



Beds BioNews



BedsLife
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership



Hot off the press: latest UK biodiversity indicators show mixed progress

An updated review of biodiversity in the UK was published on April 3, giving some insight into the state of Britain's biodiversity.

Eighteen indicators were agreed in 2007 by the UK Biodiversity Partnership to summarise some of the key priorities for biodiversity in the UK. The indicators include:

- population status of key species
- plant diversity
- status of priority species, habitats and ecosystems
- genetic diversity of rare sheep and cattle breeds
- protected sites
- management of woodland, agriculture and fisheries
- impacts of air pollution
- impacts of invasive species
- expenditure on biodiversity
- amount of time given by volunteers to nature conservation activities

To assess these indicators, 33 component measures are assessed. Of these, 11 show long term deterioration, 9 show long term improvement, one shows little or no overall change, 11 had insufficient data and one was not assessed. This is the first time that genetic diversity, invasive species and marine ecosystem integrity have been included among the indicators.

The full presentation of all the indicators, with charts, assessments, commentary and supporting material is published on the [Joint Nature Conservation Committee website](#).

Results of the 2008 Important Arable Plant Areas survey are in excerpt of a report by Becky Ward, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

Arable plants are currently the most critically threatened group of plants in Britain and this has been recognised in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). As such it has become important to identify Important Arable Plant Areas and to implement conservation measures to safeguard them.

Following the Bedfordshire Important Arable Plant Areas study completed in March 2008, 33 sites of county importance and 16 sites of potential national importance were identified, mapped and characterised by the Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre. The study was carried out in partnership



The good, the bad and the ugly: bats have been doing well since 2000, much better than in previous decades. But farmland birds continue to decline, and while our wintering waterbirds were doing well in the 70s and 80s, their long term prospects are not good. Photos by (top-bottom): Rob Parkin, Sergey Yeliseev, Rick Leche





with Bedfordshire County Council and the Wildlife Trust.

Of the sites identified, eight were chosen for further survey and investigation to establish their current condition. The surveys were carried out in partnership with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Bedfordshire County Council and the Wildlife Trust, and were funded by SITA Trust.



Corn spurrey *Spergula arvensis*, a national rarity but locally common in Bedfordshire: the survey found several healthy populations. Photo by Tico Bassie

Arable plant populations are affected greatly by the cultivation timing and cropping system that is adopted at a site and it is therefore important to consider management to maintain or enhance sites of particular interest. The objective of the survey was to provide information to assist in developing management strategies for the sites.

Of the eight sites studied, six were found to be nationally important. These were spread over the entire county, being located in Thurleigh, Sandy, Marston Moretaine and Pegsdon. One site was of county importance, its score reduced because

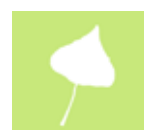
some of the high scoring plants had been introduced to the site. One of the nationally important sites is expected to decline over time as the land has been taken out of arable cultivation. One site has been compromised by a road improvement scheme but may very well recover in time.

The survey provided important information that will be used to implement measures to maintain and enhance the sites identified as being of county or national importance. Measures such as Entry Level Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship could be used to assist in the management of sites where appropriate. Further engagement with landowners should be sought to discuss future management.

Nature nuggets

A key test of the recent Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) biodiversity duty on public bodies has yielded a disappointing decision for the wildlife of West Thurrock Marshes, Essex. A three-year battle to save the Marshes from destruction was lost when the Court of Appeal judged that the decision to build on the marshes was lawful. The biodiversity duty is scheduled to be reviewed this year to determine whether it is fit for purpose. Details can be found on the [Buglife website](#).

BedsLife and Cranfield University are teaming up to identify **Bedfordshire's priority areas for hedgerow planting**. MSc student Abigail Asare will be developing a soil erosion risk model for the county to help determine where our most vulnerable areas are and how planting hedgerows might help





conserve our soil. Many thanks to Natural England for supporting this very important work!

Pond Conservation has launched its new **Pond Creation Toolkit**, with all the advice you need to dig new, clean water ponds that contribute to the Million Ponds Project targets. The toolkit can be downloaded for free from the [Pond Conservation website](#).

