

ENGLISH NATURE
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The New Forest LIFE project
Sharing the lessons with Europe

English Nature is the statutory body which achieves, enables and promotes nature conservation in England.

We do so by working in partnership with individuals and a wide range of organisations including Government, representative bodies, agencies and voluntary organisations.

English Nature Magazine is published six times a year to promote nature conservation in England and make people aware of the latest developments. The views expressed in it by individuals are not necessarily those of English Nature.

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We operate a number of other offices across the country, from where our staff deal with local nature conservation issues.

Details of your nearest office can be obtained by phoning Northminster House, or by requesting a copy of English Nature Facts and Figures Information guide, free from the Enquiry Service at Northminster House, Tel 01733 455100.

You can also learn more about us via the Internet. Our address is: www.english-nature.org.uk



Awarded for excellence

Cover picture



Cover photographer: David Fisher/Forestry Commission

New Forest ponies are able to live out in the open all year round and are supported under the New Forest LIFE project (see the full article on the opposite page)



brief update

Beneath the skin of The Lizard

School children from Coverack primary school, Cornwall, recently joined representatives from English Nature and partner organisations to celebrate the launch of an exciting new book.

'*Beneath the skin of The Lizard*', by local writer Robin Bates and designer Bill Scolding, is a fascinating look at seven coastal walks on the Lizard peninsula and describes a 350 million year geological journey around one of the most unique areas in Britain.

Helped by local experts, Peter Ealey, Reverend Vincent Holyer and Pat Sargeant, the authors

unearth the dramatic complexities of The Lizard in plain English.

Lavishly produced with more than 100 colour illustrations, including maps and diagrams, the book was commissioned and funded by a partnership of English Nature, Cornwall County Council and South West Path Team, with support from the EU Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

For further details, contact Andrew McDouall of English Nature's Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Team on 01872 262550.

Meeting with remarkable trees

Common Ground, creator of Apple Day, has just published a new book celebrating orchards as some of our best links with nature. English Nature's Invertebrate Specialist, Roger Key, and General Manager James Marsden both helped to put 'the Common Ground Book of Orchards: conservation, culture and community' together.

Exploring how they continue to shape local culture from custom to kitchen, the book urges us to value old orchards, particularly for their delicate ecology and local distinctiveness.

Packed with illustrations plus some 50 photographs by James Ravilious, it includes scores of examples of how community orchards provide wholesome food, wildlife havens and areas for communal celebration both in town and country. The 224 page book retails at £18.95. To find out more contact Common Ground on 020 7267 2144.

Bionic beetle

A rare species of beetle is going bionic to safeguard its future.

The hazel pot beetle is being spliced with a sliver of metal so conservationists can monitor its behaviour as it is released into the wild.

English Nature has teamed up with the University of Leeds, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and local specialist Annette Binding, for the project, which has seen 300 larvae released into a natural habitat in Lincolnshire. Metal detectors will be used to track their progress.

Conference tells LIFE story

Environmentalists from across the European Union are to descend on Hampshire next month for a three-day conference to share in the success of the New Forest LIFE Project. This is the largest of the 60 initiatives funded under the European LIFE Natura 2000 fund.

Launched in 1997, the project has helped to restore habitats and species within the New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and has pooled the expertise of no less than 10 project partners. Among these, English Nature has been responsible for developing an SAC management plan that focuses resources and activities to achieve the best for wildlife, plus an SAC-wide monitoring system. Phase one of the project is due to conclude later this



The New Forest LIFE Project – an unprecedented opportunity for co-operation between Agencies.

summer, and partners are now waiting to hear confirmation of further LIFE funding for the second phase.

The conference takes place from 14th to 16th February in Avon Tyrrell in the New Forest. Topics covered include innovative methods of wetland restoration, large-scale eradication of rhododendron, managing

bracken, recreation management and erosion repair, restoring ancient pasture woodland, and a technique for monitoring large and complex ecosystems.

"The conference will demonstrate not only new techniques for restoring SAC habitats and species," says Russell Wright, Senior Conservation Officer for English Nature, "but also the benefits of partnerships."

