

Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre

Information on the natural environment from the Humber to the Wash

Newsletter Spring 2006

Integration of the LERC and BAP Working Groups

It has been decided by the BAP Steering Group to integrate the Two Working Groups that oversee the work of the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan and the Environmental Records Centre. We hope that this will help the close working relationship between the two projects to develop further, and safeguard a sustainable future.

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Welcome to the second newsletter of Lincolnshire ERC.

We are now well into the second year of the three year development phase, and have doubled the staffing level. Phil Ricketts joined LERC at the beginning of February as Environmental Information Officer. Phil has previously worked on the Cambridge Green Belt Project, and has moved into Lincolnshire from Suffolk. He has been making great headway with extracting and inputting protected species records, from sources including English Nature Bat Roost Reports, Environmental Statements, and Lincolnshire Bat Group Records (see page 2).

One of the projects that has kept us busy over the last year is the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB Habitat Surveys (see page 3). One of the outcomes of this survey work, and the review of Local Wildlife Site Criteria (see page 7) will be the designation of new Local Wildlife Sites, with up-to-date survey information and agreed boundaries. This information, along with protected species records, is essential for local planners and development consultants.



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We intend to promote a prototype ERC offering limited services (including data searches) at the launch of the new Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan in the autumn. Look out for further details later this year.

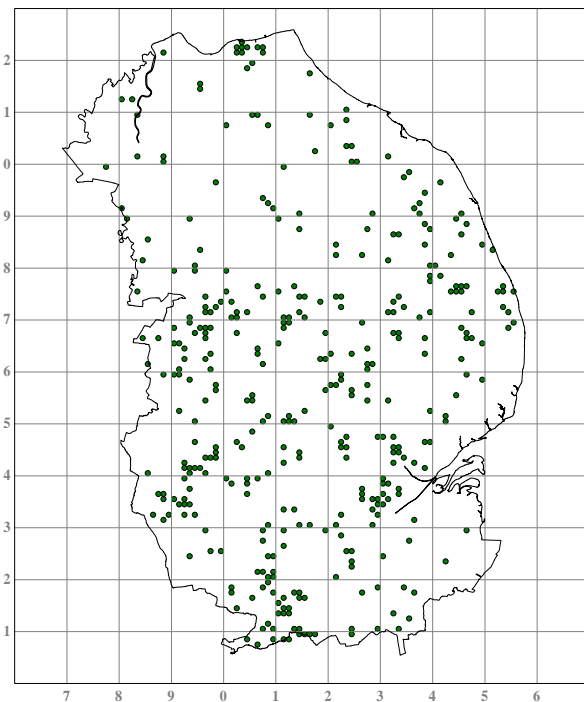
Bat Records – Increasing the Availability and Accessibility

Margaret Haggerty, LERC Development Officer

Since Phil came into post early this year, one of the areas that he has been working on is increasing the availability and accessibility of bat records. These are important because bats are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

One of the datasets that was transferred to LERC in 2005 was the English Nature Bat Roost Reports for 1985-1995. This transfer made this dataset more available, and the input of the records onto Recorder during 2005 and early 2006 has made the information much more accessible.

One of the datasets Phil has been working on is the large number of Environmental Statements received by LWT from various development proposals. This information was almost entirely inaccessible, being in the form of paper reports, and mostly unavailable, as no-one had been able to catalogue what information was held. Much of the information concerns protected species, including bats (which will be forwarded to the Bat Group).



Bat records currently held by LERC

The greatest amount of information on bats is held by Annette Faulkner, the County Bat Recorder, on behalf of Lincolnshire Bat Group. Since the end of March, Phil has also been spending one day a week with Annette and he is slowly working through the vast amount of information that Annette holds. This information has always been available through Annette, but, because it is held on card files, it has not previously been very accessible.

The mobilisation of this type of information is one of the main aims of LERC: to make data available and accessible to those who need it.

Lincolnshire Wolds AONB Habitat Surveys in 2005

Jeremy Fraser, LWT Senior Projects Officer, Wildlife Sites

During 2005 Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (LWT) undertook two habitat surveys within the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Most of the funding for this project came from the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service, but significant contributions were also provided by Lincolnshire County Council, Environment Agency, English Nature, The Chalk Streams Project and LWT.

