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Highland LBAP Review

Caithness Implementation Plan 2006-2009

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Caithness Implementation Plan
2006-2009**

This document was developed by EnviroCentre Ltd. in consultation with The Caithness Biodiversity Group.

CAITHNESS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2006 - 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

This implementation plan represents the next step in biodiversity action planning in Caithness and should be read in conjunction with the Caithness Biodiversity Action Plan (2003). It has been drawn up by the Caithness Biodiversity Group and EnviroCentre.

Like the Caithness Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), this document forms part of a suite of area BAPs and associated Implementation Plans that have been produced for the Highland Council area by local biodiversity groups. It is anticipated that the Highland Biodiversity Partnership will be responsible for working on the strategic and cross-boundary issues identified in each of the area BAPs, and each local biodiversity group is represented on the Partnership. A Highland Biodiversity Action Plan is also underway, to draw out the main issues from the area BAPs and provide a work schedule for the Highland Biodiversity Partnership.

It is therefore envisaged that the Highland LBAP Implementation Plans will be the main tool for local biodiversity groups, funding bodies, other partners, community groups and individuals to make progress on biodiversity issues at a local level.

1.1 *Local biodiversity group*

The Caithness Biodiversity Group is a body of interested individuals representing a number of public sector agencies, NGOs, businesses and community interests that was initiated at the time of writing of the original area BAP. The Group is currently considering the issues associated with a separate constitution. At present they function under the auspices of the Highland Biodiversity Partnership, who also manage their finance.

Membership is as follows:

Barbara Bremner (Chair)	Independent
David Glass	SWT
Ken Butler	Botanical Recorder
Angus Spirit	SEPA
David Shaw	Scottish Natural Heritage
Marina Swanson	HC Ranger
Mary Legg	HC Ranger
Norrie Russell	RSPB
Kenny Graham	RSPB
David Watt	Independent /Crofter
Anna MacConnell	Caithness Partnership
Lesley Crawford	Caithness Fishing interest
Ruth Sutherland	HC Area Development
Julian Smith	Independent

1.2 *Habitats and species priorities*

The Caithness Biodiversity Group has not undertaken a formal exercise to identify specific individual priorities in terms of habitats or species for the area. Their focus over the development of this plan has been the identification of projects that are achievable in the three-year plan time frame. The Group will review habitats and species of local importance over the coming months, in the context of funding opportunities.

The projects chosen indicate a degree of prioritisation of species and habitats.

2. CAITHNESS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PROJECTS

The Group have chosen these projects over an extended period. A list of project proposals already existed as a result of previous processes of selection. This was augmented by a quick review of concerns for different habitat types in the area BAP. Through a refinement process identifying achievable targets for a three-year period and topics that had a willing leader, the following projects were developed.

2.1 *Identification of Important Biodiversity Sites*

Project aim: To create a list/database of locations in Caithness that are important for biodiversity, and additional to designated sites.

Project objectives:

- To identify sites that people in Caithness value for their biodiversity;
- To create a list of such sites; and
- To include the list in local strategic planning processes.

Project lead: Ken Butler.

Project partners: SNH, FCS and THC Caithness Area Planning.

Project implementation and outputs:

This project will host an event that will provide a relaxing and open setting at which information about important biodiversity sites will be discussed. The target audience for the event is local wildlife enthusiasts, agency staff, NGO members, and community members.

Actions:

- Organise 3 events, each in a different geographical locality;
- Advertise event to ensure attendance by target audience;
- Hold events;
- Produce list of biodiversity sites; and
- Submit list to HC Area Planning team, and other relevant bodies.

Resources needed:

- Facilitator;
- Venue and refreshments;
- Site database; and
- Short report.

Outputs:

- A list of important biodiversity sites; and
- Inclusion of list in strategic planning processes.

