



Issue 1 Autumn 2009

SOMERSET *Biodiversity* NEWS

Welcome to this bumper edition of the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership newsletter.

The aim of the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership is to work together, protect and enhance the natural environment of Somerset, its wildlife and geological assets, for the benefit of this and future generations of Somerset's people.

Staff news

In July 2009, the partnership employed Ali Slade as Biodiversity Partnership Officer, based at Somerset Wildlife Trust.

Previously, she has worked as an Ecologist and Biodiversity Officer for three different South West local authorities and with Devon Wildlife Trust. In her spare time, she is a bat and dormouse survey enthusiast and grows organic produce and "arable wildflowers" on her allotment.



Her role is to implement our new set of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). If you are reading this, you probably have at least one BAP Action to deliver this year! You are not alone, as there are over 50 lead partners. She is also putting together project proposals

for funders for many of the BAP habitats and species, so if you can help make new biodiversity projects happen, please get in touch with her at alison.slade@somersetwildlife.org Tonedale Mill, Tonedale, Wellington, Somerset,

TA21 0AW. Telephone: 01823 652409. Unless otherwise stated, this newsletter has been compiled by Ali.

Staff news (contd.)

Joy Williams at Somerset County Council is continuing to efficiently co-ordinate partnership meetings, consultation responses and deliver biodiversity projects. Joy's contact details are jewilliams@somerset.gov.uk or 01823 355663.



Meet **Matthew Marshall**, Somerset Wildlife Trust's new Advisory & Wider Countryside Coordinator. Delivering advisory visits for projects such as Neroche and Mendip Living Landscapes is in his remit and he has a special interest in Local (County) Wildlife Sites! Contact Matthew on 01823 652410 or matthew.marshall@somersetwildlife.org.

The South West Regional Delivery Plan and me

As 2010 approaches there has been a collective understanding that we are failing even to halt biodiversity loss and that we will fail the biodiversity targets we have set ourselves. The predicted impacts of climate change will add significantly to pressures on the natural environment that are already beyond our ability to mitigate. All delivery is local.

This is the context for a fifty year Regional Delivery Plan (RDP) for Biodiversity in the South West. We are drafting the first of 10 x five-year biodiversity delivery plans that should result in achieving our Nature Map vision, and securing biodiversity into the future by meeting our targets.

Phase 1 of the RDP process has focused on gathering evidence about where to date we have maintained, restored or re-created BAP priority habitat in the region. The outputs from this project will be available in Autumn 2009

and will be disseminated to all LBAP partnerships.

In Phase 2 starting now, each partnership is asked to submit between 3 and 8 new or enhanced priority areas that deliver at a landscape scale across multiple BAP habitats and should be broadly based on Nature Map.

The Somerset Biodiversity Partnership is putting this information together for submission to Biodiversity Southwest by the 30th November 2009 deadline. The final list of South West priority landscapes will be collectively agreed by the end of 2009.

*Naomi Brookes,
SW Regional Biodiversity Co-ordinator*



New Action Plans adopted

There is plenty of progress since the last newsletter, back in 2007. Somerset now has an overarching Somerset Biodiversity Strategy, called Wild Somerset and a range of up to date County wide and district level habitat and species action plans. Thanks to the hard work of the partnership, most have been now adopted by the local authorities.

The most recently adopted were the Mendip LBAPs in August 2009. The Quantock Hills AONB Local BAPs will be completed by the end of 2009.

Here is a table (see below) showing all the biodiversity action plans (BAPs) produced by the SBP: They can be accessed through the Somerset County Council (SCC) website. www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/ete/countryside/biodiversity. Watch out for additional

information on biodiversity activity on the Somerset Wildlife Trust and SCC websites - coming soon!

Rather than write a new BAP, the Blackdown Hills AONB (spanning Devon and Somerset) are including biodiversity actions in their Delivery Plan, which will be available on their website www.blackdown-hills.net or contact Nickie Moore 01823 681932 for more information.