Other organisations involved include The Forestry Commission, The National Trust, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, New Forest Verderers, Ninth Centenary Trust, the New Forest Committee, and the RSPB.

Continues Russell, "Working closely together to achieve the shared objectives of the LIFE partnership over the past four years, has led to a degree of mutual understanding and co-operation between key organisations unprecedented in the history of the New Forest."

For further information, please contact: Angela Clarke of the New Forest Committee
Tel: 023 8028 4144.

New roles at The Natural History Museum



English Nature is funding two new posts at The Natural History Museum in London as part of a joint project to help encourage action on invertebrates and cryptogamic (i.e. non-flowering) plants.

Pictured above (left) Emily Funnell (invertebrates) and (right) Dr Gill Stevens

(cryptogams) were appointed in September as UK Biodiversity Co-ordinators. They will be seeking to encourage enthusiastic amateur naturalists and specialist societies to play an active role in delivering the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The project is initially scheduled to run for three years.

NEWS IN SHORT

Something to CROW about

English Nature has received an £8 million boost from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). Part of this is to help implement the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), which received Royal Assent in December.

For a full assessment of CROW, see the article on page 4.

Senior appointment for FWAG

Michael Woodhouse, Team Manager of English Nature's Somerset Team, has been appointed Director of England for the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

Michael will join on secondment as part of an increased package of support from English Nature, aimed at strengthening the advice and information to farmers on managing wildlife on their farms.

Upon the announcement, Michael said, "We have an important role to play in encouraging farmers to take more direct action to attract more wildlife onto their farms. Farmland can provide a rich and diverse haven for many of the threatened plants and animals highlighted on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan."

Taking the sting from nature's storms

English Nature has awarded an 18 month contract for the production of six pilot Coastal Habitat Management Plans (ChaMPs) schemes. These will map out the future of internationally important coastal habitats for the next 30 to 100 years.

The contract has been awarded to a consortium of British companies who have particular expertise in the field. Led by Posford Duvivier Environmental, it includes the University of Newcastle, University of Portsmouth and Guardline Surveys Ltd.

As the CROW flies

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), given Royal Assent on 29 November 2000, will come into force on 30 January 2001. The Act is the most significant wildlife legislation for almost 20 years and means good news for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), the best wildlife gems in England. This gives English Nature the full range of tools to protect SSSIs from damage and neglect.

“We welcome the wildlife provisions in CROW and thank Government for ensuring that this Bill was made a priority. We are equally pleased that they are backing this commitment with more funds to help reverse the declining condition of our special sites. We shall ensure that these powers and resources are used to benefit biodiversity”, said Professor David Norman, acting Chairman of English Nature.

“By working in partnership with landowners and managers, farmers, Government Agencies, public bodies and voluntary conservation organisations, English Nature will ensure that everyone gets the best from this boost for wildlife”.

English Nature's Chief Executive David Arnold-Forster

He continued, “It was a long and at times, difficult journey to secure this new legislation, but it is a great tribute to all the public and voluntary conservation bodies and committed individuals who have taken the time to persuade Parliament of the need for it.”

The Act puts the emphasis on supporting SSSI owners in the positive management of their land to benefit wildlife, rather than paying money to prevent new operations that could damage SSSIs. Importantly, owners and occupiers will not be permitted to carry out new works that could damage SSSIs without English Nature's consent, and English Nature will not have to make payments to prevent damaging works going ahead.

English Nature believes that this will encourage partnerships working towards

positive management of the best wildlife sites in England. Where we cannot secure management through agreement, however, we will be able to impose management. This is an important new power that will enable us to tackle sites that are deteriorating not through deliberate damage, but through neglect.

There is also a requirement on all public bodies to conserve and enhance SSSIs. This in effect means that all Government Departments, local authorities and privatised utilities will have to think carefully about how any of their functions may affect SSSIs and plan work accordingly. Where a public body is carrying out, or authorising, work that may affect an SSSI (this does not have to be on an SSSI), there are strict requirements for consulting English Nature and taking account of our advice.