Proposed timetable:

Organise and hold events spring/summer 2007; finalise report and site list autumn 2007.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

The project has no direct link to specific UK BAP or Scottish BAP species. However, once the audit work begins UK BAP and Scottish BAP species and habitat priorities will be identified.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task	Effort/materials	Cash	In Kind
Organise event	Find & book venue, sort out advertising, target invitations. 3 days @ £100	£300	£300
Hold 3 events	Venue and refreshments (~ 30 people) £200 & organiser/facilitator 3 days @£100	£600	£300
Report	Produce list and report, including consultation. 4 days @£100	£200	£200
Total		£1100	£800

2.2 Community Based Species Surveys

Project aim: To fill gaps in the knowledge of species distribution in Caithness and to increase awareness of biodiversity by involving the community in wildlife surveys.

Project objectives:

- Initiate recording of swallow and house martin in year 1, followed by two other species each year in years 2 and 3;
- Raise awareness of biodiversity among the local community;
- Encourage community participation in wildlife recording by introducing new people to it; and
- Establish database and recording procedures and make these available to local communities and HBRG.

Project lead: David Watt.

Project partners: SNH, HBRG, SWT and David Glass.

Project implementation and outputs:

Year 1: Swallows and house martins are widespread in Caithness but their distribution may be changing due to new buildings in rural areas. The proposed swallow and house martin survey will be adapted from a leaflet used successfully in Dumfries and Galloway. The colour leaflet gives information on species identification and includes a reporting card. It is aimed at recording sightings of swallows and house martins but there is space for information on sand martins and swifts as well. The leaflets will be widely distributed and will offer an opportunity for all to participate, from schoolchildren to the elderly. Once a participant has returned a reporting card they will be sent a black and white recording form for further records. Anyone can send in sightings with swallows and house martins being found in both rural and urban areas. The results of the survey will be reported through local channels to maintain interest.

Years 2 and 3: Two species of local significance will be selected for survey each year. The same principle of involving the community as widely as possible will be followed.

Actions:

- Design and print colour leaflet (4000) plus black and white recording sheet and compliment slip;
- Distribute leaflets through libraries, Primary and Secondary schools, RSPB, SNH, SEPA, Caithness Field Club and other local groups. Visit schools and clubs where appropriate;
- Launch and Press Release;
- Establish recording protocol;
- Post repeat recording forms to those who have submitted records;
- Collate records and report results through local press and Caithness Community Website records; and
- Submit records to HBRG.

Resources needed:

- Co-ordinator (volunteer);
- Records Co-ordinator (volunteer);
- Printed material; and
- Recording system.

Outputs:

- Information on distribution of swallows and house martins, and subsequently other species of significance for Caithness; and
- Community involvement and increased awareness of biodiversity.

Proposed timetable:

Launch swallow and house martin survey spring 2007. Record other species 2008/2009.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

The project has no direct link to specific UK BAP or Scottish BAP species, unless these are developed for 2008/2009.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task	Effort/materials	Cash	In kind
Year 1 – Design and print	Leaflets, repeat recording sheets and compliment slips. 3 days @ £100	£1,400	£300
Year 1 - Launch	Volunteer mileage for leaflet distribution, visits to schools, etc 500 miles @ .35p 3 days @ £100	£175	£300
Year 1 - Postage	Post out repeat record sheets 2 days @ £100	£400	£200
Year 1 - Database and Report	Set up recording database, collate records and report results. 5 days @£100	£500	£500
	Year 1 Total	£2,475	£1100
Year 2	Survey 2 species	£2500	£1100
Year 3	Survey 2 species	£2500	£1100
	Years 1, 2 and 3 Total	£7475	£3300

There is a lack of usable information about a range of species in Caithness. These gaps are being tackled in other areas. For example, the Dumfries Biodiversity Officer organised, with the local environmental recording centre, the Mammal Guardians project. This offered free training to volunteers in return for continuing surveying and recording with submission of records to the recording centre.