Somerset Biodiversity Action Plans

	Mendip	Quantocks	Sedgemoor	South Somerset	Taunton Deane	West Somerset
Somerset Biodiversity Strategy						
Hedgerows and Hedgerow Trees						
Gardens and Urban Greenspace						
Traditional Orchards						
Wood Pasture, Parkland and Veteran trees						
Roadside Verges and Green Lanes						
Ditches and Ponds						
Water and Wetlands						
Otter						
Bats						
Lapwing						
Local Biodiversity Action Plan						
Purple Moor Grass & Rush Pasture						
Calcareous & Neutral Grassland						
Heathlands						
Woodland						
Native Wildflowers of Arable Land						
Coastal & Marine						
Field Boundaries (Dry Stone Walls)						
Adder						
Long-eared Owl						
Waxcaps						
Wood White						

Welcome to a new partner

In September, Wessex Water joined the partnership management group. The Wessex Water BAP was the first corporate initiative of its kind to be based on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Copies of their BAP can be found on their website at www.wessexwater.co.uk/



Their package of activity includes:

1. Providing funding to projects carried out by wildlife organisations - the partners programme. Projects funded in Somerset include:
 - Brue Valley Living Landscapes Project (with Somerset Wildlife Trust).
 - Parrett Rivers Project (with Somerset FWAG)
 - Ham Wall Reedbed (RSPB)
2. Wessex Watermark awards within Somerset include a grant towards the creation of a Community Woodland project in Ashwell, near Ilminster and grant (and lease of land to) Cowleaze Meadow Project, Shepton Beauchamp
3. Action to minimise the impact of building new infrastructure, such as treatment works and pipelines;
 - Fivehead Arable Fields (Somerset Wildlife Trust)
 - Westhay Reedbed & Heath (Somerset Wildlife Trust)

4. Environmental assessment work to enhance biodiversity on Wessex Water land, such as the sites of treatment works and the following examples;
 - A significant portion of the Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve
 - Large surface reservoirs sustaining wildfowl, bat and butterfly populations and varied habitats from open water, species-rich grassland to broadleaved woodland at Clatworthy, Sutton Bingham, Hawkridge and Durleigh Reservoirs.

As well as the management group who meet quarterly to guide the work of the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership, there is also a much larger "Biodiversity Forum" for all organisations and individuals active in nature conservation. If you would like to be added to our mailing list for this newsletter and other relevant emails, please pass your details to Joy.

News on funding for biodiversity

Our latest partner, **Wessex Water**, have given us notice of grants likely to be available soon. The Wessex Water Partners Programme (being announced end of November 09) covers:

1. Projects aligned with Wessex Water's core business activities (i.e. sewage treatment and water supply) to enhance biodiversity and be aligned with their Biodiversity Action Plan;
2. Partnership Building Projects focusing on capacity building within environmental organisations;
3. Science & Research Projects which will actively survey, monitor or promote understanding of a habitat or species of biodiversity importance.

Also, they have a Wessex Watermark award, generally up to £1,500, available for environmental projects by groups, schools, councils and other organisations. They specifically include research projects identified in LBAPs. For more information please contact Ruth Bardon ruth.barden@wessexwater.co.uk 01225-526022

SITA have announced that they are offering a new three-year Enriching Nature Programme that will run from 2010 - 2012. The Trust has committed £8m in new funds to this programme. There will be three funding rounds per year in each of the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. Applicants may request up to £120,000 for an individual project.

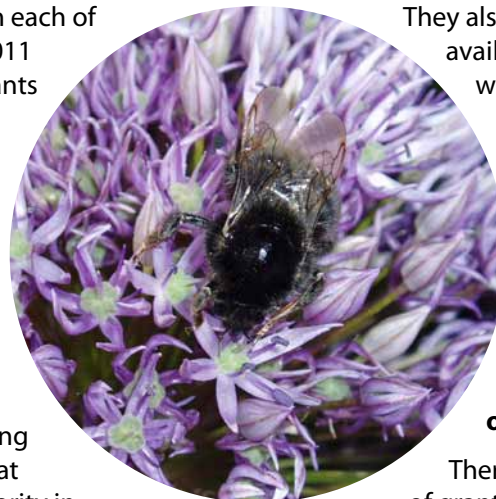
Applications are welcomed from not-for-profit organisations with projects that focus on conserving a species or habitat identified as a priority in the UK BAP process but they must be within 10 miles of an operating landfill site. The next deadline is 15 February 2010. <http://www.sitatrust.org.uk/nature-funding>

The **Tree Council** are looking for projects that will plant around 500m of hedge with hedge trees at average

20m intervals. The amount of funding available will be around £1,600 for each project, but they are also interested to hear about larger projects. As the funding is from Stella Artois, projects cannot involve children or schools.

