

**England Biodiversity Group  
4<sup>th</sup> December 2007**

**Minutes from previous  
EBG Meeting  
September 5<sup>th</sup> 2007**

**EBG-07-19**

**England Biodiversity Group**  
**11.00am to 2.00pm , Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

**Rooms LG 4, 5 & 6, Page St, London**

**Minutes**

---

**Present:**

John Robbs (Defra, Wildlife & Countryside)	Paul Cobbing (GOWM/Defra)
Sarah Webster (Defra, WHB)	Andrea Graham (National Farmers' Union)
Jane Goodwin (Defra, WHB)	Simon Pryor (Forestry Commission, England)
Andy Stott (Defra, LLS SD)	Sue Armstrong-Brown (RSPB)
Steven Marfleet (Defra, WHB)	Alex Tait (LGA)
David Henshilwood (Natural England)	Nigel Bourn (WCL)
Pete Brotherton (Natural England)	Doug Hulyer (Independent consultant)
Mark Tollitt (Defra, CD)	Amy Coyte (WCL)
Julian Hughes (RSPB)	David Pape (ALGE)
Paul Raven (Environment Agency)	David Goode (UCL)
Roger Ward (NE/Defra)	Ruth Waters (Natural England)
Gemma Regniez (Defra, CD)	David Knight (Natural England)
David Switzer (LGA)	

**Apologies**

John Everitt (represented by Nigel Bourn)  
David Bullock NT  
Shaun Mowat Defra  
Pam Whaley Defra

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

John Robbs welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

**2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

**EBG-07-12**

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted without amendment.

A number of the actions from the last meeting related to substantive agenda items for this meeting, as such they are covered under the appropriate item.

**Action point: David Henshilwood to report back to the group on NE's 'Natural Health' conference**

David had supplied a paper for information purposes only; this was circulated as Paper EBG-07-16

**Action Point: Martin Brasher to speak to Protected Species policy team and report back to EBG.**

Since the meeting, NE and FC have been working closely together on developing the guidance and reducing the licensing burden; the Habitat Regulations came into force on 21 August.

**Post meeting note:** Simon Pryor has promulgated details of a webpage with guidance on implementation of the Regulations for the forestry sector:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-protectedspecies>

Feedback on this is welcomed and comments should be returned to Simon.

**Action point: Doug Hulyer to write up proposed division of labour and next steps to be circulated with the minutes (attached at Annex); England Biodiversity Group to feed in offers of help direct to Doug copied to the Secretariat**

Doug had circulated a paper; no comments had been received. Doug was working with Defra CD to take this forward.

**Action Point: David Henshilwood to forward the results of the regionalisation exercise to secretariat for circulation to the group**

The regionalisation paper had been circulated as paper EBG-07-13. John Robbs invited David Henshilwood to speak to the paper.

David said that this had been an initial attempt to disaggregate the targets to the regional level; the complexity of data analysis had precluded the degree of consultation NE would like to have undertaken, but comments and debate were invited at this stage. Alex Tait welcomed the paper as a good piece of work but noted that it was very much a starting point. Simon Pryor also acknowledged the value of this and said that understanding the rationale behind the allocations to the regions would assist with the implementation. David Henshilwood agreed to provide a note on the rationale.

Andy Stott asked whether climate change had been systematically considered in developing the paper. David said that this had not been possible to any significant extent, and it was agreed that it would be helpful if Andy Stott's team could examine the paper on a targeted basis, offering advice on those habitats known to be vulnerable to climate change.

Simon Pryor noted that this paper only included the targets for restoration and expansion and asked whether the condition/maintenance targets could also be included. David Henshilwood said that this would be possible in principle.

John Robbs concluded by asking members of the group, and particularly the Local & Regional SIG to let NE have their comments by 5 October.

**ACTIONS:**

**David Henshilwood to provide a note setting out the rationale for the regionalisation of the targets;**

**Andy Stott's team to provide advice on climate change on a targeted basis;**

**Comments to be returned to David Henshilwood and copied to Gavin Measures by 5<sup>th</sup> October.**

**3. Quarterly Workstream Achievement Reports**

**EBG-07-18**

SIG reports received prior to the meeting (Climate Change Adaptation, Economics & Funding and Towns, Cities & Development) had been circulated.

