



TAYSIDE BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

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SAND MARTIN INTEREST GROUP

Minutes of Meeting held on 15th July 2009

The Bothy, Friarton Ponds, by Perth

Present: Ian Ford (Chair) (IF)
Mike Groves (MG)
Ann Lolley (AL) Broughty Ferry Environmental Project
Charles Macpherson (CM) Perth & Kinross Ranger Service
Daniele Muir (DM) Tayside Biodiversity Partnership
Catherine Lloyd (CL) Tayside Biodiversity Partnership
Iain Campbell (Minute-taker) (IC)

Apologies: Al Borland, Murton Trust; Craig Borland, Angus Council Ranger Service; Guy Harewood, Clackmannanshire LBAP; Ben Herschell, Angus Council Ranger Service; Steve Moyes, Tay Ringing Group

1. Apologies & Welcome

As above.

2. Project Updates

IF opened discussion of stoat problems in Broughty Ferry, with **AL** and **MG** believing that stoats were able to access the Sand Martin wall by going under netting, adding that Bob Clark, the gamekeeper, is planning to look in to possible access through rabbit holes. The stoat was killed by the gamekeeper. **IF** asked if there was the possibility of smaller diameter mesh being installed, but **DM** noted that stoats can get through even very small holes, and that installing smaller chicken wire would be too big a job. **IF** raised the point of stoats possibly being necessary to keep local rabbit population down. **MG** suggested setting traps, with **AL** adding that the gamekeeper would be willing to check them every day. **IF** suggested that advice be sought from the gamekeeper, and further suggested contacting Ted Cowley at the Sand Martin Trust.

ACTION: IF, AL, MG TO SEEK ADVICE REGARDING STOATS

AL reported that besides this, developments were positive, with two broods currently. **MG** added that the stoat came later, with 40 Sand Martins getting away. There were 12-15 pairs maximum, and due to cold weather the first wave moved on, leaving only the second. Despite this there were 40-50 youngsters, a substantial increase in numbers but still not a high number... **AL** further added that this is still valuable to local people and good for longer term interest.

CM reported on developments in Perth and Kinross, noting that Sand Martins have returned to the lade side, with WWF having drilled some holes in the lade wall. There is also a large colony at Huntingtower, which members of the public can get close enough to see but do not have access to. **IF** requested that **CM** get a grid reference for Huntingtower. **CM** also noted that there are many at Ballathie Estate, with **IF** noting that there are many barrels there. **IF** noted that previously Sand Martins had used a drainpipe by the river in Perth city centre as a nest and asked if there had been any developments here; **CM** replied that many sites had been lost, although there is a new site in the railway arches - **IF** requested the grid reference.

DM reported on nesting in the new viewing platform on High Street, at the end of Tay Street,

noting that there had been Sand Martins there in the last few years although she had not checked yet this year. **DM** also reported sightings at Spittal of Glenshee and on the new section of the A93. **CM** noted that nesting had been spotted in drainpipes on the North East bank from across the river at North Inch.

ACTION: DM, CM TO LOOK INTO GRID REFERENCES AND ENSURE ALL SIGHTINGS ARE LOGGED

MG suggested that looking into pulling together the historical records held by recorders would be worthwhile - **IF** noted that Steve Moyes has done some work in gathering records.

CL distributed the BTO's RAS News, and asked if we should not be liaising with a wider group of people - Steve Moyes is already a member, but it is important to do more in the way of linking in with the BTO, through, for example, sharing the group's Sand Martin map with them. We will ultimately also need to add all Tayside sightings to the National Biodiversity Network website.

ACTION: IF TO LOOK INTO

IF reported on the projects in Angus, noting that there are currently no Sand Martins at Crombie - a bank for ringing was built there with SITA TBAF funding, but has seen no results to date. **AL** noted that the pipe system - with around 100 pipes - doesn't seem to be successful. **AL** added that the pipes at Crombie are not filled with sand - **MG** suggested that the birds may prefer to feel that they are making a tunnel, with **IF** adding that while colonies are found in drainpipes, this may be as a last resort, and suggesting asking the rangers to try filling the pipes.