2.3 Wildflower Habitat Enhancement

There are a number of locally important and threatened plants in Caithness that it is possible to help relatively simply and successfully. Three are included in this project, oyster plant (*Mertensia maritima*) listed as 'near threatened' in the Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain¹, (as a result of more than 20% decline between the most recent population assessment dates). This plant has a north Britain coastal distribution with a significant proportion of its Highland population in Caithness. Scottish primrose (*Primula scotica*) and kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) are listed as 'least concern' in the red data book. Scottish Primrose is listed as endemic with international responsibility and the whole population is in the extreme north of Scotland, in addition it is on the

¹ Cheffings, C. M. & Farrell, L., (Eds), 2005 Species Status no. 7, The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain, JNCC, ISSN 1473-0154 (online)
www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/pub05_speciesstatuspredlist3_web.pdf

Scottish Biodiversity List². Kidney vetch is a food plant for the small blue butterfly (*Cupido minimus*) also on the Scottish Biodiversity List.

Project aim: To secure existing populations of two locally important plants, oyster plant and Scottish primrose in Caithness and to improve the habitat for small blue butterfly through extending its food plant populations.

Project objectives:

- To ensure a significant amount of seed produced by oyster plant is retained at existing population sites at a time when it is likely to germinate;
- To extend two existing populations of kidney vetch, for the small blue butterfly, through planting young plants propagated from the wild populations;
- To pilot the growing of Scottish primrose from seed from one healthy population;
- To cut grass at one Scottish primrose site to improve the habitat for the plant; and
- To involve volunteers in the management of their local wild flowers.

Project lead: HC Rangers; oyster plant - Marina Swanson; kidney vetch and Scottish primrose - Mary Legg.

Project partners: SNH and Caithness Countryside Volunteers.

Project implementation and outputs:

Oyster plant seeds will be collected from Noss (where much of the plant has already been artificially seeded to create an especially vibrant community for several years) in July and August when they are ripe. The seed will be labelled, dried and stored until after the spring storms. The seed will then be sown by hand at Noss, Keiss and Dunbeath by hand to germinate. This methodology has been developed in Caithness as a mechanism of ensuring that at least some seed produced by plants germinates at suitable sites. Because of the vulnerability and nature of oyster plant sites THC ranger will carry out this work at no cash cost.

Kidney vetch seed will be collected from local sites. The seeds are then germinated and plants grown on by a local nursery. Caithness Countryside Volunteers will then be involved in planting the young plants back out so as to extend the area of the populations where the seed was collected. This work is an extension of a project already underway to improve the future of the small blue butterfly in Caithness.

Scottish primrose was the subject of a survey by SNH in summer 2006. A population at Dunnet Bay is declining. The decline is potentially related to the reduction in rabbits on the site and a consequent increase in other vegetation. The project will include trial management of the vegetation to favour the primrose, through scarifying, and digging out marram grass. In addition, the project will do a trial collection and propagation of seed and re-introduction of plants back onto site, to test the value of this method for safeguarding populations, which have declined. Experience

² Scottish Executive 2005 The Scottish Biodiversity List
www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/pageType2.php?id=35&type=2&navID=92

in the management of this plant from other areas will be consulted, e.g. pioneering work on Hoy by Roy Harris of SWT.

Actions:

- Collect seeds at appropriate times;
- Organise contract growing of two seed types with grower;
- Deliver seed to grower for propagation;
- Arrange planting out events with volunteers;
- Arrange repeat visits to monitor success of planting; and
- Organise grassland management at Dunnet.

Resources needed:

- Knowledge of plant seeding times and propagation methods;
- Knowledge of sites for all plants;
- Nursery facilities;
- Volunteers;
- Collection containers;
- Planting out tools;
- General information about the plants; and
- Grass management tools/machine.

Outputs:

- Enhancement of 3 populations of oyster plant;
- Management of one Scottish primrose site;
- Enhancement of 2 kidney vetch sites with small blue butterflies;
- Volunteers with knowledge of the plants; and
- Monitoring capacity to measure the success of the project over time.