They also have funding available for bluebell woods, planting wildflowers and regenerating meadowland. Catherine Armstrong has more details on 020 7407 9992 or e-mail her at ca@treecouncil.org.uk

There are a variety of grant streams from the **Heritage Lottery Fund** which can be used for biodiversity projects. The word is, they are looking for more applications relating to biodiversity. See www.hlf.org.uk/English/HowToApply/OurGrantGivingProgrammes for more information.



Somerset Schools Projects

We are nearing the end of our School Wildlife Grounds project for this year. Our first five schools were Holy Trinity, Holway Park, East Brent, Pawlett and Rode School. I've been working with volunteers from the Somerset Wildlife Trust Wildlife Gardening group who have visited each school twice and developed project plans to improve their grounds for wildlife. Work on ground is starting this term and some of their plans include planting wildflowers, trees, shrubs and hedges, digging and restoring ponds, putting up bird & bat boxes, growing organic vegetables, composting and collecting rainwater. I'm hoping to get some nice photos of the children at work to promote this project, so watch this space in the next Newsletter.

Joy Williams

Projects helped with Somerset Landscape Scheme grants

Many countryside improvement projects have been helped this year by the Somerset Landscape Grant Scheme (funded by the County and District Councils). During the first six months (April – September) 72 grants have been issued to carry out the following work:

Number	Type of Scheme
14	Tree / shrub planting
2	County wildlife scheme
14	Hedge planting
20	Orchard planting
3	Dry stone walling
4	Hedge laying
8	Pond restoration
2	Willow pollarding
5	Woodland management
72	Total schemes

Somerset Landscape Scheme is also providing funding for the School Grounds Project.

Joy Williams



The SERC slot

A key document has just been approved by the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership – the Somerset Priority Species List. The Somerset Environmental Record Centre (SERC) has undertaken a massive amount of work to produce an up to date and accurate list of species on the current UK BAP priority species list, ones where Somerset holds a nationally/internationally important population or the species is under threat of extinction in Somerset.

Special thanks go to Natalie Harmsworth, Richie Smith, Ric Sandifer and Tony Serjeant for all their hard work.

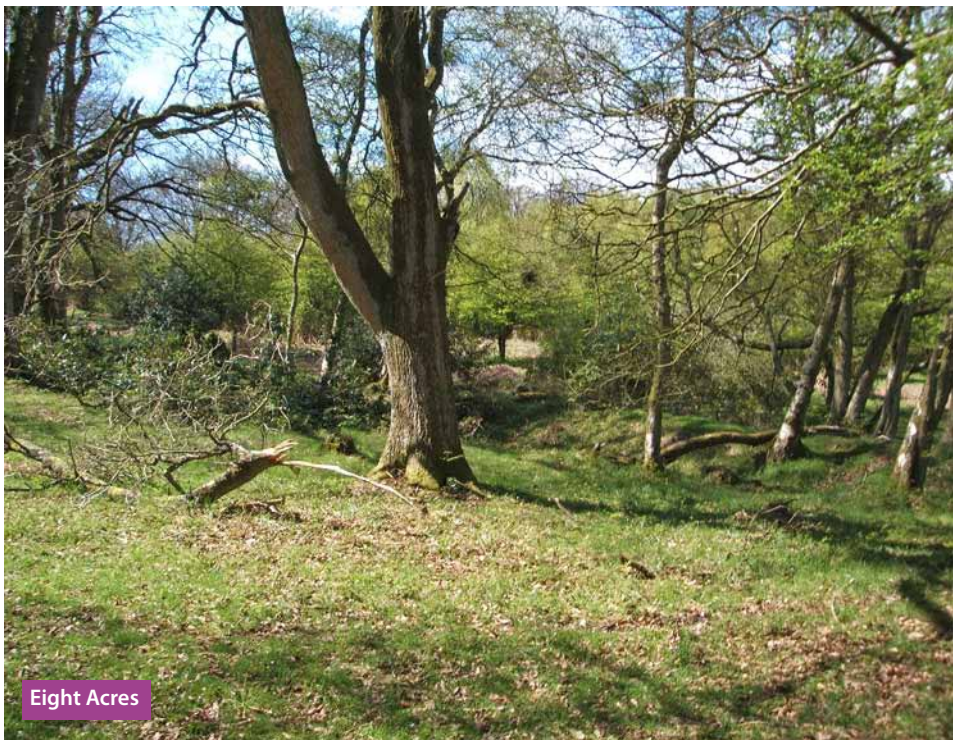
The priority species list assists in applying the NERC “duty to have regard to biodiversity”. Examples of its use include:

- Town and Country Planning
- SERC data search results
- Advice on land management
- Funding applications for projects
- Selection of Local (County) Wildlife Sites

The List will be distributed widely and placed on the SERC website very soon.

