

HIGHLAND INVASIVE SPECIES GROUP

2pm, Wednesday 19 June 2008
Highland Council Headquarters, Inverness

Introduction

Councillor Ian Ross welcomed everyone to the meeting. He began by saying that the Highland Biodiversity Partnership had found there is a strong interest in taking steps to address the issue of invasive non-native species. Rather than focus on individual species or issues at this point, he suggested that it is necessary to take a more coherent 'joined-up' look at the issue, following the work that is taking place at a UK and Scottish level. The purpose of this meeting was to explore the issues and achieve a degree of agreement as to the way forward.

Those present were then asked to state their name, who they represented and summarise their interest in invasive species. For ease of reference, this is recorded with the apologies to the meeting in the table at Annex 1.

The National Context

Angela Robinson, Chair of the Scottish Working Group on Invasive Non-Native Species, joined the meeting by tele-conference link to give a presentation on the GB and Scottish Policy. Her slides are attached at Annex 2.

The focus is on Great Britain not the United Kingdom, as Ireland and Northern Ireland are working together on this issue.

Defra initiated a Review of Non-Native Species Policy in 2001, this reported in 2003. There were 8 key recommendations:

1. Designate lead co-ordinating organisation: *The GB Programme Board was set up in 2005, comprising senior representatives from GB government agencies supported by an independent Non-Native Species Secretariat.*
2. Develop comprehensive risk assessment procedures: *Non-Native Risk Analysis Panel set up and Risk Assessment Methodology being finalised.*
3. Develop Codes of Conduct
4. Develop targeted education and awareness strategy
5. Revise and update legislation
6. Establish adequate monitoring and surveillance: *still being set up but aiming to ensure that recording of non-natives increases and that data is relayed to the right people, faster.*
7. Policies developed with respect to management and control
8. Stakeholders consulted and involved

A number of **Working Groups** have been set up including Country Working Groups, the Media and Communications Working Group (which Angela chairs), and the Rapid Response Working Group.

The Scottish Working Group was set up in March 2006 to ensure effective and practical implementation of policy at Scotland level.

The **Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy for GB** provides the framework for a more co-ordinated approach. It contains 48 key actions (each based on chapter headings) and the main focus is on prevention. Both the Strategy and the Implementation Plan can be found on www.nonnativespecies.org. Angela stressed the importance of work ongoing at the local level. She said that Forums are a very good idea and she hopes they can help to implement the actions of the GB Strategy and Implementation Plan.

There were questions on the following issues*:

Stakeholders (JM): Lot of agencies and Scottish Environment Link have an input through the Stakeholder Sounding Board, the Scottish Working Groups and

- through other working groups such as the Media and Communications Working Group.
- Monitoring (DG): This work has only recently been taken forward and while it is not yet operational it is moving in the right direction.
- PAWS (Partnership for Action Wildlife Crime) (PE): There are links – the Wildlife Crime Police Co-ordinator sits on the Scottish Working Group
- Legislation (RD): There is currently no legal duty for landowners to control invasive species, access to land to control invasive species on other people's ground has been suggested but this will require a change in primary legislation
- GB and Scottish differences (IR): different areas face different problems but they are working to the same framework
- Resourcing (IR): The Scottish Group is trying to prioritise species, but resources are limited and we are unlikely to get rid of some things.

*Initials in brackets refer to the person who raised the question or point throughout this minute.

Argyll & Bute Invasive Species Forum

Lucy Sumsion from Argyll Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) then gave a presentation on the Argyll Invasive Species Forum. It was formed following a Forestry Commission Commissioners visit to Argyll in Autumn 2006. They too originally suggested a Forum or Action Group focused on Rhododendrons, but it was agreed to set up a wider Invasive Species Forum under the Argyll & Bute Biodiversity Partnership.

Lucy volunteered to take this forward using her SNH core funding, and a smaller Steering Group comprising representatives from SNH, the Forestry Commission, Argyll & Bute Council and the Nadair Trust was set up. The Steering Group investigated LIFE funding but pulled back from this round due to the difficult timescales involved. Lucy circulated a paper outlining the Argyll & Bute Forum's mission, vision, objectives etc (Annex 3). The Forum sits under the Scottish and GB Groups, and brings in local stakeholders.

They have set up a Rhododendron Action Group with the potential to set up other action groups dealing with Japanese knotweed (and other noxious weeds) and Mink on Mull. They are limited by lack of resources and time, but are aiming to undertake a prioritisation exercise (cost benefit analysis) and link in to the GB risk analysis. The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding places a great emphasis on collaborative strategic working on issues such as Rhododendrons. Lucy asked whether these groups need to be a bit more pro-active. She finished by saying that a key challenge is to involve community groups on issues such as Japanese knotweed.