ACTION: ANGUS RANGER SERVICE TO CONSIDER

DM said there had been success at Forfar Loch in the past, but **IF** noted that there are none this year - it is possible that there are better sites nearby. Montrose has seen 20-25 pairs, with impressions from a ringing session being that breeding has improved this year. **IF** further noted there had been nesting in Montrose sand dunes, but not at other sites. **CL** noted that there had been no report from Al Borland regarding Murton, **IF** asked that he be contacted and information returned to the group.

ACTION: CL TO ASK AL BORLAND TO GIVE UPDATE FOR MURTON

IF reported information from Ben Herschell, noting that there had been successful ringing of birds (mixture of old and young) at Cotside Quarry. **IF** also raised the point of consideration of whether there are links between returns on the east coast of Scotland and in Norway - ringing return information would help here. Getting more comprehensive figures from other sites around Angus would also be helpful.

ACTION: IF TO LOOK INTO

CL reported that Guy Harewood had noted Sand Martins flying in the area but not nesting in Clacks sites. **MG** enquired into the statistics across the country - **IF** said that this was difficult to judge due to the high number of small colonies, but added that it is important to keep yearly records for larger colonies.

IF reported on the proposal to install a northward-looking Sand Martin bank at the south side of Friarton Ponds, noting that funding will be sought when charitable status is attained. It will be designed and installed by the same group as were behind the Broughty Ferry site. It will be easily visible but not easily accessible for members of the public.

3. Survey update - and Plans for the Future

IF raised the issue of publicising the need for survey input and website information. A letter in The Courier, Perthshire Advertiser and Angus local papers would be an easy way to begin, as these always receive replies.

ACTION: MIKE GROVES TO LIAISE WITH IF AND CHARLES MACPHERSON

4. **Tayside Biodiversity Partnership Website: Opportunities via the Tayside Recorders' Forum section**

CL noted that there is the opportunity to publicise the Tayside Biodiversity website review. The Tayside Recorders' Forum is now set up and the contact list is being updated. It is being moved forward by David Lampard and Mark Simmons, and will be mostly web-based, with occasional meetings and a plan for eventual workshops and other events. Links with NESBReC are planned and it is hoped to help in filling gaps in survey information, eventually leading to a generic site for all surveys to bring all records together. There will be a designated Recorders' Forum page on the site.

**ACTION: IF TO DISCUSS RECORDERS' FORUM WITH CL
ACTION: ALL TO CHECK THE WEBSITE MID-AUGUST**

There is also the opportunity to improve surveys, and with survey forms needing redesigned to include more information on nesting sites, other contacts and so on. Putting together a distribution map next year was also suggested - this would also be useful for planners, etc. IF suggested that the online survey form should also include columns for number, whether or not there are nest sites, and habitat, along with emphasising the importance of grid reference and date. DM recommended also having a general comments box. IF suggested an RSPB link with information on each bird, with DM adding that information to help distinguish between commonly mistaken birds. CL also suggested a link with the Sand Martin Trust.

ACTION: IF TO WORK WITH IC TO IMPROVE SAND MARTIN SECTION OF THE WEBSITE

CL asked if there had been any update on Al Borland's willingness to input Sand Martin data onto MapMate - IF said he would discuss this with AB. IF asked if there was information on how to input data to the National Biodiversity Network; CL recommended contacting David Lampard or Mark Simmons.

ACTION: IF TO CONTACT AB RE. MAPMATE DATA INPUT

AL noted that there are many people who would be willing to help, and work must be done to assure conditions that best facilitate this - it is important to allow people to feel they have a contribution to make. MG asked if there was to be any movement towards making the website more appealing to children and young people, through interactive features etc. CL noted the difficulties in catering equally to professionals who are looking for just lists, general members of the public, children, and so on, but added that Tayside Biodiversity Festival was aimed towards reaching new audiences, and that there are ongoing schools projects, albeit at a small scale. CL also noted that the website figures show that it is used by people outside Britain.

