

The Green Linnet

The Newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



Issue 17: December 2012

"Wild Purbeck" Nature Improvement Area



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Photo © Amanda Marler

Wild Purbeck is one of twelve Nature Improvement Areas in England chosen to test a new approach to conservation. Created to deliver wildlife enhancements across large areas, they will be watched closely to assess this

new way of working. They are supported by Government through Defra, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Natural England.

Dorset Wildlife Trust are working on Wild Purbeck in a partnership led by Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with FWAGSW and a number of other conservation and partner organisations.

NIAs are not a 'protection' designation - the partnership want to ensure it provides opportunities for a greener future, but without compulsion.

Projects being undertaken fall under 4 main themes with a number of projects within each theme:

- Land management & advisory services: helping farmers to achieve even better results on the ground – for heathlands, woodlands, rivers and ponds; with improved connections between these habitats.
- Community at the Centre: creating opportunities for people to get involved in enhancing and celebrating this great area for wildlife.
- Research & planning: ensuring all partners use the best information to guide our actions and developing plans to address the landscape's challenges and opportunities.
- Green economy, income & skills: supporting sustainable management of the landscape through new business opportunities and training.

Monitoring and evaluation will also be carried out to assess the progress of the various projects.

SNCI owners can of course be involved in any or all of these projects as they wish, but from the point of view of the SNCI team at DWTT, our main interaction with SNCI owners will be through the aspects of land management advice and re-surveying your sites. We have started some monitoring surveys on Purbeck sites this summer, and over the next couple of years we hope to have another look at as many sites within this area as we can manage. (The NIA includes Purbeck District and some extra areas to the west and the north-east).

Following the survey we always provide a short laminated report with an aerial photograph, a habitat map and some management advice, plus a species list. There is also the opportunity for a free follow-up advisory visit. We work closely with FWAGSW who will be the main agents for helping with applications for agri-environment grants, particularly for those owners whose Countryside Stewardship grants are coming towards the end.

Although we will not exclusively be working in this area, our surveyors are looking forward to seeing lots of Purbeck and its people over the next couple of years.

Sharron Abbott

CONTACTS

For further information on SNCI's:
Sharron Abbott 01305 264620

Dorset Wildlife Trust West Dorset Team Office:
01300 321329

For advice on Environmental Stewardship:

We suggest you initially contact our West Dorset Team on 01300 321329. They should be able to advise you as to the best course of action or person to contact within the re-structured Natural England team for further help.

Forestry Authority:
Dick Preston 01626 892853

FWAGSW: 07966 032029
Clare Buckerfield



Front cover photo © John Stevens

The Reform of the CAP

Under new proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the European Commission has set out some potentially sweeping changes that may affect direct payments for agriculture and the environment for the new programming round from 2014-2020.

The first of these changes is that the existing Single Farm Payment could be replaced with a basic payment that would be topped up by an additional one, conditional on farmers implementing certain 'greening' measures. These measures would include crop diversification, maintenance of permanent grassland and, for certain farms, where appropriate, to have "ecological focus areas". Secondly, the Rural Development Programme could focus on six priorities rather than the existing programme, thus widening its remit to include climate change mitigation and adaptation, resource efficiency, food chain organisation and realising the jobs potential and development of rural areas. The most obvious dilemma for those of us trying to farm in a wildlife friendly way is in trying to ensure that these new greening measures fit with existing and new agri-environment schemes, especially where farmers are carrying out a considerable amount of environmental management already. With this in mind, Defra are currently looking at ways to implement transitional arrangements which may include those farmers already in agri-environment schemes being considered "green by definition" through the transition period.

These are still only proposals and very little detail has yet been agreed either within the UK or across member states. All we know is that there will probably be less money for the CAP as a whole, but that the need to provide measures that continue to fund agri-environment schemes is as important as ever.

Since the start of Countryside Stewardship and beyond, there have been some really excellent agri-environment schemes in place in Dorset and much hard work has gone into ensuring they succeed. It therefore makes sense to ensure that all this work has not been in vain and that there is potential for future work to continue and in a way that is practical and profitable for both farming and wildlife.

As the story unfolds, The Wildlife Trusts and particularly Dorset Wildlife Trust have spent much time engaging with Defra to ensure that this work does not go unrewarded. We have been discussing with them the future of greening and agri-environment on a practical level, working with MEPs to influence decisions, and we hope to encourage Defra to properly consider the experience of farmers in helping them to achieve the desired outcomes.