Proposed timetable:

Collect Scottish primrose seed – summer 2006, collect kidney vetch and oyster plant seed – late summer/autumn 2006, return oyster plant seed to site - spring 2007, plant out plants for other species (kidney vetch/Scottish primrose) – spring/summer 2007. Repeat sequence for 2008.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

The species being considered are listed under the Scottish BAP and so this project will deliver practical conservation for these national priorities.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task	Effort/materials	Cash	In Kind
Oyster plant	Collect and store seed, return to site twice 6 days @ £100		£600
Other species	Co-ordination: ~ 6 days over 3 years, @ £100		£1,200

	Volunteer travel and refreshments (for 12) x 2 events (one annually) (20 x 8 @ .35p), transport 10x20x35 = £70 plus refreshments, £4x10 = £40	£220	
	Nursery costs for contract growing & potting on – 2 spp x £200 (2 yr Kidney vetch, 1 yr Scottish primrose)	£600	
	Dunnet grass management x 3 years @£50	£150	
	Materials, labels, tools etc	£100	
	Contingency for 2 more yr Scottish primrose propagation	£400	
	Total	£1,470	£1,800

2.4 Moth Trapping & Monitoring

Project aim: To increase recording of moth species in Caithness.

Project objectives:

- To involve volunteers in using moth traps and identifying moths; and
- To increase the knowledge about moth distribution in Caithness.

Project lead: HC Ranger, Mary Legg.

Project partners: Butterfly Conservation Trust.

Project implementation and outputs:

The volunteers will be provided with moth traps, nets and identification books, and information on submitting records. Volunteers have already been trained in the use of the traps, in handling the moths, and the rudiments of identification. There will be ongoing support with the use of traps and identification. Moth records will be submitted to the Butterfly Conservation Trust and to HBRC. A report of new/notable records will be produced annually.

Actions:

- Purchase and distribute moth traps and identification books; and
- Maintain contact with volunteers and collate records into an overall report for Caithness.

Resources:

- Moth traps, nets, trays, collection tubes and labels;
- Identification books;
- Skills in the use of moth traps and identification of moths;
- Record forms; and
- Report of moths found.

Outputs:

- Increase in information about moths in Caithness;
- Increase in moth identification skills; and
- Report of new records.

Proposed timetable:

The project will take three years to complete.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

Caithness contains a large number of UK BAP and Scottish BAP Lepidoptera. This project should directly lead to new information on the occurrence and status of many of these nationally important moth species.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task	Effort/materials	Cash	In Kind
Co-ordination	3 days in year 1, 2 day each for yr 2 & 3 @ £100		£700
Moth trapping	Traps – 3 @ £200 each	£600	
	Identification books 3 @ £30 & 1 @ £45	£135	
	Moth Nets x 4, & 1 tray, 100 x 125 ml collection tubes & labels	£188	
	Contingency	£77	
	Total	£1,000	£700

2.5 Water Vole Monitoring

Project aim: To monitor water vole populations in Caithness.

Project objectives:

- To detect significant changes in distribution and abundance of water voles; and
- To involve volunteers in surveying.

Project lead: David Glass.

Project partners: SNH.

Project implementation and outputs:

Water vole distribution in Caithness was investigated by Caithness Biodiversity Group in 2005. Water voles were found to be present in 11 of the 17 10 km squares surveyed. Work is continuing in 2006 to survey the remaining 10km squares, using volunteer effort. The results indicate that Caithness, especially the peatlands, is an important stronghold for this threatened species, owing to the relatively undisturbed habitat and the absence of American mink.

The 2005 and 2006 surveys were intended to establish baseline information in advance of the possible spread of mink northwards. It is now important to monitor water vole populations in order to detect any changes in distribution and abundance.

Actions:

- Train volunteer surveyors;
- Survey annually a proportion of the locations where water voles were found during the 2005/2006 surveys as well as a number of locations where habitat was found to be suitable although unoccupied. Continue surveys for 3 years; and
- Report the results and pass records to HBRG.