The two elements of the project were a Phase 1 habitat survey and a Wildlife Sites survey. Fieldwork took place between May and December 2005, but the process of inputting and analysis of data, map production, report writing and liaison with landowners extended well into 2006. Although three surveyors worked on this project full time, help from volunteers and colleagues proved to be invaluable.

The Phase 1 habitat survey is a well established field technique involving brief but total coverage of a given area to provide simple data on land use and habitat types. Outputs are large-scale (1:10,000) coloured maps, notes of features of interest, and statistical data. This approach is extremely useful for indicating the general condition of the countryside. In contrast, the Wildlife Sites survey involved investigation of a limited number of sites, but at a much greater level of detail. The aim is to produce a list of plants for each different element of every site, contributing to an overall assessment of the habitats, fauna and flora, and management requirements. This approach drew upon experience gained during a pilot study of four parts of Lincolnshire in 2004, and aimed to provide data for designation of Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs). Currently, the local term used in Lincolnshire to identify wildlife-rich sites is Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCl), but most of these have not been surveyed recently. In view of this, SNCl provided the obvious starting point for LWS surveys, to which were added any other sites of potential interest identified during the Phase 1 survey. In total, 225 SNCl or part-SNCl were surveyed, as well as 69 sites identified through Phase 1 survey. All the data from the Wildlife Sites survey was input, and is now being managed, by LERC.

The 2005 surveys provided much useful data on the wildlife interest of the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB, which is summarised below.

Habitat Types

Woodland

Of the measured habitats, by far the largest area (47%) relates to broad-leaved woodland, 381 ha of which is semi-natural, and 779 ha plantation. This occupies less than 3.7% of the

surveyed area. Such a low figure is not unexpected, because the great majority of the AONB has a very open landscape dominated by arable cultivation.

Unimproved Grassland

Only 84 ha of the surveyed grassland was considered to be agriculturally unimproved, of which 46 ha was neutral and less than 4 ha acidic. The remaining 34 ha consists of calcareous grassland, all on chalk which in Lincolnshire is restricted to the Wolds.

Unimproved acidic grassland is clearly rare in the AONB, partly due to a lack of sufficiently acidic soils, and partly due to the ease with which intensive grassland management can eradicate this habitat type. However, there are some important surviving examples, for instance south of Nettleton and west of Donington on Bain.

Semi-improved Grassland

Some of the areas supporting this habitat type represent formerly unimproved grassland that has declined in diversity in recent years, but still retains some characteristic species. While such declines are often due to high-input farming, there are also many cases where lack of grazing has had deleterious effects. The 432 ha of semi-improved grassland surveyed provides plentiful opportunities for restoration of botanically-rich grassland through provision of appropriate management techniques.

Rivers and Streams

Although not measured as discrete areas of habitat, the importance of running water in the AONB is immense. Of particular note are substantial lengths of the River Bain, the Great Eau and Waithe Beck, as well as headwaters of the Rivers Trent, Lymn and Lud. These are mainly fast-flowing and clear watercourses, some of which are true chalk streams. The national importance of these habitats has been confirmed by Environment Agency research into populations of vascular and non-vascular plants, invertebrates and other groups including fish. In many cases rivers are part of a complex of adjacent habitats that together are of particular importance.

Wildlife Hotspots

Notable concentrations of wildlife-rich land within the AONB include the following: Nettleton to Normanby le Wold; Willoughby to Welton le Marsh; Louth to Burwell; and west of Donington on Bain.

Nettleton to Normanby le Wold

The north-western corner of the AONB south of Nettleton is scenically dramatic. Here there are extensive grasslands (some being grazed by cattle or sheep) covering both the west-facing scarp slope, and picturesque valleys that dissect the land surface to the east. This area is

geologically complex, with small outcrops of chalk and much larger areas of neutral or somewhat acidic rocks that in places have been quarried for ironstone. The diverse topography has favoured the development of numerous wet flushes and marshy areas feeding small streams and the excellent northward-flowing Nettleton Beck. Most of the area supports drier species-poor neutral grassland, but there are richer parts with significant populations of the scarce meadow saxifrage. There are also some very good chalk grassland slopes.