The Act also makes it an offence for anyone knowingly or recklessly to damage an SSSI. This is an important development, since previously it was not an offence for a third party (i.e. not owners or occupiers) to damage an SSSI, except where it was the subject of a Nature Conservation Order made by the Secretary of State. We will also be able to introduce byelaws on any SSSI to prevent activity that may cause damage.

Despite these stronger powers, partnership will remain the cornerstone of English Nature's approach. Most SSSI owners should not notice any change. The strongest powers will be reserved for those cases that cannot be solved through negotiation. We believe, however, that this new regulatory framework makes partnership more likely than ever.

The latest Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) has just been published and shows not only an increase in migratory winter waterfowl numbers, but also significant changes in their distribution. England's wetlands are of world importance for their migratory waterfowl and such information is essential to inform decisions on how sites are managed in the future.

The monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, WeBS is a partnership between the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the RSPB and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which includes English Nature and provides the main data for the conservation of wetland bird populations and their habitats. Around 3,000 volunteers participate each year in synchronised monthly counts over the winter months.



Shelduck

This most recent survey, which relates to 1998–99, makes for interesting reading because of the strong upward swing in bird numbers. For example, the number of gadwalls, a dabbling duck, surpassed 15,000 for the first time, and they have continued to extend their range. 20 years ago they inhabited a few sparse areas in the south-east, but now can be found over much of England.

Wetland Bird Survey

The Ribble Estuary alone held just under 100,000 wigeon, a figure exceeded only by two counts at the same site in 1994–95, and represents over 25% of the national total. Numbers of little stint, curlew sandpiper and ruff surpassed 1,000 birds each, a record for all three species.

“Numbers of little egret also reached a new high with over 1,000 birds present in estuaries on the south coast of England,” says WeBS National Organiser (Core Counts) Mark Pollitt of English Nature. “The rise in mute swan numbers continues unabated. Our figures suggest an increase of around 75% since the mid-1980s.

“The strength of this long-running survey, now over 50 years old, is that we can detect these long-term trends, although understanding the causes of these changes often requires further research. This may be due to milder winters, habitat changes or a host of other factors.

“Interestingly, our counts suggest that some species are tending to winter further east,” Mark continues. “Traditionally, colder weather forces birds south and west, but there is evidence that some species have tended to stay further east in more recent years.”

The answer may lie in the changing climate brought about by global warming. “From the WeBS counts dating

back from 1969–70 we were able to look at changes in the distribution of waders over the past three decades,” says Dr Graham Austin, Team Leader of the Wetland and Coastal Ecology Unit of the BTO. “By combining this with Met Office weather data we were able to detect that the higher the average minimum temperature across the UK, the lower the proportion of birds wintering in south-west England and Wales.”

A gradual trend over the last 30 years towards wetter, warmer and windier winters in the UK it seems is encouraging birds to winter on the east coast. Furthermore, even though marginally colder than the west, the east coast offers better feeding conditions for many wader species.

“If wintering populations continue to shift as they have been, it may be that the estuaries in the south-west no longer attain the bird numbers for which they have become nationally and internationally significant,” he continues, “and may even be perceived as less important. It is essential that this does not result in their degradation as wader habitat. We cannot be certain that the east coast will remain a more attractive option for these birds in the future as weather patterns may change.”

The other issue is of rising sea level, which according to Dr Austin, will

principally be felt on the east coast over the coming years.

“Current estimates suggest a rise of between 15 and 70 cm over the next 50 years, which will certainly have a major impact on inter-tidal habitats – particularly those trapped between the



Gadwall

sea and sea defences. Whether we lose or gain this wader habitat will therefore depend largely on the management policies adopted regarding sea defences.”

The full impact of sea rises on inter-tidal habitat is being researched under the English Nature led ‘Modelling Natural Resource Responses to Climate Change’ (MONARCH) project. This is due to be published early this spring. For further details contact Mike Harley, Environmental Impacts Team, English Nature tel: 01733 455113, e-mail mike.harley@english-nature.org.uk.

The Species Recovery Programme

Ten years on...

This year marks a decade of the Species Recovery Programme, an initiative that has halted or reversed the decline of 45 species and now extends to over 300 species and counting. Time, then, to pause and take stock of one of English Nature's defining achievements.

