

THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL: FROM RIO TO TAYSIDE

THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR BIODIVERSITY

We have come a long way since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which was held in Sweden in 1972. To mark the twentieth anniversary of this landmark conference and in recognition that human activity is changing and destroying the natural environment at an alarming rate, an 'Earth Summit' was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. On the agenda was 'Biological Diversity', a proposed 'Statement of Principles on Forests', Agenda 21, and the 'Climate Change Convention'.

The officially named 'United Nations Conference on Environment and Development' attracted representatives from nearly 180 countries. Of these, 153 world leaders - including Britain - pledged their commitment to safeguard the global biodiversity resource by signing the "Convention on Biological Diversity". The international document required that each signatory "develops national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity".

THE UK FRAMEWORK FOR BIODIVERSITY

Arising from the Earth Summit, the British Government produced its UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) in 1994. A Steering Group identified the rarest and most threatened species and habitats within the UK and produced an Action Plan outlining conservation targets and the actions required to meet them.

The overall goal of the UK Action Plan is:

“to conserve and enhance the biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms.”

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The objectives underpinning this goal are to conserve, and where applicable, to enhance

- the overall populations and natural ranges of native species and the quality and range of wildlife habitats and ecosystems;
- internationally important and threatened species, habitats and ecosystems;
- species, habitats and natural and managed ecosystems that are characteristic of local areas;
- the biodiversity of natural and semi-natural habitats where this has been diminished over recent decades.

As a result of the UK Action Plan, the Steering Group prepared detailed programmes of action to achieve the following objectives:

- Develop costed targets for our most threatened and declining species and habitats;
- Establish an effective system for handling the necessary biological data at both local and national level;
- Promote increased public awareness of the importance of biodiversity;
- Broaden public involvement in biodiversity issues;
- Promote Local Biodiversity Action Plans as a means of implementing the national Plan.

A total of 391 UK Species Action Plans (SAPs) and 45 UK Habitat Action Plans (HAPs), each with time limited targets to measure their success, were drawn up and are now being implemented country-wide.

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THE SCOTTISH FRAMEWORK FOR BIODIVERSITY

The UK and Scottish parliaments remain committed to the conservation of our biodiversity through the implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Scottish Biodiversity Group was set up in 1996 to oversee the implementation of the relevant UK Action Plans in Scotland. Now re-formed as the Scottish Biodiversity Forum, its membership includes statutory and non-statutory organisations from a very wide range of sectors. It produces a variety of publications giving a strategic overview of the habitats and species under threat in Scotland and provides a central liaison point for everyone involved in the biodiversity process. As well as working at a national level, the Forum provides support, guidance and information to the Local Biodiversity Officers throughout Scotland.

Within Scotland, Wales and England approximately 170 biodiversity initiatives have started since the Steering Group's Report was published in 1995. All 32 local authority areas in Scotland have now committed to preparing a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). Some, such as Clackmannanshire or Fife are county-based; others, including Highland and Tayside cover a much wider area. In total there are 25 LBAP Partnerships in Scotland with 20 Project Officers co-ordinating the process. Many local authorities are integrating the process into an existing service such as Planning and Development or Community Planning. Other partnerships are being co-ordinated by a Biodiversity Project Officer who may or may not be local authority based. In some areas the LBAP Officer is based in different partner's offices such as North-East Scotland which is SWT-based, or in the Cairngorms which is based within the Cairngorms Partnership. So far 11 LBAPs have been published in Scotland; many others have reached consultative draft stage.

LOCAL ACTION

The national action required is ambitious. To be implemented successfully it must be assimilated into the work already being undertaken by a variety of statutory and non-statutory bodies. National targets need to be translated into focussed local action, but at the same time consideration must be given to those threatened or highly valued species and habitats important to the region but not listed as nationally or internationally important in the UK BAP.

LBAP objectives are therefore to:

- Translate national targets for species and habitats specified in the UK Action Plan into effective action at local level;
- Stimulate effective local working partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are developed and maintained;
- Raise awareness of the need and responsibilities for biodiversity conservation and enhancement in the local context;
- Identify biodiversity resources and priorities in the local area;
- Identify targets for species and habitats important to the local area, including both the rare and the common, according to local circumstances;
- Ensure that delivery mechanisms for conservation and enhancement of biodiversity resources are promoted and understood by a very wide audience at a local level;
- Provide a local basis for monitoring progress in biodiversity conservation.

THE BENEFITS OF THE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

AWARENESS

The LBAP provides the opportunity to raise public awareness of the area's flora and fauna – in a local and global context – and at the same time emphasises the local character and distinctiveness of Tayside. The LBAP may not only give a sense of ownership and pride in local surroundings, but may extend such confidence and increased knowledge to welcome visitors from all over the world.

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QUALITY OF LIFE

By caring for the variety of species and habitats around us our own lives are enriched by improved surroundings and the knowledge that we can pass on such natural heritage to future generations. The UK Government has recognised the importance of the environment by including populations of wild birds as one of the indicators of the quality of life.