The Nude Ewe has two new wools in stock! Speck is a lovely light Aran weight wool from a flock of organic Beulah Speckled Face sheep at Aston Rowant Nature Reserve in Oxfordshire. Not exactly our patch but with Natural England supporting the project how could we say no? And thanks to support from the Chilterns Conservation Board we've just received our first shipment of Heb DK, a black double knitting weight lamb's wool. Check them out on the [Nude Ewe website!](#)

New publications

Buglife has published a review of the categorisation ('signposting') of actions required for priority invertebrate species in the new list of UK Priority Species. The summary finding is that the actions/signposts are generally incomplete, poorly drafted and not a sound basis for local or country biodiversity conservation action. The complete report can be downloaded from the [Buglife website](#).

In a related vein, Wildlife and Countryside Link has published their third annual assessment of England's progress towards halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. And except for marine protection, the picture they paint is not a pretty one. Their report can be downloaded from the Wildlife and [Countryside Link website](#).

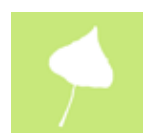
Natural England the Association of Drainage Authorities have produced '[The Drainage Channel Biodiversity Manual](#)', relating to flood storage, drainage and watercourse management and implications for aquatic and riparian wildlife. It includes lots of practical advice for maintaining flow and flood storage, as well as habitat protection/creation.

Upcoming events

Apr 29-May 1: **Valuing our Life Support Systems** is a three-day symposium exploring the link between the health of the environment and the health of the economy. The Natural Capital Initiative invites you to come discuss the challenges of applying the ecosystem approach, identify gaps in science and policy, and explore solutions. The event will take place at Savoy Place in London. For more information visit the [conference website](#).

May 14: A **Chalk grassland restoration summit** is taking place at Coombe Bissett near Salisbury, Wilts. The day will include knowledge-sharing, a site visit to some Wiltshire Wildlife Trust chalk grassland restoration and a final plenary session. Lunch is included; to book a spot contact Dave Blake at davidblake@cranbornechase.org.uk.

Jun 7: **Open Farm Sunday** is a fantastic chance for everyone to enjoy our living, vibrant countryside. Discover at first hand what it means to be a farmer





and taste the produce! You can find your local participating farms on the [Open Farm Sunday 2009 website](#).

Jun 23-26: **'Climate Change: Act and Adapt'** is the theme for **Europe Green Week 2009**. This is a crucial year in the battle against climate change as negotiations on a new UN agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol will conclude in December. As usual this free annual conference will be held at the Charlemagne Building in Brussels. Details will be available on the [conference website](#).

Jul 4: **Insect Festival 2009** is a celebration for anyone with a fascination for insects. It will feature exhibitors, local natural history societies and lectures, all open to the public. The festival will take place at the York Museum Gardens; for more information visit the [Royal Entomological Society website](#).

Jul 10 (note new date!): The National Trust will be your hosts for the **2009 Chilterns Chalk Downland Day**. The event will take place at their Bradenham Village property. Details to follow but put the date in your diary!

July 5-9: **The Second International Youth Symposium for Biodiversity** is being planned for Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Students aged 12-19 are invited to submit biodiversity project proposals to attend. If you, your school or community is involved in something valuable for biodiversity and you want to share it with the world then you should apply to be part of this great event! Details are available on the symposium website: www.biodiversitymatters.org.

Sept 12-13: Interested in trees, woodland crafts and stories? Bedfordshire's countryside and woodlands? Local and global forests and the health of the planet? Then **WoodWorks!** is for you! This annual weekend of fun and activities will take place at the Millennium Country Park Forest Centre in Marston Moretaine. Stay tuned to the [WoodWorks! website](#) for details!



You can get your news and announcements into the next Beds BioNews!
Just send your stuff to Heather at heather.webb@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

BedsLife - Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership
Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Room 550
Bedford MK42 9AP
(01234) 228063
www.bedslife.org.uk