The turning point in species conservation undoubtedly came at the end of the eighties with the publication of 'Species Recovery'. This hefty report gave recognition to the fact that habitat conservation alone could not halt the

based on creating action plans for each species with partner organisations brought in to share resources, responsibility and experience. The Species Recovery Programme (SRP) was born. "Back in 1991, this approach was seen as something quite novel by the

establishing the bare bones of what we knew about each of the 14 species initially selected. From there research on behaviour and habitat requirements was carried out to underpin any work done in the field. Only then were experimental management techniques developed in partnership with wildlife trusts and people on the ground such as farmers – those with a real understanding of the essential management skills."

The success of the programme in the subsequent 10 years is clearly evident. Dozens of species have not only been helped back from the brink, but are now thriving both in their original sites and further afield – species such as the stone curlew, fen ragwort, wart-biter cricket, natterjack toad and dormouse. Indeed,

"Our partnership with English Nature has been a very profitable one: we're satisfying our professional curiosity through research while English Nature is receiving valuable data which can be put to good use."

Johannes Vogel, UK Programme Leader, Natural History Museum

decline of endangered species and that funds could be better targeted to reverse the trend. The result was an approach

conservation world," says Programme Co-ordinator Dave Stone. "It was a case of going back to the beginning and

"Working with English Nature has highlighted the importance of species recovery work to biodiversity conservation. The challenge now is to co-ordinate SRP work with other vital issues such as reforming agricultural policy and delivering conservation at a landscape scale."

Robin Wynde, Biodiversity Policy Officer, RSPB

the programme has been extended to cover twenty-fold the original number thanks to new initiatives under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The programme has been extended to include species of European as well as British interest in support of the Habitats Directive. Likewise, the budget has grown – £1.1 million during 1999/2000, but this is just a portion of the total figure being spent, serving mainly to generate further investment from partner organisations.

"Almost every project we take on has a partnership element to it so that the true value of the work undertaken doubles or even trebles the resources put in by English Nature," Dave adds. "We were involved with the wildlife trusts and

universities at a very early stage, but as the programme has expanded and gained credit with the conservation community, we have sought to work with others."

Over 100 partners are involved in current projects and range from other government agencies, through to voluntary organisations and even commercial businesses. "Organisations from Anglian Water to the Zoological Society of London have been able to bring a range of perspectives to the table to develop a strong and robust approach," he continues. "The smallest partner may not have a lot in the way of funds, but can contribute an invaluable degree of experience or skill."

A good example is the lady's slipper orchid (see case study), a species that was almost a forerunner of the programme and at one point was reduced to a single flowering plant. Over the last fourteen years, The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Botanical Society of the British Isles and Sainsbury's are among the diverse interests brought together to achieve its successful re-population in the wild.

Many partners are involved in several projects. Kew, for example, has been building a Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place, Sussex with support

Lady's slipper orchid

Once reduced to a single flowering plant, the lady's slipper orchid required a special hand from English Nature and The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew. Genetic research was carried out to ensure that plants are as true to the original 'wild' stock as possible. A further difficulty is that the plant can only germinate with the help of a special fungus. Kew has overcome this and seedlings are now grown routinely for an introduction programme to re-populate 12 former sites by 2004. In 2000 a re-introduced plant flowered for the first time.



P Wakeley/English Nature

Stone curlew

Once a numerous breeding bird, the stone curlew is now only found in two areas of England: the open plains of Salisbury and the dry, sandy area of East Anglia known as Breckland. English Nature and the RSPB set up the Stone Curlew Recovery Project in 1995 to restore the population of the bird from as few as 100 breeding pairs. Numbers have now doubled, but because the birds nest on the ground they require constant protection from predators, farming operations, over enthusiastic bird watchers and persistent egg thieves.



Paul Glendell/English Nature

from the programme and developing ways of saving endangered mosses and liverworts.

To help encourage further organisations or individuals to get involved, a grant scheme was launched last year with the power to give part funding to any project that will contribute to SRP or BAP. This is due to run for at least two further years.