INCLUSIVE INVOLVEMENT

Local support is essential to ensure long-term adoption of the LBAP. People from a very wide range of sectors - from schoolchildren to business people - will be encouraged to participate, help implement and develop responsibility for a variety of local biodiversity projects.

POSITIVE ACTION

Each Habitat and Species Action Plan within the LBAP has a prioritised Actions Schedule so that clear objectives and targets can be worked towards and monitored. Such actions may be adopted by the statutory bodies, local authorities and many non-governmental organisations, as well as individuals.

FUNDING

Local and national governments are recognising the importance of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and a broad range of funding opportunities must now be sought to ensure that biodiversity-related projects are implemented. Partnership working will encourage a pooling of resources and the best use of existing funding.

INTEGRATION

The LBAP process informs an array of other plans, programmes and strategies, including statutory development plans, of local priorities. It also converts broad sustainability objectives into specific actions for wildlife and thus provides indicators of a wider environmental quality. It links to and forms an integral part of both the Local Agenda 21 programme and Community Planning.

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“Scientific study shows that just three minutes amongst trees gives a measurable degree of stress relief - but we don’t need science to tell us that a walk in the woods or a stroll in the garden works wonders. With GPs prescribing more than £100 million of anti-stress tablets a year, the economic benefit of stress relief alone makes Britain’s biodiversity a bargain.”

Professor Chris Baines

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group recommended that the production of an LBAP should take a partnership approach. By co-operating with a wide range of organisations and individuals the most effective local action can be agreed, linking in with work currently being carried out by different organisations and focussing us all to implementing national and locally-set targets. Partnership working is not necessarily an easy option, but it can bring huge benefits in avoiding duplication of effort and in providing a superb network of committed and enthusiastic partners who can make a real long-term difference.

The UK Steering Group recommended that the local authorities should take on the role of LBAP co-ordination as they are in touch both with all the statutory and non-statutory bodies, as well as the general public. Additionally, LBAPs link with the requirements of the biodiversity component of Local Agenda 21 which increases the opportunity for wide-scale partnership working.

BIODIVERSITY AUDIT – Priority Species and Species of Conservation Concern

Once the Tayside Biodiversity Partnership had been set up, the first step was to prepare an audit. This was achieved in 1999. From this document a list of Priority Species and Species of Conservation Concern has been drawn up. These two levels of national importance are used to indicate how threatened certain species are –

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Priority Species are those occurring (or are known to have occurred) in Tayside for which either a UK SAP or a UK Species Statement has been published.

These include:

- species which are globally threatened;
- species which are rapidly declining in the UK – by more than 50% in the last 25 years.

There are 391 UK Priority Species in the UK; 89 of these are found in Tayside

Species of Conservation Concern include:

- threatened endemic or globally threatened species;
- species where the UK has more than 25% of the world or appropriate biogeographical population;
- species where numbers or range have declined by more than 25% in the last 25 years;
- in some instances where the species is found in fewer than 15 ten kilometre squares in the UK;
- species which are listed in the EC Birds or Habitats directives, the Bern, Bonn or CITES conventions, or under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

There are 1250 Species of Conservation Concern in the UK; 407 of these are found in Tayside

Species of Local Concern. In each of the HAPs there is a Key Species listing which shows which species is Priority or of Conservation Concern. A third category is sometimes used to identify species not found on either the Priority or Conservation Concern lists. This covers species identified by local experts as being of 'local importance' or 'under threat'. This category has yet to be prepared in Tayside. Authors of the Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) have suggested which species may be considered in any future lists. Where any species fits into this third category a blank will appear on the Key Species column, rather than the 'P' or 'C' code.

The Tayside biodiversity audit was based on the best information available at the time and a great deal more information will be required in the future to fully understand the needs of the habitats and species in our care. As yet no funding is available to set up a Local Biodiversity Record Centre and we need to consider how best we can manage the information which has been accumulated.

ACTION!

The most important word in the whole process is Action. Without a concerted effort to conserve our local biodiversity nothing will be achieved and the LBAP will be just another document left in pristine condition on numerous bookshelves.

Six sub-groups, the members of which have been drawn from as wide an audience as possible, have undertaken the development of the First Tranche of the Tayside Habitat Action Plans. Each Action Plan identifies objectives and targets for the conservation of the habitat, together with the actions required to achieve them.

The life of each of the Plans is 15 years, but regular reviews for updating and reporting our successes and failures will be essential. A key part of the biodiversity process is the monitoring and review of the agreed actions. The successful implementation of these will require a working partnership of local communities, industry, commerce and individuals. Several of the HAPs may well have to be updated after a few years as more information becomes available or the actions are achieved and new targets set.

A partnership approach is essential so that Lead Partners and Partners each take responsibility for specific Actions.

The biodiversity process is not a "quick fix", nor is it something that can be merely set down in print and checked periodically. It is an extremely dynamic process involving a vast range of people who can all make a difference. A Second Tranche of both Habitat and Species Action Plans is already in preparation. The first of these are attached at the back of the Tayside LBAP for consultation.

