Mons Kvamme at the University of Bergen: +47 92 03 24 47. More information on the conference is available online at www.heathlands2007.uib.no/.

