

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE SPECIES ACTION PLAN & NATURE RECOVERY PLAN

Purpose

To present members with the third of the 5 National Landscape Species Action Plans, for the Bumblebee Assemblage, under the Colchester Declaration.

Recommendations

That the JAC endorses the Bumblebee Assemblage Species Action Plan and welcomes the on-going work on the preparation of the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and remaining 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, were chosen as representative of the Wye Valley National Landscape Special Qualities.
- The second Species Action Plan, for the Hedgehog, was adopted at the last meeting, and the first Species Action Plan for Noble Chafer beetle was adopted in July 2023.
- The third Species Action Plan is published and is appended below, focusing on a bumblebee assemblage, to encourage the sustainable management of their habitat of species-rich and semi- or un-improved grasslands.
- The National Landscape Team is working on the production of the remaining Species Action Plans
- The suite of Species Action Plans accompany the Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan, which will be published shortly as a public consultation draft.
- A Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is being prepared in both Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, with both counties undertaking public surveys before publishing their respective LNRS for consultation.

Reasons

Biodiversity is in decline. To reverse the declines in biodiversity and realise nature’s recovery, we need to work together and on a landscape-scale to enact the Lawton principles of Bigger, Better, More and Joined Up. This means conserving and enhancing our existing natural habitats, but also making them bigger, creating new areas of species-rich habitat and, critically, ensuring they join up to create functional and resilient ecological networks that enable nature and people to thrive.

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://national-landscapes.org.uk/the-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 chosen are: Noble Chafer beetle in relation to orchard habitats & Veteran Trees [SQ27, SQ18]; Hedgehog as a locally iconic species [SQ1, SQ4, SQ5, SQ26]; Bumblebee assemblage with particular focus on Shril Carder, Brown-banded Carder, and Red-shanked Carder in relation to grassland sites [SQ4]; Woodland butterfly assemblage with special interest in the Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to woodlands [SQ2]; and Water Crowfoot as an indicator for river water quality [SQ3, SQ10].

The Environment Act 2021 introduced the requirement for local bodies to take responsibility for restoring the environment within their locale, working with local groups and the local authority. This needs to be captured in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) that draws on ecological insights and finds natural solutions that improve biodiversity. DEFRA has asked every county in England to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This will describe where and how the development of habitats could have the greatest benefit for nature.

Implications

The third of the 5 Wye Valley National Landscape Species Action Plans, has been produced and is appended below. A bumblebee assemblage was chosen to encourage the sustainable management of species-rich and un/semi improved grasslands, to support these species and increase the diversity within our grassland areas. Being habitat focused, the bumble assemblage encompasses all bumblebees, but with a particular interest in locally distinctive and rare bees including the Shril Carder Bee, Brown-banded Carder Bee and the Red-Shanked Carder Bee.

The accompanying Wye Valley National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan is being finalised ready for consultation. It is primarily a plan for the Wye Valley National Landscape Team, to give strategic direction to nature recovery work. It can however be used by a broader audience in decision making around land management opportunities, including but not limited to landowners and managers, communities and other interest groups. The plan will also influence and help implement many of the new policies and initiatives on both sides of the national boundary.

The Herefordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is progressing through a number of stages. Baseline mapping has been developed by the Herefordshire Biological Record Centre (HARC) which includes designated sites and irreplaceable habitat, following a criteria list shared by DEFRA. Opportunities mapping has been undertaken by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust which identifies opportunities for creating connectivity across 3 main habitat types;

grassland, woodland and wetland. The Council is now seeking to engage with stakeholders on mapping to utilise local knowledge to amend mapping, based upon best available data. A series of workshops have been undertaken with Members, Parish Councils in market towns and shortly due to commence workshops with landowners. A survey was published for members of the public seeking their views on what is important for nature recovery in the county. Mapping will shortly be published on the council webpage (see <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/conservation-1/ecology/7>).

The development of the written strategy is imminently due to be commissioned and will commence with using the survey feedback to set out what is important in Herefordshire and what the priorities and key measures will be.

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) is also producing a new and first Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the county. This will largely be done through the Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership (GLNP) and its members with involvement of a wide range of stakeholders across Gloucestershire. A draft version of the LNRS is likely to be circulated for public consultation in late 2024. For further information see <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/ecology-and-landscape/a-nature-recovery-strategy-for-gloucestershire/> .

Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) have produced a Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) which, along with the Rivers & Oceans Action Plan and the Green Infrastructure Strategy, forms part of the Council's Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy adopted in May 2024. The NRAP sets out actions to help reverse the decline in biodiversity and build ecosystem resilience, For further information see <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/climate-emergency/>.

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.