Welton High Wood (Bruce Shortland)

Willoughby to Welton le Marsh

The south-eastern corner of the AONB contains a very significant concentration of woodland, comprising Welton Low Wood, Welton High Wood (incorporating Brackenbury and Bethlem Woods), Willoughby Wood and Hoplands Wood. The latter two are entirely or mostly SSSI and are dominated by semi-natural woodland, whereas the two Welton Woods are much bigger, actively managed and contain significant amounts of plantation. Together these woods (and eight other small sites that are immediately adjacent or very close) support a huge diversity of flora and fauna.

Louth to Burwell

A second important woodland complex occurs on the south side of Louth, between the A16 (T) and the AONB boundary. Here the large and actively managed Burwell and Haugham Woods are of comparable wildlife value to the Welton Woods, supporting scarce species such as white

admiral, grasshopper warbler, hard fern, greater wood-rush and bladder-sedge. Nearby to the north are the diverse woodland habitats of Haugham Pasture, and wooded remnants in Maltby Wood and Kenwick Park Woods.

West of Donington on Bain

This area comprises extensive areas of botanically-rich grassland and wetland on both sides of the southward-flowing River Bain. Many scarce species are present, such as barn owl, otter, grass snake, bottle sedge and meadow saxifrage. Narrower strips of rich riverside habitat also occur downstream.

Other Sites

All the excellent small or moderately-sized sites in the AONB are too numerous to mention here. They include the botanically diverse but now un-grazed Greetham Valley; the fantastic valley system forming the south-western part of Kirmond Valley Marsh; a complex of wetland habitats close to Silverines Meadows SSSI between Goulceby and Asterby; and the well managed fens at Welsdale Bottom and Dodd's Wood Marsh, both supporting the now very scarce marsh arrow-grass.

Local Wildlife Sites Criteria Review

Margaret Haggerty, Wildlife Sites Review Group

Currently, in Lincolnshire, the locally designated, non-statutory sites are known as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs). There are around 1800 of these sites, most of which were identified from various surveys that took place between 1977 and 1988. Unfortunately, many of the sites have not been surveyed since, and some sites have never been properly surveyed. In addition, sites were chosen on purely subjective grounds, without consideration of any formal criteria.

Since December 2004, a sub-group of the BAP Steering Group has been meeting to review a set of draft criteria written by Neil Pike in 2001. The aim of this group was to produce an agreed set of guidelines for "identifying and gaining recognition for sites of substantive nature conservation value" in Lincolnshire. At the same time, DEFRA was producing its "Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management", which was published in April. The guidelines were approved by the BAP Steering Group in February, subject to incorporation of alterations necessary for consistency with the guidelines published by DEFRA.

The BAP Steering Group has also appointed a Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) Panel, with members drawn from statutory and voluntary nature conservation organisations and local authorities. This

Panel will consider sites for selection as LWSs, using up-to-date survey data, such as that collected in the Wolds AONB in 2005.

LERC will manage all the LWS data, and provide relevant information to the LWS Panel to inform their decisions. Information that will be taken into consideration will include: criteria fulfilled; notable and protected species records; priority habitats present; and adjacent sites. The basis for individual site selection will be recorded, and the Panel will also decide on the site boundary. The selection of sites will thus be transparent, and all site owners/occupiers will be given the opportunity to comment on Panel assessments.

The BAP Partnership has identified as a priority the need to acquire detailed information on sites of importance for their wildlife. A target of 2010 has been set to establish a baseline level for LWSs. By this date, all SNCIs should have been resurveyed and considered for selection as LWSs. The baseline will allow comparisons of losses and gains of sites and habitats in the future, thereby assessing the BAP process, and the effectiveness of the local authorities' planning policies.

Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union – New Publications

The Butterflies and Moths of Lincolnshire - Species review to 2004

Colin Smith (Editor)

A review of the current know status of the Butterflies and Moths of Lincolnshire giving details of latest records for the more unusual species. There are tables for the moths showing when they were recorded in each vice-county over the last ten years and in blocks further back than that. It gives a quick and easy view of species in the county based on the LNU records.

Deer & Deer Parks of Lincolnshire

Chris J. Manning

Current and historic details of Lincolnshire's deer, focusing on their landscape impact particularly the creation and maintenance of parks, it includes a Gazetteer of the county's parks.

Both to be published by the LNU in June 2006.

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