Although local expertise is necessary to write each of the Plans, it has been found elsewhere in Scotland that by highlighting a variety of species, projects and initiatives quickly follow and a very wide range of people can become involved in biodiversity conservation.

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More Action Plans will follow. It is intended that they will be published at a later date as a supplement to this First Tranche. So too will reports of "Progress of Action" so that those actions listed in each Plan can be monitored and updated.

The entire biodiversity process is a very fluid one which must remain flexible to respond to changes in both local policy and the environment itself.

LINKS WITH OTHER LOCAL PLANS

It is essential to link the LBAPs' objectives and targets to other plans in Tayside. Key processes and policies that could play a role in biodiversity include:

- Local Agenda 21;
- Community Planning;
- Local Authority land use development plans (Local Plans and Structure Plans) and development control processes;
- Shoreline Management Plans (Angus Council);
- Natural Heritage Zones (SNH);
- Environmental Management Systems;
- Business Management Strategies;
- Agri-environment Schemes;
- Local site management plans;
- Individual business or farming Biodiversity Action Plans;
- Neighbouring LBAPs.

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Where appropriate Plans should be linked across local authority boundaries to ensure their message and actions reach the widest range of partners possible.

The Tayside LBAP area is also bounded by five other LBAP areas – North-East Scotland, the Cairngorms, Stirling Area, Clackmannanshire, and Fife. Awareness of initiatives introduced in other areas is very important so that positive action can be carried out in the most beneficial and co-ordinated way. Effective links with other LBAP groups, together with the overarching Scottish Biodiversity Forum, are also a key part of this co-working approach.

WIDER ISSUES OUTWITH THE PLAN

Our LBAP targets have been informed in part by the UK Action Plans. Our contribution to the achievement of UK-wide objectives ensures we can be central players in the biodiversity process whether it is at a local or national level.

There are, however, a number of factors which have a major impact on our local biodiversity, but which the Plan, by its very nature, cannot address. But we can highlight such issues and encourage the many statutory bodies who are considering how best to cope with the wider challenges of pollution, acid rain, waste, climate change and the European Union Common Agricultural Policy.

Climate change, for instance, may have a profound effect on our montane habitats which could virtually disappear if temperatures increase. The Plan can highlight the issues and show linkages, but it cannot propose solutions. There are, however, some actions we can all take to tackle the issues at a local level:

Pollution – dispose of hazardous substances wisely, reduce chemical use in both home and garden, use biodegradable washing and cleaning products, refrain from flushing non-biodegradable items down the toilet.

Acid Rain – much of the acid deposition is due to pollution from our power stations and over-use of the car so we could use less energy, make our houses and offices as energy-efficient as possible, cycle more or make use of as many forms of public transport as possible.

Climate Change – as with acid rain, we could look into buying electricity from renewable resources, use more energy efficient appliances and use less energy. We can consider our travelling habits – from transport by air, boat, train or car - at leisure and at work.

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WHERE TO NEXT?

Ten years have elapsed since the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Some environmental scientists are warning that it may soon become too late to repair the damage we have done to nature and although science can give no definitive answers as yet, the forecasts are becoming increasingly gloomy. A report in December 2001 from the US National Academy of Science warns of the possibility of large and abrupt climate change. It suggests that we may be reaching the end of a cycle of opportunity to address challenges. If we ignore that chance to act serious consequences may follow.

The Second World Summit on Sustainable Development is taking place in Johannesburg as the Tayside Biodiversity Action is published. It is therefore a timely occasion for collective reflection on the progress we have made towards sustainable development and safeguarding biodiversity so far – and our commitment to take action where we can – locally.

RESOURCES

The LBAP will become a focus to all the action needed to enhance and improve our local biodiversity. Partnerships are being forged not only by statutory bodies and the larger environmental organisations, but also with local community groups, businesses – large and small – and the increasingly important tourism and recreation sectors.

Biodiversity creates work, providing employment directly and indirectly to a large number of people in Tayside. Our countryside is renowned for its beauty and diversity: it draws visitors from overseas as well as encouraging residents to get out and about. What could be a better example of biodiversity conservation than the income generated by people wanting to explore our hills, woodlands and beaches? By investing in biodiversity we will reap long term, sustainable rewards.

Much of the planned action listed in the LBAP will be integrated into an organisation's existing work programme or it will suggest ways in which a particular organisation can take a lead. In some cases it will suggest new priorities and give a new focus to an organisation. In many instances, the actions will even save money.

To ensure the process got off the ground in Tayside, the major part of funding for a three-year project was secured from SITA Waste Management with significant contributions made by the three local authorities and Scottish Natural Heritage. This allowed the Partnership to appoint a Co-ordinator for a three year period between 2000 and 2003. In addition, many organisations and individuals contributed their time and expertise.

The Partnership is aware of the challenge facing it to secure additional funding to continue its work. Funding the co-ordination, implementation and monitoring of all on-going aspects of the Plan is vital as the process promises to be a sustained and long-term project in itself. New ways of generating funds and resources will need to be investigated and addressed to ensure the biodiversity process continues to build upon its successful beginnings in Tayside.



LORNE GILL/SNH