"It's clear that SRP has now come to something of a critical mass and that this will be a year of review," adds Dave. "It has a lot of momentum and clear biological outcomes are being achieved for many species. However, the number and extent of partnerships now means that it is perhaps time for English Nature to revisit its role. Furthermore, the implications of the Millennium Biodiversity Report, the emerging Rural White Paper and the Local Government Act will all need to be assessed. The Annual Meeting later this year in December, will no doubt prove an ideal forum."

Dormouse



John Robinson

During the last 100 years the dormouse has become extinct from seven counties – half of its former range – due in large part to changes in woodland management such as cessation of coppicing and mechanical cutting of hedgerows. English Nature has been supporting a programme of captive breeding and re-introduction since 1992 as well as putting in place appropriate management. The species has now been re-introduced to six counties in southern England and populations are thriving and expanding.

As well as benefiting wildlife and conservation in general, UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) initiatives may also boost local economies. Such are the findings of new research commissioned by English Nature in partnership with the Countryside Agency and Devon County Council.

Undertaken by the Countryside & Community Unit at Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education, the report states that if an additional £1 million were spent each year on assisting farmers to restore Devon's species-rich hedges, there would be substantial benefits for the local economy plus the creation of jobs*. It goes on to say that such benefits may also apply to the implementation of other habitat BAPs that also have a labour-intensive element.

As much as £2.2 million could be generated per annum from this level of investment, and as many as 32 additional full-time jobs created. Since this degree of return measures very favourably with that of the agricultural industry, the wider message is clear: investing in conservation can be as sound as investing in other forms of rural industry.

One of those who prompted the research is Dr Rob Walton, until recently Manager of English Nature's local team in Devon and now leading the Hampshire and Isle of Wight team. "This is a novel and exciting way of assessing the benefits of implementing BAPs. While hedges can contribute indirectly to the economy of a farm (by providing excellent wind

protection and so better yields from animals and crops, etc.), the potential arable value of the land is much higher, (between £230 and £410 per km compared to £1,300 and £1,700). Farmers must, therefore, receive public money to help them manage their hedges or face substantial losses. At the same time they must also help achieve biodiversity targets. By documenting the potential socio-economic impacts of implementing BAPs such as this, we can show that there are other benefits to be had. This research could also prove a powerful tool in attracting further funding."

The report also highlights that many farmers see the existing grant structure for hedge work as being too cumbersome and complex.

An additional £1 million of public money – roughly double the current expenditure in Devon – would allow some 180 km of species-rich hedges to be restored. Over five years this would amount to 2.5 per cent of the total length in Devon. Significantly more, however, would need to be spent if Devon is to meet the UK BAP target for species-rich hedges, i.e. that 50 per cent of all such hedges are under favourable management by 2005. Currently the figure



Bolberry Down Hedgerow in South Devon

P Wakey/English Nature

is said to be nearer one quarter although an accurate assessment will follow the conclusion of local surveys.

"No such increase in funding is likely in the short term," adds Devon County Council Ecologist Peter Chamberlain. "Nevertheless, the key principal of the report remains the same: expenditure on hedge regeneration does and is already generating very real benefits for the community."

"The report shows that hedge regeneration has a multiplier effect for wildlife, the economy and jobs. It is based on real experiences and we have good anecdotal evidence that these benefits are already being felt by local communities. Now we have to use it to our advantage and convince those with the purse strings for European funding to reassess the economic value of environmental management."

The research is available as an English Nature Research Report and can be obtained from English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA.

* This figure is based on the £4.2 million required to meet BAP targets for hedges nationwide: Devon has 20 per cent of such hedges in the country.

Arthur Allen Hedging at Kingswood in Gloucestershire Nick Smith/Countryside Agency

Bridging the financial divide

Airbase to greenspace

Transforming a neglected site into an area rich in wildlife is one thing, but a former US nuclear airbase? West Berkshire Council and English Nature have worked together to accept the challenge and overcome a range of very unique problems.

Dominic Parrett/West Berkshire Council

Greenham Common conjures up images of nuclear threat and candlelit vigils, but with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent decommissioning of the airbase seven years ago, a programme of conservation has given the area a completely different prospect today.