Over the survey season, SERC surveyors have been busy monitoring biodiversity across Somerset. Some notable highlights so far include what is believed to be the first confirmed *Nathusius pipestrelle* bat record for the County and new records of Pale St. John’s Wort, Marsh Cinquefoil and Broad-leaved Helleborine. Reports of this activity will be produced.

A summary report on Biodiversity monitoring in Somerset will shortly be available on the SERC website www.somerc.com



Local Nature Reserve progress

We're making good progress towards our goal of having one new Local Nature Reserve in each District by the end of this financial year. Silk Mills Park & Ride in Taunton Deane, Yeovil Country Park and Ham Hill Country Park in South Somerset have all been supported by Natural England, management plans are in place and District Legal Teams are progressing the legal declaration. We will need to start planning how we can promote and celebrate our new Local

Nature Reserves when this process is finalised.

Sites at Brushford Railway Line in West Somerset and Eight Acres in Sedgemoor have also been approved by Natural England and management plans are being developed for those sites. Further site visits to assess other sites for potential LNRs are took place during October.

Joy Williams

Arable wildflowers

Actions from the LBAPs for the rare wildflowers found on arable land have been achieved this year:

- A talk was given by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust;
- Leaflets on identification and management of land for these plants were ordered from Plantlife and distributed to advisory officers;
- Five Head arable fields nature reserve successfully gained funding from SITA for interpretation and management, at the time of writing £1K of match funding is required to unlock this money;
- An awareness and training event at Five Head fields is planned for June or July 2010 to include a plant identification workshop and talk on managing land for these rare species.

Further BAP actions are in hand so watch this space....

Coastal focus

Out of sight but not out of mind, Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) are the new marine protected areas introduced under the brand new Marine and Coastal Access Act.

They will be in addition to the existing Severn Estuary and Bridgwater Bay designated areas. Their purpose is to safeguard the region's undersea habitats and marine wildlife, and to help ensure the long-term sustainability of marine resources. Protection measures typically involve restricting or zoning specific types of activity. **Finding Sanctuary** is the partnership project which will design the network of MCZ's in the South West. The Somerset off-shore area is included and there is now a Somerset County MCZ group, organised by Tom Hooper 01392 878 3237, Tom.hooper@southwestfoodanddrink.com.



Trees for Communities'

Barbara Collier reports on one of the South Somerset Together Sustainable Communities pump priming Projects.

These are projects being developed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) partners as part of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Aims of the Project

1. To increase the amount of tree cover in South Somerset, especially focusing on community woodlands. (The aim is to develop a minimum of two community woodlands to feasibility stage)
2. To work with partners to agree on a methodology to facilitate tree planting in the District.

Progress

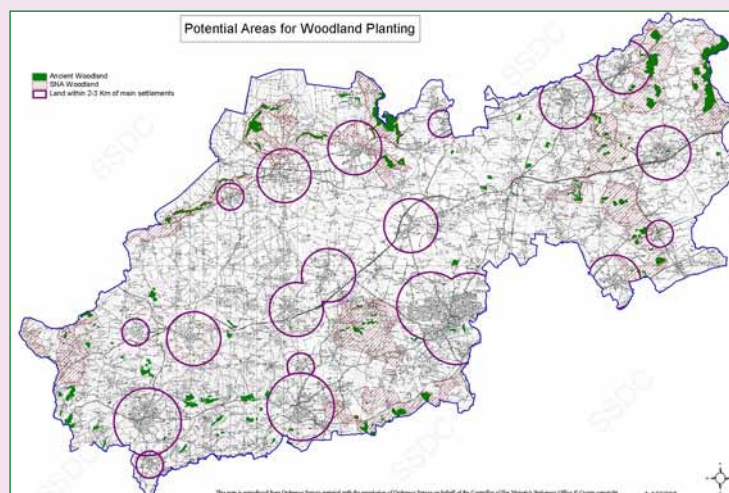
Four sets of maps produced on paper, are being placed on the Council's GIS system.

