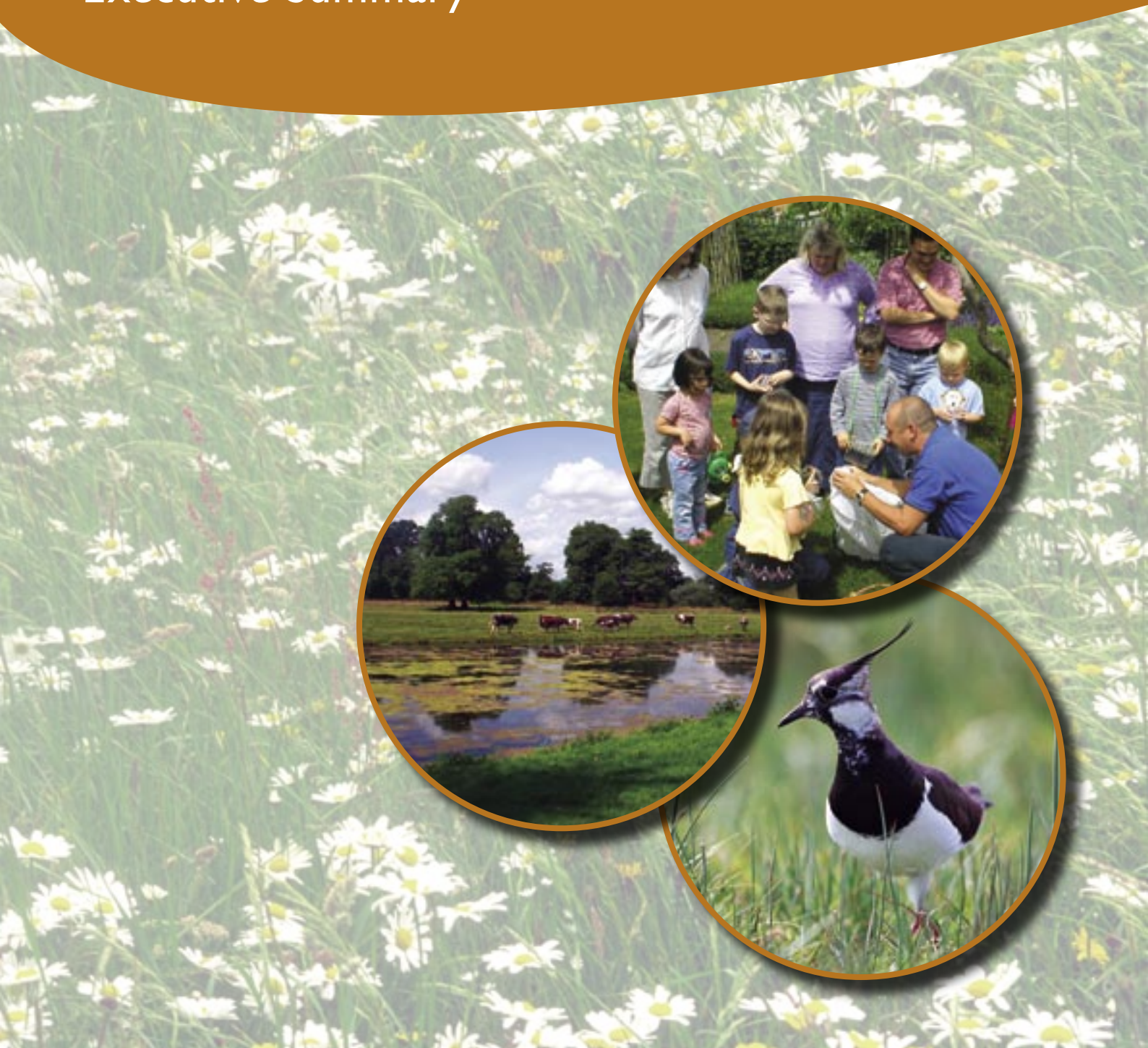


*Regional Biodiversity Strategy
Annual Report and Delivery Plan
2007 to 2008*

Executive Summary



Restoring the Region's Wildlife

Background

This publication is a summary of the Delivery Plan and Progress Report for the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership (WMBP). To reduce our environmental impact we are only making the full report available in electronic form. You can access this via the Partnership's web site at: www.wmbp.org.uk.

This summary and the fuller report it is drawn from sets out the progress that the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership has made on the delivery of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy since its adoption by the Regional Assembly and launch in 2005. In addition it identifies the key priorities of the Partnership for 2007/08 in taking the delivery of the Strategy forward. The Strategy concerns itself with five key challenges requiring regional scale action.

- Coping with the impacts of climate change
- Re-connecting and integrating action for biodiversity with other environmental, social and economic activity
- Developing an area based approach to restoring wildlife
- Maintaining and improving the condition of habitats, species and ecosystems
- Monitoring the condition of habitats, species and ecosystems

The West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership operates at a regional level to:

- integrate biodiversity into regional plans and processes
- give regional expression to our biodiversity targets
- identify and promote actions that need to be taken at a regional scale
- co-ordinate local biodiversity partnerships to help them meet the region's targets.

The Partnership has made great strides over the last two years. The original Heritage Lottery funded Rebuilding Regional Biodiversity project came to an end in the middle of 2006, and was replaced (though on a smaller scale) by funding from Defra via English Nature and then Natural England. Since January 2006 a Co-ordinator, Jeff Edwards, has been in place and a streamlined operational structure has been developed, working closely with a range of partner agencies.