John Robbs asked if there were any additional comments from the SIGs that had reported. David Goode welcomed the agreement of the priority urban habitat and the launch of the wildlife gardening manifesto.. He also noted concerns regarding the level of engagement from CLG and the lack of a single focal point within NE for urban issues. This was of increasing importance in the light of the role that green infrastructure could play in relation to flooding, the new BAP habitat and the Government's house-building targets. John Robbs said that NE were aware of the importance of the urban environment and that how they organised themselves to engage on this was a matter for NE; however, he felt that collectively we needed reassurance that there was adequate resource in NE dedicated to this important area. He asked David Henshilwood to take these concerns back to NE and hoped that NE would take them into account. The Secretariat would consider how to encourage engagement from CLG.

**ACTIONS: David Henshilwood to report to NE the concerns of EBG that adequate resource be identified for urban conservation;**

**Secretariat to consider how to encourage engagement from CLG.**

John Robbs invited updates from the remaining SIGs:

Paul Raven reported for the Water & Wetlands SIG that of the 3 obstacles to progress previously reported, 2 had now been resolved (tackling abstraction on protected sites and tackling diffuse water pollution from agriculture). In light of recent events there would be major expectations of flood defence funding for housing protection and it would be important to ensure that biodiversity 'spin-offs' were used wisely. Paul also highlighted the recent news of the Heritage Lottery Fund award to the Great Fen Project. It was important that Flood Defence money was spent wisely and made the most of opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

Simon Pryor reported for the Woodlands & Forestry SIG that there had been an assessment of woodland and other SSSI types on the FC estate and that there would be a major programme of work on open habitats over the next 9 months. Guidance for the forestry sector on best practice in implementing changes to the Habitat Regulations had been produced (see post meeting note, above). Secretariat would clarify whether it was for Defra or NE to raise awareness of the guidance amongst practitioners. Andrea Graham noted that the NE website still referred to the 'old' Regulations.

Doug Hulyer reported that the Education & Public Understanding SIG would be meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> Sept. Doug had been working with Gemma Regniez to progress the Communications Strategy and this would be the major agenda item for the meeting.

As Paul Cobbing had been delayed, David Pape reported for the Local & Regional SIG. Work was underway on: promoting the biodiversity duty (NERC Act S.40) in the regions, producing a regional effectiveness performance indicator, working with funding bodies in the regions (notably SITA). David also noted that a biodiversity indicator had been included as part of Defra's submission on Local Government Performance Indicators. Andy Stott advised the group that the UK Indicator group was considering organising a forum on indicators and that there was scope to discuss local and regional indicators, although there were so many potential players in local and regional work across the UK, that it was difficult to know how to structure a forum to enable meaningful discussion.

Sue Armstrong-Brown noted that the Agriculture SIG had been experiencing difficulties (the last meeting had been cancelled) and Sue was considering how the SIG could be taken forward to add value and ensure that the work of other fora was not duplicated.

#### 4. Review of Habitat Action Plans

EBG-07-17

John Robbs invited David Knight to introduce this paper, which had been circulated at EBG-07-17. David's presentation is attached at Annex A). David noted that interactions between habitats were needed by species, and ecosystem services too did not emerge from single habitats. There was therefore some merit in grouping habitats together at the larger scale rather than adopting a single habitat-based approach. Having said this, there was a good read across between habitat groupings and workstreams. There was unlikely to be a one-size fits all solution, and there was benefit in keeping a rich mix.

John Robbs asked the group to take the four options in the supporting paper as a starting point for discussion. He reminded the group that the consensus from the 1<sup>st</sup> March workshop had been to place emphasis on delivery through habitats, noting the need to integrate the needs of species, and that this would seem to rule out options 1 and 4. A pragmatic approach (ie at the most appropriate spatial scale for each habitat/species) incorporating the views of the devolved administrations would be required and within this context option 2 would also seem to be ruled out. This would suggest that option 3 could be a solution but this would raise questions regarding the relationship with SIGs and how to ensure the needs of species were met.

Simon Pryor strongly supported option 3, noting that this was effectively the position for the Woodlands & Forestry SIG where the focus at a UK level was primarily on information sharing and communications. He also noted that this could work well with 'linking' habitats such as hedgerows.

Sue Armstrong-Brown supported development of option 3 as it could help define the work of the Agriculture SIG. Careful consideration of the structure and strong leadership from NE would be required.

David Henshilwood said that this presented an opportunity to ensure there was clarity on accountability and responsibility. This point was endorsed by others including Pete Brotherton who noted that responsibility should be extended down to the local level to aid delivery and by Roger Ward who said that this would be central to the development of the biodiversity programme structure. Doug Hulyer further noted that the local and regional aspect should be built in from the outset and that a coordinated approach to communications was also essential.

David Goode offered the support of the Town, Cities & Development SIG to take forward work on urban issues by building on good links that were already well established.