"It was clear from the start that this site was important in a number of ways," says English Nature Conservation Officer Heather Whetter. "First we approached the local community to find out how it could best suit their requirements as a local green space of some 500 hectares. There was also its potential as a wildlife habitat: it was already home to woodlark and nightjar, and we undertook a survey to establish what other species could be encouraged back. It was then that West Berkshire Council was able to purchase the site."

Once a programme of improvement had been agreed in April 1995, diggers moved in to tear up the runways.

"The biggest problem was undoubtedly dealing with the hard structures. To get a real community spirit going, we got everyone to push the nine mile perimeter fence down. It was very fulfilling! A number of heavy fuel tanks had to be excavated, each capable of holding up to 50,000 US gallons. Their removal began in September 1997 and left us with the problem of fuel contamination to the soil. This was painstaking work and involved cleaning the soil using a variety of methods including natural venting to the

atmosphere, bioremediation (a process whereby millions of natural fuel degrading bacteria are sprayed onto the contaminated soil) and removal to a licensed tip for disposal."

The removal of the runways has left large areas of bare gravel, providing a useful habitat for lapwing, ringed plover and redshank. A programme of spreading heather seed has been undertaken, the regeneration of which has so far proved extremely successful and will serve to extend heathland habitat. The influence of concrete has given the ground an unusual combination of alkaline and acid habitats giving rise to a unique mix of flora. As well as heather there are seven species of orchid, dwarf gorse and dense silky bent – an unusual grass. The bare stony areas also provide a welcome sunbed for reptiles, including the adder.

In all, over one million tonnes of concrete, metals and tarmac have been recycled from the former runways and barracks, the re-landscaped land will provide hollows and humps to blend in with existing heathland to form wetlands as well as undulating dry areas.



From concrete, fencing and aviation fuel tanks (above) to a welcoming green space (below), serving the needs of the local community, wildlife and grazing livestock.

The long-term future of the common as an area of open countryside free from development will hopefully be secured by West Berkshire Council's Greenham and Crookham Common Bill. With the restoration nearing completion, cattle and ponies have been added to graze. This will maintain long-term heathland characteristics and prevent the area turning into impenetrable birch scrub.



Dominic Parrett/West Berkshire Council

Dominic Parrett/West Berkshire Council



Lessons from the deep

English Nature and its partners have taken some important first steps in developing a greater understanding of the internationally important marine life off our shores. Schemes to manage the future of twelve Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are now being finalised.

Through the 1992 European Habitats Directive, the UK has responsibility for selecting SACs as a contribution to a series of wildlife sites across Europe. The UK Marine SACs Project, led by English Nature and launched in 1997, has involved producing management schemes for twelve such marine areas, and the first step has been to improve the knowledge and understanding that is required to establish and conserve these sites.

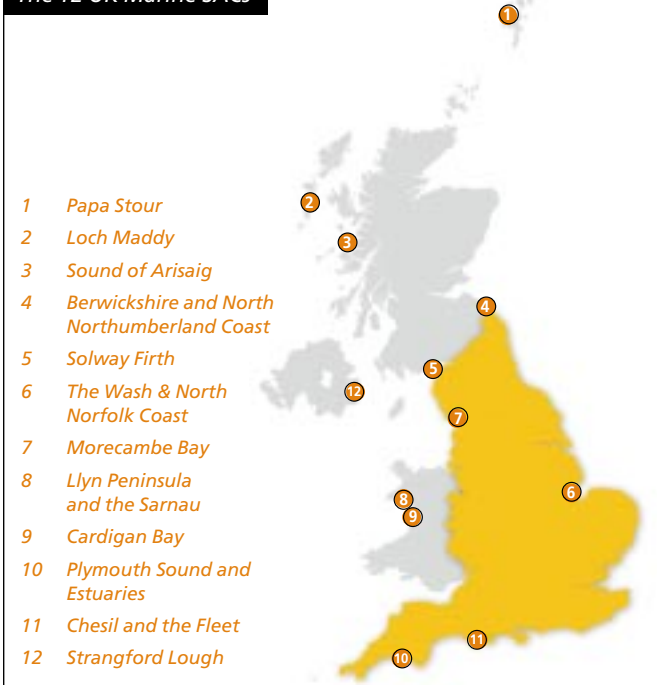
Conservation Committee – and the Scottish Association for Marine Science. These have worked alongside user groups and local communities, with interests as diverse as fishing, ports, water quality and recreation in order to review the existing activities and management of the sites. As a result, draft schemes for 11 of the 12 sites have been completed and are currently out for public consultation.