Alison McIlroy from Argyll & Bute Council said the Council had let a contract to deal with J knotweed. Members of the public are keen and have strong views on this issue, but it is difficult to manage this as pulling together with a bigger group may be more effective than actions taken by any one person. She highlighted the danger of raising people's expectations.

The following points were raised in the discussion:

- Planning: Need to look beyond control and offer alternatives once control is effective, eg once you have eradicated J knotweed, what comes up in its place?
- Ecosystem approach (JM): Danger of wiping out otters through Rhodie eradication – conflicting interests need to work together to recreate a balanced ecosystem, maybe control programmes need to go slower to give wildlife time to adapt?
- Education (RD): Rob Dewar is discussing the production of a leaflet with funding from the Highland Biodiversity Partnership. Alison drew the Group's attention to a J knotweed eradication project in Cornwall, which has produced some good materials. Alison has put basic information on the Argyll & Bute Council website because she

found that Council Services (Environmental Health, Planning, Roads) were all giving a slightly different message, the website starts to help address this and identifies who to contact etc.

- Species identification (DG): First priority ought to be to identify the species concerned, how did Argyll & Bute go about this?
Argyll & Bute haven't identified & mapped the species concerned as they do not have a recording headquarters. They are about to review their LBAP, so that is a starting point. There is a good web-based mapping system for J knotweed on the Cornish site, people can register an occurrence which gives a blue dot, which turns to a red dot once it is verified. They believe they have knotweed under control in Cornwall now, but it has taken many years to get to that stage. Mapping is a good way to involve people, and the next step for Argyll & Bute is to produce a standardised monitoring and recording form.
- Co-ordination (IC): We have species which we know a lot about eg Rhodies & squirrels, and there are a lot of groups doing work in different locations.
- Enforcement (DH): Legal action has been used as a threat to encourage people to address problems in Argyll & Bute, but as yet no action has been taken. Landowners are liable for the spread of some invasive species under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, and persistent problems should be reported to the Police. There is a possible test case coming up in Dumbarton.
- Training (RP): SNH are holding an event entitled 'Controlling Invasive Non-Native Species in Wetlands' under their Sharing Good Practice Programme at Battleby on 11 November. Robin Payne said he is hoping to get some speakers from abroad.
- Recording (DO'B): There are good models across Scotland, but no joined-up model as yet. HBRG have experience in identifying obscure taxa and groups of invertebrates. David O'Brien said that they would be keen to apply any knowledge and expertise, and set up a list of alien species for Highland. They already have the systems in place for recording through eg the National Biodiversity Network.
- Lack of awareness (JP): Ignorance is often part of the problem, once a species becomes common & is readily identified it is often too late.
- Involving people (JH): It is very important to pitch this correctly, we need to be careful not to put the work back by talking about education and patronising people. We have to find mechanisms to get people involved, physical involvement can be very satisfying.

Highland Invasive Species Group

Janet summarised her paper to set up a Highland Invasive Species Group (Annex 4). The proposals were very much draft and the Chairman emphasised that the key thing was to identify the steps to give the Group a steer as to how to proceed.

The following points were raised in the discussion:

- Prioritisation (BS): It would be useful to get a complete list of species that we need to look at in Highland. If we start with a long list we can focus in on the main priorities.
- Involvement (LD): New Zealand have made significant developments in creating tools to help people identify and tackle problems, and develop inter-agency weed busters which support communities with tools and information.
- Co-ordination (JH): The Skye & Lochalsh group have found that local co-ordination is the key, people are willing and able to volunteer to eradicate invasive weeds, but they need support.
- Timing (RD): We need to think about what order we do things, do we look for funding or speak to communities first? It was agreed that the Group ought to be given the flexibility to develop its own approach.

Joint-Working (JM):	Highlighted the willingness of Transerve to work jointly, and suggested other Local Biodiversity Groups give them feedback on their roadside problems.
Collaboration (BS):	The Government is suggesting a collaborative approach and funding may be dependant on collaboration, the Group may fill this role.
Linkages (IC):	Need a database stating who's doing what, where and when, this would help us explore the links we have already.
Focus (JH):	Not all non-native species are invasive and not all invasive species are non-native, he suggested that the focus ought to be on invasive species. We need to undertake work on less 'fluffy' species but if we are having a public campaign, we do need to focus on the 'big' species, and on different species in different areas.
Website (BS):	Asked whether the website could be a hub for recording and providing information, and asked for training events on eg aquatics.
Socio-economic (RK):	It is important to consider the threat to socio-economic issues as well as biodiversity.
Awareness (DK):	Lots of areas where Rhodies are being controlled contain houses with Rhodies in their gardens. Donald highlighted the need for some kind of educational campaign – even if the gardeners could dead head the bushes that would help.
Quick Wins (RP):	A group of this size and importance could do a lot in the longer term but there are some “quick wins” to be had. Robin said that if we can make progress by the next meeting that will help stimulate enthusiasm.
Education (KW):	There is a lot of information on <i>Gyrodactylus</i> amongst the angling community, so it is possible to educate people about what isn't here as well as what is. Keith and this ought to be an important component of any future plan.