These maps cover

1. Ancient Woodland/Replanted Ancient Woodland, Woodland on Tithe maps 1837-54 (information available from SERC)
2. Woodland ownership
3. Accessible Woodland (using

information supplied by the Woodland Trust and Somerset County Council's Rights of Way data)

4. Potential woodland sites



The mapping exercise has identified locations for potential community woodlands around existing towns or large villages in South Somerset. Tree planting in these areas will help to connect isolated woodlands, particularly within Woodland Strategic Nature Areas and so will give real biodiversity benefits.

Letters have been sent to the identified Town/Parish Councils to enquire if they wish to receive an information pack to help them get planting this winter. It

is hoped that this will lead to negotiations with landowners to bring a minimum of two sites to feasibility stage. A PowerPoint presentation is also now complete.

The Next stage

It is envisaged that, subject to agreement by the LSP, Somerset County Council could use the finished product as a template for other District Councils in Somerset. For a copy of the pack and more information please contact Barbara Collier Tree planting Project officer by telephone 01935 462120 or email b.collier@southsomerset.gov.uk

Bringing reedbeds to life

A project spanning reedbeds across England is undertaking research into the range of wildlife they support, led by the RSPB. One of the study sites is the Ham Wall nature reserve. After the survey and research stage, the project provides site specific management advice to reedbed owners via "audits" of 20 further sites (nationally). A series of technical workshops and training courses on reedbed management are proposed in 2010. For more information, please contact nick.droy@rspb.org.uk.



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Working with nature to prevent flooding

The National Trust has been successful in securing funding for a project on its Holnicote Estate, near Minehead, that is designed to demonstrate the important role land management can play in flood risk management and mitigation, whilst also delivering wider benefits for water quality and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, habitat creation and biodiversity, carbon stewardship, access and recreation, and landscape conservation.

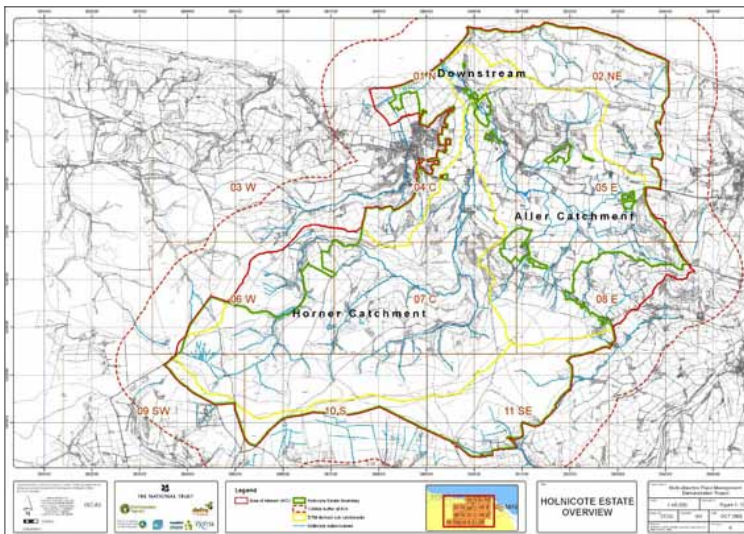
The 3-year project is to be funded by a £473,000 grant from DEFRA, drawn from the Flood and Coastal Erosion Management capital budget. An entire catchment project is proposed at the Holnicote Estate, where the Trust owns approximately 90% of three catchments totaling 51km². The

Trust owns 260 buildings at Holnicote of which 170 are residential properties with 14 farms. There are 55 residential buildings at highest flood risk and these are mainly located within the villages of Allerford and Bossington.

The project will address key land management issues in four main areas, primarily in the Aller and Horner Water catchments: the upland areas at the headwaters of the watercourses; steep transitional valleys feeding down from the upland areas; the

lowland meadows; and the intertidal zone where the rivers flow to sea by infiltrating through a shingle beach.

Under the Exmoor MIREs Project, the Trust has already undertaken ditch-blocking in 2008 in an area of blanket bog at the source of the Horner Water. This management technique might be extended to other areas under this project.



A detailed survey of all of the watercourses will be carried out in the initial phase of the project. Drainage routes from the upland areas through the incised valley systems will be mapped with options reviewed for flow and debris attenuation through these systems. A comprehensive review of geomorphology and channel geometry will be used to target the use of large woody debris, channel naturalisation and wetland creation to attenuate flood flows and sediment transfer in these tributaries.