John continues, “One of the main things we have learnt is that all sites across the UK are very different and our approach needs to differ accordingly.

“For example, on The Wash and North Norfolk SAC, local communities have a strong interest in the continuation of traditional activities and have real reservations about anything that may change the pattern of use. Whereas, on the Plymouth Sound and Estuaries, the previous estuary management partnerships have developed good support for the wildlife on their site and a firm basis for taking the marine SAC forward.

“Local support is crucial and, while there is a lot of interest in marine conservation and wildlife, we often have to allay initial concerns. It is important to involve communities in the decision making process, via workshops, meetings, booklets, and slideshows. It has been useful to be able to show people the wildlife that is on their doorstep, but hidden under the waves.”

The 12 UK Marine SACs



These experiences have been the subject of a recent conference co-ordinated by the Project and attended by over 300 delegates from the UK and abroad. John says, “We demonstrated that the UK SACs Project is making a significant contribution in marine conservation, both through supporting work over the 12 sites and through developing our understanding of the interactions between human activities and marine features. Given where we were three years ago there have been tremendous advancements, a lot of useful learning, knowledge and ideas that can be helpful not just in the UK, but also in the rest of Europe.”

Once the management proposals have been agreed for each site, the implementation phase will begin. John concludes, “So far, we have only identified and planned what needs to be done to improve the sites. The next step is to put those plans into practice. We are confident that we have made good progress and have a really good basis to work from.”

Better access to Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and greater involvement from local communities – English Nature is to massively increase the money available through its LNR Grant Scheme thanks to a £4.6 million lottery award from the New Opportunities Fund. A further £6.4 million is to go to award partner BTCV.

Space to breathe

Due to start in April, the new LNR Grant Scheme is aimed principally at local authorities and LNR managers and will provide between £5,000 and £25,000 towards projects, which involve local people in the management of their LNR. English Nature will encourage those local authorities applying for grants to focus particularly on people who cannot readily use LNRs, perhaps due to poverty or lack of transport, and also to realise the full educational potential of such green areas.

“Accessible, natural, open spaces, such as that provided by LNRs, are important for local biodiversity and for our quality of life,” says Margaret Grindle, English Nature’s LNR Grant Scheme Manager. “They are particularly important for the sustainable development of rural and built-up areas and the new funding will have a massive impact.”

A fundamental objective of the programme is to encourage active community involvement in the management of LNRs. To this end, it includes funding for ‘community liaison officers’ to help develop a more ‘hands-on’ role for local people. Up to £20,000 will be available for these posts.

Such a community-minded approach is already being piloted by the London Borough of Richmond, with funding from English Nature. Along with BTCV, the borough has undertaken a visitor and door-to-door survey to find out local feeling towards Oak Avenue LNR, a site that has hitherto suffered some neglect and vandalism.

“We are also holding a number of community and public events to encourage local people to cherish and contribute to the site,” says Emma Wilson, Ecology Officer for the borough. “At the same time we are keen to involve the local community in the developing Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan.”

“Accessible, natural, open space, such as that provided by LNRs, are important for local biodiversity and for our quality of life”

Local authorities considering applying for a grant are encouraged to develop community-based LNR projects linked to, for example, the implementation of LA21, Community Strategies or Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

BTCV’s complementary programme, ‘Peoples Places’, is being run in partnership with English Nature and the £6.4 million will be used as part of a five-year grant scheme due to be launched in the spring. Grants will average £6,500 and, like the LNR programme, will also be targeted at disadvantaged communities with little



(Above and below) The local community rallies round at Oak Avenue LNR in Richmond, London

English Nature guidelines for towns and cities

- Statutory LNRs should be provided at a minimum level of 1ha per thousand population,
- an accessible green space should be less than 300m (as the crow flies) from each home,
- at least one 20ha site should be accessible within 2km,
- one accessible 100ha site within 5km, and
- one accessible 500ha site within 10 km.

or no access to local green space. These sites in themselves need not be designated like LNRs. The goal is to create an England-wide network of green spaces used to contribute towards sustainable, environmental, community-based projects.