We work closely with the six Local Biodiversity Partnerships - who are represented in the Regional Partnership - and a wide range of regional and local partners. The Local Biodiversity Action Plans contribute to the regional habitat and species targets – there is no separate detailed regional action plan. Funding for the WMBP's activities has come mainly from Natural England and the Wildlife Trusts with additional contributions from Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust and the National Trust.

Progress to Date

Key achievements of the Partnership over this period have been:

1. Establishment and oversight of the SITA Enriching Nature Fund in the region. This has so far provided over £850,000 for a range of biodiversity projects. These include: the creation of 160 ha RSPB nature reserve at Middleton Lakes, the restoration of ancient woodlands within Herefordshire, the installation of green roofs in Birmingham for Black Redstarts, re-establishing Water Voles in the River Monnow Catchment and research into management techniques for conserving a range of priority species within the Wyre Forest.
2. Restoration and creation of priority habitats by partners across the region. Major examples include:
 - the purchase of 52 ha of heathland at Prees Heath and restoration of 25 hectares of heathland at Stiperstones in Shropshire
 - the creation of 216 ha. of wetland and 127 ha. of grassland habitats across the region under Environmental Stewardship
 - 170 ha. of new woodland planting under grant aid from the Forestry Commission
 - Expansion of pasture woodland at Oakley Pastures in Staffordshire
 - Restoration of 120 ha of Hill Court Farm Nature Reserve in Worcestershire including grazing marsh and reedbed
 - Creation of 10 hectares of Lowland Meadow at Venus Pool Nature Reserve in Shropshire including a large population of Green-winged Orchid.
 - Coordination and reintroduction of grazing on over 100ha of important grasslands sites within the Woolhope Dome in Herefordshire
3. Development of a 50 year vision for biodiversity and regional biodiversity map through the Landscapes for Living project which has undertaken a major consultation exercise across the region. This will set a regional framework for guiding biodiversity delivery at a landscape scale in response to the threat of climate change.
4. Starting to deliver the Biodiversity Enhancement Area policy set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy, focussing particularly on research and delivery in two pilot areas with funding from Natural England. This has included work to develop the local environmental economy in Woolhope Dome and the development of a toolkit to inform decisions regarding the potential locations for restoring habitats in Cannock Chase.
5. Development of a set of adaptation principles to help combat the threat climate change poses to the region's biodiversity, through a sub-group established jointly with Sustainability West Midlands
6. Commencement of the Regional Habitat Data Project which aims to improve our knowledge of the extent of regionally important habitats to inform the development of future strategies and work programmes.
7. Response to key regional consultations including the Regional Spatial Strategy and West Midlands Economic Strategy Options consultations, seeking to integrate biodiversity into regional plans and programmes



Priorities for 2007/08

Despite this progress huge challenges remain. There is a marked contrast between those parts of the region that support wildlife rich landscapes and those where past change in land use has reduced that resource. Overall the quantity of wildlife rich habitat in the West Midlands region remains one of the lowest in Britain and in many areas wildlife habitats are small and fragmented.

Climate change poses a new challenge. With temperatures predicted to rise and changes in rainfall, flooding and the intensity and frequency of storms, a key challenge is to maintain the value of the existing patchwork of good quality sites while also increasing the linkages between them. It will require the development of ecological networks and corridors through targeted expansion of some sites and by changing the way in which land is managed to make it easier for species to move across the landscape.

During 2007/08 the key activities for the Biodiversity Partnership are to:

1. Produce the Landscapes for Living Prospectus setting out the 50 Year Vision for biodiversity, the case for landscape scale restoration and the Biodiversity Map showing at a regional scale where the best opportunities for restoration and network development lie. Contact with biodiversity benefits peoples lives and livelihoods and the vision will make clear how biodiversity opportunities will deliver other benefits.
2. Continue the work with Local Biodiversity Partnerships and partners to identify and progress good projects to improve the region's biodiversity using funding from SITA's Enriching Nature Fund and other sources.
3. Work with partners to inspire the development of sub-regional biodiversity opportunities maps and the development of clear priorities for biodiversity habitat creation and restoration in each area.
4. Work with the network of Local Biodiversity Partnerships to help stimulate and co-ordinate actions to meet the regional biodiversity targets.
5. Continue the implementation of the Regional Spatial Strategy policy for Biodiversity Enhancement Areas, clarifying objectives, building delivery partnerships and exploring the economic potential of the biodiversity resource.
6. Develop our understanding of the impact of climate change on the natural environment of the region and work with partners on building appropriate adaptation strategies.
7. Provide advice to Local Authorities and other public bodies to assist them in understanding the new legal duty to consider Biodiversity and how to embed this into their policies and delivery.
8. Establish better regional biodiversity information and progress work to establish an agreed set of indicators against which to measure progress on delivery of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy and the biodiversity components of the Regional Spatial Strategy.
9. Review our approach to communications including development of the website and other materials and approaches and produce a funding strategy for the Partnership.
10. Secure support to continue the employment of the Local Biodiversity Co-ordinators beyond March 2008.

The Members of the Partnership include the following organisations: Association of Local Government Ecologists, British Waterways, Butterfly Conservation, Country Land and Business Association, Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Government Office for the West Midlands, The National Trust, National Farmers Union, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Severn Trent Water Ltd, West Midland Bird Club, West Midlands Local Government Association, West Midlands Regional Assembly, The West Midlands Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, West Midlands Regional Public Health Group, LANTRA, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, The Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships within Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Birmingham and Black Country.

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