John Robbs summarised that the group were generally supportive of option 3. The next step would be to consider how the 55 priority habitats in England could most usefully be grouped, which of these would make sense to organise at the

UK, GB or two country level (this would be discussed in the 4 countries meeting in the margins of the Aviemore conference) and who would be the natural leads for such groups. This would be discussed at the next EBG.

**ACTION: Comments to NE (David Henshilwood) by 21<sup>st</sup> Sept  
NE to prepare an updated version of the paper to circulate in time for the next meeting of the group on 4 December.**

## **5. NE Progress report on Minister's letter**

John asked what the timescale was for a response to the Minister's letter and whether there were any issues associated with it that should be discussed. David Henshilwood advised that a written response could be expected in the near future. The only item not covered elsewhere on the agenda related to the Environmental Stewardship targeting process. Here, Phase 2 of Environmental Stewardship targeting would replace the present targeting statement. John Robbs urged NE to send their written response to the Minister by the end of September and suggested the letter should offer a follow up meeting with the minister to go through the response.

## **6. Priority Habitats and Species List Review**

**EBG-07-14**

John Robbs referred to the questions within the paper which essentially boiled down to "what is the point of the statutory list?".

Alex Tait said that, from a planning point of view, the list would help public enquiries clarify proportionality and importance and that planning inspectors would be expected to take the list into consideration in formulating any advice to the Secretary of State. David Pape acknowledged this but said that focussing solely on planning would be unwise as the S41 list was intended for much wider use than this. Pete Brotherton pointed to the use of current (S74 CROW Act) list by funding bodies to prioritise and said that it would be important to structure the list in such a way that it would be of most use.

There was some support for the S41 list to be the same as the UK priority list. John Robbs asked whether such a long list might 'water down' the importance of being on the list. Roger Ward said that Scotland had a list of approximately 1,900 and had experienced just such a 'watering down'. Sarah Webster noted that it was because of this experience that Standing Committee had decided not to publish the list until the signposting information was available. Simon Pryor said that the experience of the Woodlands & Forestry SIG suggested that a long list should not be daunting.

Pete Brotherton said that the important difference between the newly published UK list of priority species and habitats and the previous list, was that the last list

identified priorities for action. The current list did not prioritise those species that required conservation action.

Amy Coyte felt it was important to start work now on how species map across to Habitats.

John Robbs asked whether the list, whether long or short, should only contain those species that are present in England. After some discussion John Robbs summarised that on this particular aspect the consensus seemed to be that the list should contain those species that currently exist or can reasonably be expected to exist in England in the future. There was no consensus on the long v. short list issue.

David Henshilwood advised the group that NE would shortly be consulting people likely to be in receipt of the list and that following this would hope to report back to the response December meeting of the EBG on its draft advice.

**ACTION NE to consult and report back to the group on its draft advice.**

## **7. EBG Advice to BRIG on treatment of habitats and species requiring action plans** **EBG-07-15**

Sarah Webster explained that the paper was seeking a steer on how to take forward work on the 299 species that have been identified as requiring specific action. Amy Coyte suggested that the starting point for BRIG should be to consider the integration of species and habitats needs where this is possible. This gained general support and John Robbs noted that it was in line with the consensus reached at the 1<sup>st</sup> March workshop.

John Robbs noted that having 299 species was not the same as needing 299 SAPs, particularly as 112 already had existing SAPs. Alex Tait agreed with this and said that there was merit in considering the suitability of the existing SAPs, building on these where possible. Julian Hughes thought that an important signal for BRIG was not to get hung up on writing an action plan but to “get on and do things”, using the signposting as a framework and capitalising on the enthusiasm to take action. John Robbs noted that if people wanted to get on and take action, they were free to do so, but hoped that there would be a more structured approach which would include prioritisation.

Pete Brotherton advised that a consultation exercise would be starting on Friday (7<sup>th</sup> Sept) and would conclude on the 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. Bearing in mind that this would be a second iteration, John Robbs asked whether 3 months could be considered adequate for such a consultation bearing in mind the risk of losing momentum if longer were taken. After discussion, the group agreed that 3 months would seem to be sufficient, and asked the Secretariat to let the Chairman of the Priorities

Review Group know the views of the England Biodiversity Group, while acknowledging that this was a UK process.

Andy Stott emphasised the importance of maintaining the engagement of existing lead partners who would be asked to take part in the forthcoming 2008 reporting round.

**ACTION: Sarah Webster to convey these messages to Steve Lee-Bapty.**

## **8. AOB**

No further items were raised.

## **9. Dates of future meetings**

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December London

Provisional future dates:

4<sup>th</sup> March 2008

10<sup>th</sup> June 2008

9<sup>th</sup> September 2008