To register for an application pack for the LNR Grant Scheme send your contact details to: LNR Grant Management Team, Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA or e-mail enquiries@english-nature.org.uk.

For an application pack for the Peoples Places scheme, contact BTCV direct at 36 St Mary's Street, Wallingford, Oxon OX10 0EU or e-mail information@btcv.org.uk.

Morecambe Bay, Lancashire

English Nature’s John Torlesse is the UK Marine SACs Project Manager. He explains, “Putting protected areas into the marine environment is a very new piece of work. We haven’t got the same amount of experience and consolidated knowledge that we have for land projects, so we started from a much poorer platform of experience, knowledge and understanding. This has meant developing a whole new approach and we have struck up partnerships with organisations that we haven’t previously worked with.”

The project brings together the Government’s main nature conservation advisers in the UK – English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment and Heritage Service DoE Northern Ireland, the Joint Nature

With floods bringing the country to a near standstill earlier this winter, English Nature believes that a long-term, strategic approach to flood-defence planning is needed. Furthermore, working with nature to achieve such a plan has distinct benefits.

water, water everywhere

Flooded farmland on the river Severn flood plain, near Bridgnorth, Shropshire

A year before the flooding hit press headlines, English Nature was already working on its Flood plain Restoration Initiative. This seeks to promote a vision for flood plains, which would include the restoration of wetland wildlife habitats within a sustainable approach to flood management. The products of this initiative will be rolled out during 2001.

"Flood plains are an integral part of river systems," says Clive Doarks, Flood plain Restoration Project Officer and Lead Conservation Officer for the Norfolk Broads, "and in their natural state include 'washlands' – areas into which rivers can spill at times of high flow." An example is the Nene Washes, which helped to protect Peterborough from the worst of the Easter 1998 floods, and where 1,310 hectares of farmland have been designated as a European Special Protection Area for birds. However, to protect agricultural land, a general programme of drainage and flood defence has seen up to 90% of

"The loss of these natural washlands, together with the consequential deepening and straightening of rivers and building of embankments, has increased the rate of run off from river catchments and the incidence of downstream flooding."

English Nature is therefore encouraging greater use of washland areas together with the creation of habitats capable of retaining large amounts of rainfall in the upper reaches of river catchments.

"We have commissioned an economic appraisal of the value of washlands and the feasibility of an incentive scheme to encourage the necessary changes in land use management," adds David Withrington, Senior Freshwater Officer in the Environmental Impacts Team. "If some of the flood risk can be reduced in this way, it should lessen the need for extra urban defences, which are both costly to construct and maintain."

English Nature will use this research and an earlier report on the role of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in flood plains to inform its advice to Government, the Environment Agency and local authorities on the development of integrated catchment strategies for flood management.

"If flood plains, and in particular washlands, can be managed in such a way as to reduce risk to people and property," continues David, "and at the same time provide additional wildlife habitat, then there will be increased benefits to society from this integrated approach."

Floods at Lewes

The recent flooding of Lewes in East Sussex illustrates the need and opportunities for such approaches. Flooding of the town resulted from river water meeting a tidal surge in a constrained channel. Opportunities for the creation of washland exist above the town on agricultural land and below the town on Lewes Brooks SSSI, which requires higher water levels. The SSSI could be used for freshwater storage. There is also the opportunity to create saltmarsh, through set back of floodbanks in the estuary. These options should be considered as part of a strategic approach to flood management in the Ouse catchment.

English Nature's Council has recently agreed a Position Statement entitled 'A sustainable approach to flood plain management, which reduces flood risk and enhances biodiversity'. This summarises our evidence to Select Committees of Parliament investigating flood management and our advice on the forthcoming Policy and Planning Guidance to local authorities on development in flood plains. It is available on English Nature's website.

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The river Severn floods Upton-upon-Severn

coastal and flood plain grazing marsh lost, and a further 400 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are currently at risk.