



The Peewit



The newsletter of the Wildlife Sites Project

Small woodlands to qualify for grant aid

It has been difficult to get funding for managing small woodlands in the past, but now the new Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) handbook states that proper management of such sites will qualify for grant aid.

Nearly half of Wiltshire's Wildlife Sites are ancient woodland (about 700 out of 1,563) and about half of these are between two and ten hectares in area. In addition, it is likely that there are hundreds of smaller ancient woodlands that could qualify as Wildlife Sites.

Woodland was once an essential component of the rural landscape and economy, providing materials in the form of timber and coppice products and also fuelwood and charcoal. Increasing use of fossil fuels through the 20th century and the availability of cheap imported timber and synthetic materials lead to the near cessation of management activity in most of our small woods. Many were clear-felled and converted to arable land, or replanted with exotic softwoods. Although this loss has been more-or-less halted in the last two decades, it is probably fair to say that the majority of woodlands in Wiltshire now receive little or no management.

Woodland is on the whole, fairly tolerant of neglect. Many natural processes continue unaided, however in the absence of active management, woods tend to become less diverse and support fewer species. Clearings and rides close up and at ground-level there is little light available for flowering plants and, as a result, little nectar for butterflies and other insects and less food for birds and bats. Woodland species tend not to move easily across open landscapes, so when species are lost from an isolated wood, they may be unable to re-colonise.

The English Woodland Grant Scheme, DEFRA's flagship mechanism for funding woodland management aims to 'sustain and increase the public benefits given by existing woodlands' and this includes environmental benefits such as promoting biodiversity.

The new edition of the Higher Level Stewardship handbook has a revised chapter on woodland



Photo by Rob Large - WSP WWT

management with options for the maintenance and restoration of woodlands in the farmed landscape which can include ride maintenance, rotational coppicing, clearing inappropriate or invasive species and selective felling. These options can be applied to woodlands of any size, and can form one objective of a multi-objective HLS application across a farm with a range of land-uses, increasing the chances of a successful application.

The challenges presented by climate change offer both threats and opportunities for our woodlands. Woodland composition will probably have to change as different species will be better suited to different climatic conditions, but it may be that the benefits of a system which can produce renewable materials and fuel as well as carbon storage could lead to a renaissance in our woodlands.

Perhaps it is time to look again at that little copse behind the farmhouse and prepare for the future.

Improving local biodiversity...

In 2008 Local Authorities all over England signed new three year Local Area Agreements (LAAs) which set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and local authorities and other local partner organisations (such as the Wildlife Trust, Natural England, etc.) For the first time this includes an attempt to measure progress in conserving wildlife through National Indicator 197, Improved Biodiversity (NI197), which simply measures the percentage of all the Wildlife Sites in a local area which are known to be managed positively for their wildlife.

In both the local areas covered by the Wildlife Sites Project, Wiltshire and Swindon, improvement targets have also been agreed. This means that each area has undertaken to increase the number of well-managed sites by a certain amount in each of the

three years of the agreement (2008-2011). There is a scheme which will reward those areas meeting their targets.

In March 2008 it was found that in Wiltshire 38.5% of sites were in positive management, rising to 43.2% by March 2009, exceeding the 3% improvement target agreed, while in Swindon the 2008 value was 25%, rising to 36.2% in 2009, greatly exceeding the target of 5% improvement.

We hope that this means that in the future there will be more money available to assist with the preservation of our important Wildlife Sites.

If you are interested in learning more about this process you can read the guidance issued by DEFRA here: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/what/localgovindicators/documents/ni197-guidance-revised.pdf.



Photo by Rob Large - WSP WWT

...and welcoming Lindsay Moore

In order to cover the extra work generated by NI197, Wiltshire Council has recruited a new Biodiversity Indicator Officer, Lindsay Moore who took up her post at the start of January this year.

Lindsay is an experienced botanist and advisor and has worked for the National Trust, English Nature, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre.

Lindsay's first task will be to begin collecting information in order to produce a report on the indicator for 2009-10, but once this is complete, she will be working alongside the Wildlife Sites Officer, Rob Large, surveying Wildlife Sites and offering advice on how they can be managed positively for wildlife. More sites visited and brought into good management will, we hope, contribute to a brighter future for Wiltshire's wildlife.

Environmental Stewardship *and Wildlife Sites*

Environmental Stewardship is DEFRA's flagship agri-environment scheme, which provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England who deliver effective environmental management on their land.

The scheme offers two strands; Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) is available to all farmers and offers an area-based payment for simple management measures to help wildlife across the whole farm, while Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) aims to fund more specialist management targeted on important species and habitats known to be present on a farm.

The ELS includes some management options which would be of benefit to Wildlife Sites, such as managing grassland without fertilisers. The HLS however, aims to support the best possible management for important habitats like species-rich unimproved grassland, by recommending stocking densities and when to graze (or when not to), and compensates the farmer financially for reducing the intensity of the farming system. In most cases, we feel that HLS offers the best solution to supporting the specialised management needs of the important habitats found on Wildlife Sites.

The greater cost of Higher Level agreements means that the scheme has to be targeted effectively, putting the money where it will do the most good. Natural England has identified target areas, such as Salisbury Plain and the North Wessex Downs, but farms outside these areas can still get HLS support if they combine

a number of different objectives, such as managing species-rich grassland, supporting farmland bird species on arable land and protecting archaeology.

Information gathered by the Wildlife Sites Project during surveys of your Wildlife Sites is held by the Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC), along with other data, collected by a wide range of other organisations and specialists. This information can be invaluable in the production of a Farm Environment Plan (FEP) which is one of the most important stages in preparing an application for HLS.

The Wildlife Sites Project has been working closely with a number of consultancies which specialise in Stewardship applications and this has resulted in many successful HLS agreements as well as the identification of several new Wildlife Sites. We would be happy to hear from other organisations interested in a similar arrangement.

In an ideal world we would like to see all of Wiltshire's Wildlife Sites managed in the most appropriate way for the habitats and species they support.

HLS is not suitable for all sites, but it is one of the most effective tools we have at present to ensure the future of our wonderful wildlife.

To learn more about Environmental Stewardship, see Natural England's website: www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/es/.



New service for New Forest landowners

A new service to provide advice and practical help for farmers, landowners, tenants and commoners in the New Forest has been launched.

The New Forest Land Advice Service aims to support land managers for the benefit of the environment in the wider New Forest and Avon Valley areas.

The new service will offer independent guidance and assistance with a range of issues, offering support to all types of landowners and managers to manage their land sustainably and for wildlife and the environment.

The team, made up of Mark Larter, Rhys Morgan and Julie Stubbs, will help with Environmental Stewardship (ES) agreements, deliver advice to owners of Wildlife Sites, support commoners on their landholdings and give advice to managers of small sites which are not eligible for the ES grants, for example equine paddocks.

The Service will also be developing a small grants fund to help landowners who are not eligible for

other grants, with environmental improvements on their land, such as hedgerow planting and restoration.

To find out more about the Land Advice Service, please contact Julie Stubbs (details below).



Photo by Rob Large - WSP WWT

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Natural England - for
Environmental Stewardship
www.naturalengland.org.uk/
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default.aspx
Tel: (08456) 024098

Natural England - for advice on
Sites of Special Scientific Interest
and protected species
www.english-nature.org.uk/
special/ssi
Tel: (01380) 726344

Forestry Commission Wiltshire
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