

AONB SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Purpose

To present members with the first of the 5 AONB Species Action Plans, for the Nobel Chafer Beetle, under the Colchester Declaration.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- A) endorses the Nobel Chafer Beetle Species Action Plan and
- B) welcomes the progress on the commitments in the Colchester Declaration and the other forthcoming Species Action Plans.

Key Issues

- The Colchester Declaration – a ‘declaration for nature’ was produced by the National Association for AONBS (NAAONB) and supported by all the AONB partnerships in 2019.
- Five species, or assemblage of species, have been chosen as representative of the Wye Valley AONB Special Qualities.
- The first Species Action Plan, for the Nobel Chafer Beetle, relating to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees has been published, and is appended below.
- The AONB Unit is working on the production of the remaining Species Action Plans and an accompanying Wye Valley AONB Nature Recovery Plan.

Reasons

In July 2019 the Colchester Declaration was produced by the NAAONB and supported by AONB partnerships. The Declaration demonstrated the readiness of AONB partnerships to act to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change. The ambition was pledged for every AONB to prepare a Nature Recovery Plan and deliver Species Action Plans to reverse the decline of threatened species identified on the IUCN Red List, see: <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/projects/colchester-declaration>

The AONB Unit worked with local wildlife and conservation experts to choose 5 species, or assemblage of species, that are representative of the AONB Special Qualities [SQ], as identified in the AONB Management Plan, and will benefit from positive landscape scale management. The species are; Nobel Chafer beetle in relation to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18]; Hedgehog as a locally iconic species [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26]; Water

Crowfoot as an indicator for river water quality [SQ3, SQ10]; Woodland butterfly assemblage with special interest in the Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to woodlands [SQ2], and Bumblebee assemblage with particular focus on Shrill Carder, Brown Banded Carder, Redshank Carder and long horned bees in relation to grassland sites [SQ4].

Implications

Nobel Chafer Beetle - Orchard habitats & Veteran Trees

The first of the 5 Wye Valley AONB Species Action Plan, has been produced and is appended below.

Progress to date on delivering the Nobel Chafer Beetle Species Action Plan (SAP), led by Ellie Baggett, AONB Nature Recovery Officer, includes the following:-

- A partnership was developed with Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) during initial discussions about the species.
- PTES shared their NC records with the AONB Unit, and suggested installing beetle boxes, which led to the commission of a prototype box for the AONB Unit to evaluate.
- RHUL offered to fund pheromone lure trapping surveys in the AONB as part of their National study, which Ellie carried out between June-July 2022:
 - 27 orchard sites across the 3 AONB counties (Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire & Herefordshire) were surveyed.
 - This resulted in two sightings of adult beetles, and one sighting of larvae, all in Herefordshire orchards.
- With a population baseline now established, the AONB Unit successfully applied for a FiPL grant to fund a noble chafer project in Herefordshire, which will deliver the following:
 - Installation of 10 beetle boxes (soon to be commissioned, following feedback from prototype box)
 - Planting of 20 plum trees (beetles orchard species preference)
 - Delivery of 2 orchard management training courses (in partnership with local charity Colwall Orchard Group & local business The Orchard Tamers, to take place in winter 2022 and spring 2023)
 - Production of 100 leaflets about traditional orchard management and noble chafers
 - Pheromone supply and beetle traps for 2 more years' worth of surveying as part of the National study, in partnership with RHUL
- Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding for Nature Recovery in Wales has been secured, which will allow delivery of similar work in Monmouthshire, focusing on maintaining the integrity and longevity of orchard habitats, improving their connectivity, and continuation of surveying for noble chafers.
- The AONB Species Action Plan for the noble chafer has now been written and sent out to project partners for feedback/to discuss their involvement in the project going forward (MCC, PTES, RHUL, Wildlife Trusts etc.)
- A presentation about the noble chafer SAP was given during the AONB Partnership Study Tour in September.

Work is also progressing on the other Species Actions Plans.

Hedgehog - Urban/engagement species

- A partnership was developed with Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and local hedgehog champion and 'Be Hedgehog Aware' campaigner Dylan Allman.
- PTES agreed to share their records of hedgehogs in the AONB, from The Big Hedgehog Map.
- An AONB social media campaign was launched, appealing for public sightings of hedgehogs within the AONB, which Ellie mapped to establish where baseline populations were.
- Ellie and Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer, participated in the Nature and Mental Wellbeing Week at Ashfield Park Primary School in Ross-on-Wye, delivering 5 interactive sessions about priority species, including 2 sessions on hedgehogs, their habitats and hazards they face.
- Dylan Allman is doing takeovers on the AONB social media channels every month, putting out important seasonal messages about how to support hedgehog populations throughout the year.
- Ellie set up a collaboration between Dylan and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. HWT are now supporting Dylan's campaign by putting his 'Be Hedgehog Aware' stickers on their machinery, and Dylan is doing a talk for HWT members at Peterchurch Village Hall on November 10th on what we can all do to help reduce hedgehog decline.
- The AONB Species Action Plan for hedgehogs is almost completed and will subsequently be sent out to project partners.
- Plans for spring 2023 (after the hibernation period):
 - o Further engagement with schools and local communities (talks, sessions with children, camera trap loans)
 - o Mammal footprint surveys as citizen science/engagement tool
 - o Continuation of using AONB projects to promote conservation action for hedgehogs (e.g. Nature Networks project, esp. hedgerow projects or field margin buffers, FiPL, SDF projects)
 - o Promote ongoing work of partner organisations and PTES conservation action.

Bumblebee Assemblage - Grassland species

- A partnership has been developed with Bumblebee Conservation Trust.
- Ellie attended two online courses (Bumblebee ID & How to set up a Bee Walk) and one field ID course in Brecon as part of BCT's Skills for Bees project.
- Ellie and Nick participated in the Nature and Mental Wellbeing Week at Ashfield Park Primary School in Ross on Wye, delivering 5 interactive sessions about priority species, including 3 sessions on bumblebees, their lifecycle, their role in the ecosystem and the hazards they face.
- Lack of monitoring appears to be a key issue, so a major focus of spring/summer 2023 work will be promoting and encouraging the use of citizen science survey tools, such as POMS, Bee Walk, LERC Wales and iRecord.
- A potential collaboration event with the Monmouthshire 'Nature Isn't Neat' project is in discussion, as well as collaborations with Monmouthshire Meadows Group, Monmouthshire Bee Festival, Bees for Development, Herefordshire Meadows Group, Townsend Farm, Natur am Byth and BugLife.
- The AONB Species Action Plan for bumblebees has been started, but needs further development and action in 2023.

Water Crowfoot – River species

- This Species Action Plan has not yet been started and will be a key focus of Nature Recovery work in 2023. Collaboration with NRW's proposed Water crowfoot drone survey is planned.

Woodland butterfly assemblage – Woodland species

- This Species Action Plan has not yet been started, and will be a key focus of Nature Recovery work in 2023.

Background

In 2019 the annual National AONB 'Landscapes for Life' Conference took place at the University of Essex, Colchester. The conference concluded with The Colchester Declaration – a Declaration for Nature. This was developed through a series of pre-conference discussion fora and workshop sessions during the conference. The Declaration is the pledge for nature of the AONB network: to protect what remains and restore what has been lost.