

Workshop – Habitat recreation

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Session 1

Where to prioritise?

- Urban and Rural water vole populations should be connected.
- The Glasgow water vole population is of national significance and is a priority. It is at risk of becoming an isolated population and it's important to try and influence the surrounding developments.
- Many water voles populations are in urban environments e.g. Cheshire and the River Don.
- There is money available to work in urban areas; sites are being re-generated for health and well- being reasons. If you remove wildlife from urban settings – you are removing it from people. People need to connect with nature and green infrastructure is a priority.
- Correctly developed urban drainage systems could be linked to a wetland system habitat

How can we ensure the maintenance of recreated habitat?

- Host a forum and share information
- Subsidises need to mention Wildlife Trusts so farmers can get in touch and do more to help.
- Local community champions can be nominated
- Employ a maintenance person in parish councils, e.g. the parish tree office role exists
- Don't get too hung up on the success rates – as long as some good comes out of the efforts
- Community woodlands
- Forest/beach/river schools – connecting local schools with their rivers with some guidance
- Volunteers could be the link to landowners especially if they have experience themselves.
- WT's need a long term vision currently there is no baseline for reserve managers and it's difficult to assess how you've improved the habitat

Examples

- In North Yorkshire water voles exist in managed habitats – eco dams ,these habitats need maintaining
- FC can put water vole habitat requirements into their forest plans.
- FCS - Members of Scottish parliament have been dedicated a native species for ownership

How can we reduce population isolation in urban areas?

- Take money off developers to use for habitat restoration rather than the developers do it themselves
- Community engagement is very important – support from people comes from urban areas.
- Most rural water voles cannot be seen by visitors, this is the beauty of urban voles
- Developers look at what they have rather than what they don't have, e.g. bats/newts. They need to look at what they could have i.e. create wetlands even if they're not already there.
- One pot of money exists for all developments relating to GCNS could this be created for water voles?
- The local authority should have attended the ratty conference as a local land owner.
- Rural isolation is always an issue. There are changes in landowner management along the saem river system.

Where to go for habitat recreation funding?

- Central pot from developers for mitigation for all protected species
- Is funding required if these activities become volunteer-led?
- Funds are currently project specific, but the money is in heath, flooding, education
- In Scotland, there is a risk when applying for funding. They need to pay for the works themselves and then prove a 95% success rate of the project; therefore some projects don't happen - too risky.
- 5p carrier bags – profits go toward environmental policies.
- Parish councils have fundraising powers. Stroud and Frome are good examples of parish councils making an environmental difference.
- Create a waterway award working in a similar way to the in bloom awards, make people proud of their communities
- Green flag parks exist – how about River awards, Ratty awards?!

Session 2

Where to prioritise?

Urban vs rural?

- Need to be appropriate to project scale – some are both
- Landscape scale projects tend to focus on rural
- Mitigation tends to be urban focussed
- Urban habitat works to create links between populations to help sustainability
- Smaller 'creation' of links between urban and rural populations
- Long term sustainability of projects potentially easier in urban areas due to high human populations/volunteers
- Hard to engage people in lower population rural areas
- Increasing good habitat adjacent to existing urban populations to encourage dispersal.
- Is balance right between rural and urban projects
 - o Do they need to be separate?
 - o Funding potentially easier in urban areas/people focus.

How can we ensure the maintenance of recreated habitat?

- Involve local landowners and communities from outset.
- Local community involvement
 - o Social prescription
 - o School children
 - o Connect people with project.
- Risk of local groups 'going native'
 - o Can be prevented by regular liaison/meetings/vol days
 - o A lot can be achieved with volunteers but still need paid staff to oversee project
 - o Potential for alternative solutions – going native not always negative
- Regional/community pot – accessed by and for community groups but also fund coordination from someone like Wildlife Trust
- Potential to include local authority/landowners/developers in conference – a missed opportunity.

How can we reduce population isolation in urban areas?

- Reduced spaces – corridors rather than open areas
- Need to understand development pressures/plans
 - o Integrated regional approach to water vole conservatism
 - o Money from developers to improve connectivity
 - o Include creation of habitat and links into pre-planning development plans
 - o Use local BAPS to guide/inform development planning
- Could developers be encouraged to include water vole mitigation where there are no populations to enable future colonisation.
- Some consultants looking at net gain improvements above and beyond requirements
- Joined up thinking between local authorities so developments crossing boundaries have to meet same requirements
- District licencing for newts – should it be more general than specific species?
- Good idea for developers to pay into communal pot for biodiversity gain.
- Use local plans to inform potential mitigation/conservation projects, which can be set up in advance of development proposals – inform developers so they know where their money is going – positive PR

- Look at national database/core population areas
- Cross organisational working and information sharing between consultants and with Wildlife trusts, local authorities etc.
- Information should be more readily available and shared.

How can we reduce population isolation in rural areas?

- Getting buy-in from landowners/managers adjacent to water vole populations to make habitat improvements to aid connectivity and dispersal.
- Developing better relationships with farmers – encouraging and enabling better understanding of the land they manage.
- Use translocation to bolster populations and increase connectivity between populations alongside habitat works.