Summary of Discussion

The Chairman summarised the discussion as follows: We need strong, robust, basic data linking to priorities. Awareness-raising will be an important component of any future project, and we need to be careful about the tone, and to take an inclusive approach. We should use existing and new links and forge sensible collaborations. We can pick up a great deal of good practice from elsewhere in GB as well as elsewhere e.g. SNH conference. We need to allow the Group flexibility to develop its own ideas. The Group needs to address the whole issue of resources – existing resources and new funding bids. Collaboration and co-ordination can foster greater mutual understanding and working together.

Next Steps

Members agreed to set up a Highland Invasive Species Group as a Sub Group of the Highland Biodiversity Partnership. The aims of the Highland Invasive Species Group were agreed as follows:

- To bring together the key players and take stock of the situation regarding invasive non-native species in Highland;
- To raise awareness and spread good practice;
- To identify any major gaps and prioritise key areas for future work; and
- To work together to secure new resources and funding.

Participants agreed to look at the invitee list (Annex 4.1) and send Janet any additions (**API**). Network Rail, National Farmers Union and the Environmental Research Institute based at Thurso were suggested at or following the meeting.

Derek Anderson, Rob Dewar, Ian Milne, Ian Collier, Sarah Smythe, Barbara Soutar, Llinos Davies, David Glass, David O'Brien and John Parrott agreed to participate in a Sub Group. Administrative support will be provided by the Council's Biodiversity Officers.

The Sub Group will meet two or three times over the next six months to identify gaps in current work and priorities for future action, investigate sources of funding, and work up a proposal for a future Highland Invasive Species Project for submission to the full Highland Invasive Species Group. In addition to this medium term work, the Sub Group will discuss and make progress on a small number of “quick wins” to capitalise on the enthusiasm generated by the creation of the Highland Invasive Species Group. Janet will canvass available dates in August for the first Sub Group meeting (**AP2**).

Jenny McCallum from RPID offered to investigate Invasive Weed Training for SRDP Case Officers, to spread good practice (**AP3**). Ian Collier offered to investigate and circulate a summary of what can be funded under the SRDP once the situation becomes clearer (**AP4**). Mink, for example, are not included in the SRDP.

Barbara Soutar drew the Group’s attention to a workshop she had attended in Birmingham run by the RPS Group, entitled ‘Keeping Up With Non-Native Species’. The presentations were very useful, and can be viewed, with details of the 2009 workshop and information on a range of other short courses RPS plans to run in the 2008/9, on the website www.nsnuk.org. Janet Bromham was asked to investigate the possibility of RPS coming up and running a full identification course (**AP5**).

Barbara also said that she had been approached by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) who run national apprenticeships and are interested in having an invasive species apprentice in Scotland. They need desk space and someone to learn from. Kerry Riddell agreed to explore this and report back to the Sub Group (**AP6**).

Date of Next Meeting

The provisional date of the next Group meeting was set as **Wednesday 28 January 2009**. The Chairman thanked everyone for coming along and participating in the discussion, and said that we look forward to seeing the work of the Sub Group in January.

Action Points:

- AP1** All participants to look at the invitee list and send Janet any additions.
- AP2** Janet Bromham to canvass available dates in August for the first Sub Group meeting.
- AP3** Jenny McCallum to investigate Invasive Weed Training for SRDP Case Officers, to spread good practice.
- AP4** Ian Collier to investigate and circulate a summary of what can be funded under the SRDP once the situation becomes clearer.
- AP5** Janet Bromham to investigate the possibility of RPS coming up to Highland and running a full identification course.
- AP6** Kerry Riddell to explore BTCV apprenticeship on invasive species.

Annex 1: Register of Attendees and Apologies

Annex 2: The National Context: Angela Robinson’s slides

Annex 3: Argyll & Bute Invasive Species Forum: Mission, Vision & Objectives

Annex 4: Highland Invasive Species Group: Proposal (containing invitee list)