Resources: Volunteer effort

Outputs:

- Information on population trends for the water vole in Caithness
- Indication of impacts of habitat change and predation by mink
- Report of findings

Proposed timetable:

The project will take three years to complete.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

Water voles are a UK BAP and Scottish BAP priority species.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task	Effort/materials	Cash	In kind
Co-ordination and training	2 days in each year @£100		£600
Surveying	10 days in each year @£100 Volunteer mileage 500 miles/year @35p	£525	£3000
Reporting	2 days @£100 Report printing	£60	£200
Total		£585	£3800

2.6 Wildlife Boxes

Project aim: To build a range of wildlife boxes for distribution around Caithness.

Project objectives:

- To enhance habitats for nesting and hibernating species in Caithness;
- To encourage wildlife into community gardens, such as schools;
- To raise awareness of species needs with in the volunteer sector; and
- To encourage volunteers to engage in environmental projects.

Project lead: Marina Swanson and Mary Legg.

Project partners: Caithness Countryside Volunteers.

Project implementation and outputs:

Depending on the complexity of the boxes, a mixture of volunteer and contractors will be used to build the boxes. The boxes will include bird boxes (tit, communal sparrow, barn owl etc), hedgehog boxes and possibly insect boxes (such as bee). The boxes will be used around the county and also offered to community gardens, schools and community woodlands.

Actions:

- Organise 1 event per year to build a particular type of wildlife box;
- Event will be open to all, including the Caithness Countryside Volunteers, but a booking system will be organised to ensure an appropriate number of attendees;
- Contractor will be approached to build a particular type of box each year;
- Contact will be made to schools, community gardens/woodlands to offer a box; and
- Locations of each box will be recorded.

Resources:

- Materials and tools;
- Venue and refreshments; and
- Advertising.

Outputs:

- A range of wildlife boxes available for distribution around the county;
- Habitat enhancement around the county including semi urban areas e.g. schools and community gardens; and
- Greater awareness of volunteers regarding wildlife needs.

Proposed timetable:

Winter event 2006-9.

Links to UK BAP and Scottish BAP List

There are some direct links to UK BAP or Scottish BAP priorities, particularly with provision of bat, bird and bee boxes.

Indicative costs:

The following costs have been estimated:

Task	Effort/materials	Cash	In kind
Organise event	Advertising, leaflet promotion, booking system, organise materials/tools		£200
Hold 3 events (1 per year)	Venue (Dunnet visitor centre) and refreshments (~ 12 volunteers at £4 each) Petrol money for volunteers (~ 12 volunteers at £10 each)	£504	£300
Materials & tools	Wood, screws, tools (£150 per year)	£450	£200
Contractor time	45 hours at £12 (15 hours per year)	£540	
Total		£1,494	£700

2.7 Implementation Plan Budget

Project	Cash	In kind
Identification of Important Biodiversity Sites	£1,100	£800
Community based species surveys	£7,475	£3,300
Wildflower habitat enhancement	£1,470	£1,800
Moth trapping and monitoring	£1,000	£700
Water vole monitoring	£585	£3,800
Wildlife boxes	£1,494	£700
Total	£13,124	£11,100

2.8 Other project suggestions raised by the Group

- Small native woodland remnant survey (to be discussed when results of FCS survey are available).

2.9 General issues raised by the group

- Difficulty of delivering projects from within the Group, dependent on others to volunteer;
- Assumption that Group members/volunteers have up to date technology and are linked to e-mail by broadband; and
- Lack of locally appropriate prescriptions in agri-environment schemes.

3. SUMMARY

The Caithness Biodiversity Group have proposed, worked up and developed six local area projects for implementation: (i) Identification of important biodiversity sites, (ii) Community based species surveys, (iii) Wildflower habitat enhancement, (iv) Moth trapping and monitoring, (v) Water vole monitoring, and (vi) Wildlife boxes. Depending upon how these are implemented, all six projects should deliver a range of benefits to UK and Scottish BAP targets in Caithness.