Debbie Watkins



Part of a nationwide network of Wildlife Trusts

River Char Restoration Project

With funding from Defra for Water Framework Directive delivery, it has been my privilege to run the River Char Restoration Project this year for Dorset Wildlife Trust supporting farmers in improving conditions for wildlife along the river. The Char, which runs through the beautiful Marshwood Vale, is a water course full of interesting features. Rainfall from this relatively small catchment is channelled round meanders, under the contorted boles of bank-side ash pollards and alder (the eel's favourite hiding place), over riffles - crucial spawning habitat for brown trout - through pools above which kingfishers perch on the look-out for minnows, and around dams of woody debris which provide valuable habitat for invertebrates.

I have been working with farmers on enhancing these features for wildlife, and on reducing agricultural pollution reaching the river through fencing and providing alternative drinking points. The project has also been working in partnership with the Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative to look at, for example, farm-scale manure and fertiliser applications. Keeping livestock out of the river directly reduces the nutrient load and also benefits wildlife by reducing the amount of sediment in the water. Excess sediment clogs up and 'cements' gravels on the river bed making excavation difficult for spawning fish and reducing habitat for species such as caddis fly larvae which inhabit the nooks and crannies between stones.

DWT's Sarah Williams has pioneered work on the Mill stream in Dorchester to increase river flow and 'wash out' these gravels. Well, in this 'wettest summer for 100 years' there's been no shortage of 'flow' in the Char which, while no doubt 'washing' the gravels with vigour, has unfortunately also eroded big sections of the river bank introducing plenty of new sediment into the system.

Non-native, invasive species don't help here, shading out native vegetation, then dying back in winter leaving bare, unstable banks vulnerable to erosion. Many volunteer hours have been gainfully spent pulling Himalayan balsam in the Char catchment this year and contractors have also been tackling giant hogweed on tributaries.

As always, a thriving river system is all about diversity - structural diversity, diversity of flow, biodiversity - and our River Char Restoration Project has endeavoured to maximise the occurrence of different conditions along the water course. Bank-side coppicing is another element of our project which we hope will promote new growth of submerged vegetation, another important piece in the Char's intricate jigsaw depicting such a diversity of species from the tiny, busy *gammarus* (freshwater shrimps) to one of their most handsome predators, the dipper.

Nick Gray
West Dorset Office 01300 321329



Natural woody debris in the river



Volunteers cutting back bankside trees to let in light



Fencing along the river bank prevents pollution from cattle manure

Dorset Wild Rivers

The Dorset Wild Rivers (DWR) project has funding for 5 years from Wessex Water, Environment Agency and Dorset AONB to enhance Dorset's Chalk Rivers. We are currently in the third year of the project and we have been really busy. The rivers we are working on include the Frome & Piddle and their tributaries, and the chalk tributaries of the Stour - the Allen, Tarrant and North Winterbourne.

The aims of the project are to restore and enhance 7km of these rivers and to reconnect and recreate the associated wetland habitats. Since we started in April 2010 we have restored and enhanced 6.5km of chalk rivers and reconnected 3km of river to its floodplain. This winter at least 3ha of wet woodland will be planted and if you have a site you think could become wet woodland then get in touch.



Fig. 1

On the South Winterbourne we have completed 3 projects amounting to almost 3km of works (Fig. 1) with 2 rare invertebrates benefiting from this work. One is the rare mayfly *Paraleptophlebia weneri* which is a Red Data Book species. It is characteristic of calcareous streams with abundant vegetation, in particular winterbourne sections, and is known from very few sites in the UK. The other is the blackfly, *Simulium latipes*, a rare but widespread species (regionally notable) recorded from temporary streams draining shallow ponds.

On the Sydling Brook, we have opened up heavily wooded sections and incorporated large woody debris (Fig. 2) into the channel to create clean gravels for fish to spawn in and habitat for invertebrates.



Fig. 2

'Berm' created on Sydling Water to change the flow

Sections of the River Frome have been narrowed and pools and riffles sequences have been restored in sections that were previously dredged, deepened and widened. Fish and invertebrate surveys have been undertaken before and after the works to monitor progress and assess the benefits to these species.

This autumn we have been out on the River Cerne and Upper Piddle scoping for further works and giving advice to landowners. We have secured further funds to carry out works on these 2 rivers plus the North and South Winterbournes, so if you own stretches of these rivers and are interested in speaking to us about the river, please get in touch. The River Allen has its own project which also comes under the umbrella of Dorset Wild Rivers and this has further funding for the next 2 years.

Contact Sarah Williams, Dorset Wild Rivers Coordinator for more information,
swilliams@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk tel; 01305 264620