**ACTION: ALL TO CONSIDER WAYS TO ENGAGE CHILDREN
BY WAY OF WEBSITE AND PROJECTS**

IF added that there is much potential here, which can become overwhelming and so must be managed carefully.

ACTION: IF TO COMPILE PRELIMINARY REPORTS, DISTRIBUTE

5. **Planning Manual - Biodiversity Advice Notes**

CL reported that the Planning Manual is now being circulated, and the advice notes have been uploaded to the website. This will allow local authority employees to be provided with quick information, with the opportunity for BANs to be written on any subject - CL suggested the Interest Group could compile an advisory note for Sand Martins in Tayside. She said it was likely the information would be available elsewhere, so would e-mail the Scottish Biodiversity Officers' Network first. AL suggesting making it possible to cut and paste information for use elsewhere, rather than having it available only in PDF. IF noted there is planning advice available in Lothian, which should be investigated. AL added that planners are increasingly taking notice of local people and communities lobbying, and that having this information available could make it easier for people. IF noted the problem of planners having conflicting statutory duties.

ACTION: CL TO CONTACT LBAP OFFICERS RE. SAND MARTIN PLANNING INFO

IF asked if there is planning and quarrying advice available; **CL** noted that there is in England. **IF** noted that most quarry owners are accommodating to Sand Martins, while **CL** added that advice should be available for the beginning of the season - with publicity towards the end of February or beginning of March - to help people either accommodate Sand Martins or stay within the law if trying to exclude them.

ACTION: CL TO LOOK INTO QUARRY ADVICE

6. Proposed Sand Martin Newsletter

IF suggested postponing discussion of this due to the already high workload. **CL** suggested that it would be good to bring together case studies and prepare something next year, with **IF** recommending linking in projects on Swifts and House Martins. This may be a task for a student internship if planned sufficiently far ahead.

ACTION: IF AND CL TO CONSIDER NEWSLETTER/ADVISORY NOTES IN NEW YEAR

7. Widening the Audience

CL asked if there were relevant materials for children; **IF** suggesting borrowing from the BFEP Sand Martin booklet and providing information. **AL** noted that Guy's partner is a teacher who had used the booklet as a resource, while **CL** noted that the availability of the booklet could be advertised on the website. **AL** added that she is still looking into the possibility of a swifts booklet. Sam Higgins is working with the bathing machine project (Marine interpretation) and has recently completed teacher training, and, being good with design activities, may be able to help here.

ACTION: AL TO GET IN TOUCH WITH SAM HIGGINS

8. Tayside Biodiversity Festival 2010 and Awareness-raising 2009

CL updated the group on the 2009 festival, noting that of 60 scheduled events 58 went ahead, with much success, although a lack of funding and time caused problems with programme distribution. For 2010, the plan is to have materials ready to distribute by March, for what will be the Biodiversity Month of May; this will tie in with 2010 being The International Year of Biodiversity. This will allow the festival to be linked in with already ongoing events, and offer room for themes and numerous launches to be spread across the month.

IF suggested holding an event at an artificial Sand Martin bank with **AL** or Al Borland, potentially involving performances, installations etc., and positioning Sand Martins in a wider context to fit with the international theme. **CL** suggested further thought into how currently ongoing projects - BANS, the festival - can be combined and used to raise awareness.

ACTION: CL/IC TO ADD TO FESTIVAL PLANNING

Regarding the shooting of a stoat at Broughty Ferry's Sand Martin wall, it was noted that onlooking members of the public objected. **MG** suggested having an article published in a local newspaper to clarify the reasoning behind the shooting and the necessity of managing biodiversity. **IF** added that the article should be proactive, linking in to providing information on the hazards faced for Sand Martins, and suggested The Courier as the first newspaper to approach.

ACTION: MG TO LOOK IN TO NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

9. Date and format of Next Meeting

The group agreed to meet again in July 2010 at a site with a nearby Sand Martin bank – this could be the Perth Lade or a return to Friarton Ponds if its bank is up by then.

CL thanked David Clarke and the Tay Regeneration Project for hosting this year's meeting and IC for taking the minutes.