The Trust will create a series of wetlands, water meadows and wet woodland habitats throughout the Vale of Porlock, to store and dissipate excessive rainwater and help prevent flooding of buildings downstream in the villages of Allerford and Bossington. Natural floodplain processes will be encouraged as far as possible within the constraints of existing infrastructure such as roads, bridges and buildings.

At the intertidal zone, an old, disused landfill site at the mouth of the Horner Water causes flood water to backup into the villages, rather than dissipating naturally through the shingle ridge via an extensive delta. The project proposes to create a flood relief channel to bypass the landfill and allow the river to form a natural delta. The relief channel will direct water into an extensive area of permanent pasture at the back of the beach, where it will form an extensive new coastal wetland.

Penny Anderson Associates, ecological consultants, and Jeremy Benn Associates, hydrology consultants, have been appointed to undertake the collation of baseline data. There will be a 12 month period of sophisticated data collection and computer modeling before land management changes will be implemented. It is envisaged that monitoring of hydrological data will continue for at least 10 years in order to demonstrate long-term benefits.

Nigel Hester, National Trust

Getting Otter

On Saturday 4th April, volunteers from Devon, Dorset and Somerset surveyed 73 sites on the River Axe and its tributaries to get an idea of the number of Otters on the catchment. This survey is carried out twice a year in October and April. Of the sites visited, 71% had fresh spraint, leading to the conclusion that there were between 8 and 11 animals present on the Axe at this time. The population appears stable since monitoring began in 2004.



of Otters there and to discover whether there is a resident set of Otters. The sites are surveyed on consecutive days so that a picture can be built up of how far Otters have travelled overnight.

During the same weekend, volunteers also surveyed the following Somerset catchments: Tone, Yarty, Isle, Parrett, Cary, Brue and Bristol Avon. The latter two catchments had surprisingly low results and James recommends a more thorough survey effort next year.

Information from James Williams, Somerset Otter Group. The full survey results and some fantastic otter photos can be found in Newsletter 29, available from James' email stofordman@freemail.wd-uk.com

Some 136 volunteers from Somerset and Devon went out over the weekend of the 25/26th April to look for signs of Otters across Exmoor. A two-day survey of this kind hasn't been done before on Exmoor. The idea of the survey is to get a snapshot of the whole moor, to gain some indication of the numbers

Coming up

The United Nations have declared 2010 as International Year of Biodiversity and the UK launch is later in November 2009.

Something to look forward to in January – it is now BARS reporting month. I have a BARS gift for everyone who uses the system to report and a special prize for the first to finish! So if you need some training in how to use this on-line biodiversity reporting system, please contact Liz Biron at SERC before then.



A summary of progress with implementing our BAPs will be included in the spring newsletter.

Also from January and into the spring season, surveys for Long-eared Owl (a Somerset BAP species) kick off on the Mendip and Quantock Hills and also the Blackdown Hills and Exmoor. Contact Chris Sperring chris.sperring@btinternet.com to volunteer.



National habitat survey completed

The results of a national Countryside survey were published in September 2009. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology undertook the survey in 2007 and has produced useful findings for conservation work. The report is broken down into different habitats and looks at:

- the extent and change in area of habitats;
- the extent and condition of landscape features such as hedges, walls and trees;
- the changing condition of vegetation within habitats;
- the pH, carbon concentration and bulk density of soils; and
- the changing condition of freshwaters and ponds.

The survey report can be found at www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk/eng_reports2007.html

Traditional orchards

An Inventory of Traditional Orchards (one of the new UK BAP & Somerset BAP habitats) has been recently produced by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species. It can be downloaded from the Natural England website, www.naturalengland.org.uk

Amphibian and reptile conservation

Froglife and the HCT have metamorphosed into Amphibian and Reptile Conservation this year. They have also published useful revised national Species Action Plans for each of the current priority amphibians and reptiles, available from the new website www.arc-trust.org.

Next edition

Thank you to all the contributors to this edition of Somerset Biodiversity News. The next edition will be Spring 2010 so if you would like to submit a contribution, please get in touch with the Editor, Ali on 01823 652409 or alison.slade@somersetwildlife.org.

Members of the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership

Exmoor National Park Authority
Forestry Commission
Mendip District Council
Natural England
Sedgemoor District Council
Somerset County Council
Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
Somerset Environmental Records Centre
Somerset Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Somerset Wildlife Trust
South Somerset District Council
Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership
The Environment Agency
The Mendip Environment Forum
The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership
The National Trust
The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
West Somerset Council
Wessex Water

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