Annex 5: Proposal from Derek Anderson of Scotland Transerve

Annex 1: Register of Attendees & Apologies

Name	Representing	Job	Interest
Councillor Ian Ross	Highland Council		Meeting Chairman
Janet Bromham	Highland Council	Biodiversity Officer	
Ian Milne	Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Ecologist	Broad general interest with specific interest under the Water Framework Directive in the impact of certain species upon water bodies
Chief Inspector Paul Eddington	Northern Constabulary	Operational Commander	Co-ordinates 12 Wildlife Crime Officers, interest in prevention and enforcement
John Parrott	Scottish Native Woods		Provides advice to woodland owners
Robin Payne	Scottish Natural Heritage	Invasive Non-Native Species Co-ordinator (1/2 of his time)	Sits on GB & Scottish Groups
Sarah Smythe	Scottish Natural Heritage	Area Officer	Deals with East Highland non-native species programme
David O'Brien	Highland Biological Recording Group	Member	Members record species throughout Highland, including non-natives
Ian Collier	Forestry Commission Scotland	Woodland Officer	Based in Dingwall (covering Lochaber), SRDP Case Officer so Ian has an opportunity to fund work, he also has an interest in red squirrels
Jon Hollingdale	Community Woodlands Association	Chief Executive	Works with community land managers, can help spread the word
David Glass	Caithness Biodiversity Group	Chairman	CBG have produced a summary of invasive species in Caithness, problems aren't uniform over Highland area
Barbara Soutar	National Trust for Scotland	Estate Conservation Officer Jk Project lead	Controlling non-native species for NTS, local contact for Skye & Lochalsh Environment Group's Japanese knotweed Project
Janet Ullman	Skye & Lochalsh Japanese Knotweed Project	Project Co-ordinator	Compiling database and co-ordinating control issues
Paul Gallagher	Scottish Wildlife Trust		Working on audit of invasive species on SWT reserves
Donald Kennedy	Morvern Community Woodlands & Sunart Oakwoods Initiative		Running project on <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> (Lever & Mulch method trial)
Gordon French	Morvern Community Woodlands		FCS Contractor & MCW Director
Michael Stretch	Crowing Concern Scotland		Works on roads network, 25 years experience of controlling invasive species

Keith Williams	Ness & Beaully Fisheries Trust		
Roger Knight	Spey Fishery Board	Director	
Kerry Riddell	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Development Manager	Work with volunteers
Llinos Davies	Cairngorms Water Vole Project	Project Officer	Controlling mink
Helen Gray	Cairngorms Water Vole Project	Project Officer	Controlling mink
David Hetherington	Cairngorms National Park Authority	Ecology Advisor	Involved in the Cairngorms Water Vole Project & the Cairngorms Wildcat Project
James Merryweather	Skye & Lochalsh Environmental Forum	Chairman	Interested in enhancing public understanding of species
Rob Dewar	National Trust for Scotland	Ranger	Tackling <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> on the ground, problem under control in Inverewe, main focus is now Torridon, keen to take a strategic approach & runs workshops to share good practice
Eleanor Garty	Woodland Trust		WT have 8 sites across Highland, interested in practical work
Jenny McCallum	Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate	Senior Agricultural Officer	Enforcement of Weeds Act, cross-compliance with Scotland Rural Development Programme
Kenna Chisholm	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds		RSPB involved in control of mink, giant hogweed, <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> & <i>Spartina</i>
Katharyn Logan	Moray Firth Partnership	Manager	Involved in Coastal Zone Management and the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation Management Group
Alison McIlroy	Argyll & Bute Council	Service Officer – Grounds & Horticulture	Here to give feedback on Argyll & Bute Invasive Species Forum & pick up on ideas, interest in Japanese knotweed
Lucy Sumsion	Argyll Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group		Giving presentation on Argyll & Bute Invasive Species Forum
Richard Egan	Land Engineering	Contractor	
Edwin Stewart	Scotland Transerve		Can help with number of areas from funding bid preparation to co-ordination & implementation of works on the Group's behalf (see attached note at Annex 5).
Derek Anderson	Scotland Transerve	Landscape Supervisor	
Angela Robinson (via tele-conference link)	Rural Directorate	Chair, Scottish Working Group on Invasive Non-Native Species	Giving presentation on GB & Scotland context

Apologies:

Marina Curran-Colthart	Argyll & Bute Biodiversity Partnership
Stephen Corcoran	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Justin Prigmore	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Ros Bryce	Cairngorms Water Vole Conservation Project
Simon McKelvey	Conon Salmon Fishery Board
Nick Reiter	Crofters Commission
Sinclair Coghill	Deer Commission Scotland
Moira Baptie	Forest Enterprise Scotland
Kenny Kortland	Forestry Commission Scotland
George Hamilton	Highland Council
Juliet Robinson	Highland Red Squirrel Group
David Smillie	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Lorna Anness	Lochaber Biodiversity Group
Michael Scott	Plantlife
Gillian McKnight	Scottish Agricultural College
Roger Cottis	Skye
Bob Laughton	Spey Research Trust
William Sutherland	Sutherland Partnership Biodiversity Group
Greg Fullarton	Transerv Scotland