

Confirmed Minutes from: Wales Grassland and Heathland Ecosystem Group

Meeting 3: 3rd July 2009 – Y Lanfa, Aberystwyth.

Present:

Sion Brackenbury Gower Commons and C&C of Swansea
Nick and Kyra Somerfield FUW
Richard Evans WAG
Caroline Wilson SNP
Carrie Rimes CCW
Stuart Smith CCW
Charles Morgan PONT
Helen Buckingham NT
Trevor Dines Plantlife
Julian Jones RWT & WTW
Juliet Hynes WBP

Apologies:

Sheila Spence Field Mycologist
Chris Tucker FCW
Dave Lamacraft RSPB
Jan Sherry CCW
Ivy Berkshire Flora locale
Stella Owen NFU

Item	Discussion	Action	Progress
1. Apologies	See above		
2. Minute from previous meeting,	Progress of actions entered on Minutes from meeting 2. Outstanding actions below:		

updates on actions
not covered below

A11 – Carried forward

A14 – Carried forward

Appear to be some problems when saving the action plan template

A15 - Actions added to the heathland action plan were lost due to file not saving. Was due to be item at meeting 3 but JS unable to attend due to illness; carry forward to next meeting

A17 - ongoing

A19 – carried forward; Samples being collected from potential *Phytophthora* hosts

A25 - carried forward: Habitat expansion schemes – Woodland Trust “plant an acre” and Million Ponds; need to ensure sites are properly assessed for suitability and not achieving one priority habitat at the expense of another

JJ – Million ponds project officer is aware of the need to not damage grassland sites.

CW – should also be assessed through planning regs unless agricultural ponds for stock, which could creep through.

1. CR circulate Pentwyn Farm Yard Manure experiment report to Group
Journal paper circulated
2. TD advise all groups to add an extra column to record action progress until the groups have been set up on BARS.
3. JH check template for bugs when saving
Tried saving a change, seemed OK
4. JH add heathland action plan as item to meeting 4 agenda
Added to agenda. Should be guidelines from Chairs meeting
5. JH set up coding system for advice notes that will work on BARS.
ongoing
6. JS email JH a note to go on WBP website.
Done
7. HB talk to chair of woodland ecosystem group
In contact with Chris Tucker – will chase response before the meeting.

	A29 – carried forward : need to establish differences between UK targets and standard target types and advise all Ecosystem Groups (ESGs) appropriately	8. JH and JS	JH been through targets, now need to inform other groups
	A31 – ongoing: Lowland heathland Target 4 could do similar thing for Wales as RSPB did in England	9. DL approach Nigel Symes for methodology from HEAP project	Have methodology
	A33 – Calaminarian Grasslands, Also need to consider UK context for target setting; waiting for UK meeting	10. Stuart and Carrie, discuss at UK level.	Discussed at new UK Farmland Group meeting. No clear steer at present.
3. Draft Lowland Meadow Action Plan	The actions suggested in the circulated draft Lowland Meadow action plan were discussed and changes and new actions were added by Stuart Smith.	11. SS send updated action plan to JH to circulate to G&H group	Done
	Generally more description could be added to actions so that people reading them without any prior introduction would understand them.	12. Plan currently CCW heavy, all, please contribute any relevant actions to SS, (deadline 14 th Aug)	Some comments received.
	NS suggested need to identify one person as the point of contact so not confusing to landowners.	13. SS and CR draft all grassland action plans by Christmas 2009.	Need to discuss SMART actions first.
	Suggested that the template needs an extra column to record who is contributing to funding	14. TD follow up extra column on template to record who	

HB suggested John Rodwell would provide support for flood meadows project, may also be encouraged through flood prevention/control schemes. A lot more information coming out through England too.

Restoration milestones – RE suggested that implementation of desired management could be used as indication that site switches from restoration to achieve condition action. Really is a UK wide need so should be a UK standing committee item but we could establish a G&H subgroup to discuss the detail. Each ecosystem group will need to look at this so may need a mixed ESG subgroup.

G&H restoration milestone sub group membership: SS (lead), CM, RE, CCW area monitoring expertise e.g. Dave Allen or Dan Guest.

Dolydd Byw project, review at next meeting; what is Ivy coming up against, what are the priority issues.

CCW database of important sites – make sure that the LRC network is aware of this database. They may not currently be using it as some sites are not being flagged up during searches by LRCs for developers.

Elan Valley Report is due out this summer

Is CCW monitoring report available? Could be potential item for future meeting.

is funding an action

15. HB pass on John Rodwell's presentation to the group when made available at end July
Have presentation but needs sorting out before circulating
16. CR find out what's happening at UK Standing committee level, maybe try Liz Howe.
A new UK project has now been proposed to do this.
17. JH add to policy group template suggestion for mixed ESG subgroup.
Added to policy template
18. SS set up sub group meeting for end Aug beginning Sept 09 to feed into GlasTir by Dec.
Not needed (see above)
19. JH ask IB to present paper on Dolyd Byw project at next G&H meeting.
done
20. SS get CCW knowledge base department to get info out to LRCs
Done (6/10/09)
21. JH inform LRCs about database
Email sent to LRCs
22. SS check whether CCW monitoring report can be
Report at meeting.

Grassland Trust have been looking into EIA and how it has been implemented. For farmers, cross compliance covers the EIA regs, if they breach the EIA regs then their payments will be cut. Though, small landholder might not be picked up through EIA/cross compliance regs.

Changing land use patters has resulted in farms being broken up into smaller landholding e.g. pony paddocks. These new landowners not necessarily aware of the ecological importance of their land. Maybe we could advertise the importance of grasslands to land-agents, some publicity in land-agent magazines? This fragmentation issue needs to be dealt with at county level. Policy group could think about this issue. Environmental assets value, maybe something like the wildlife sites system?

Could do some awareness raising through the smallholders show (May 2010) coordinate a message through appropriate organisations. The group suggested Charles Morgan lead a sub group to organise this strategy to include members CM, JJ, TD. RE advised that WAG will need something in writing quite soon to go into publicity material

Surveying and Monitoring action – condition of statutory sites?

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| | circulated | |
| | 23. JH add to list of potential items for future G&H meetings | Added to agenda |
| | 24. JH Add land fragmentation to policy group template. | Added to policy template |
| | 25. CM arrange subgroup meeting by end Sept 09: members CM, JJ, TD | Have circulated ideas and possible way forward. Recieved comments from RE. CM Made subsequent request for info from WAG but no response yet. |
| | 26. RE give CM appropriate contact in WAG press office | |
| | 27. TD ask Andrew Peterken for overview of the condition status of feature | |

species on Lowland meadows for the next G&H meeting

Countryside survey landcover mapping hoping to provide indicator of habitat connectivity in term of measuring expansion targets. NS asked how upland grassland fitted into the ecosystem groups. Most upland grassland is covered by the upland groups, though dry acid grassland does not appear to be included in the upland group, need to clarify which group is covering this habitat in upland.

NS noted that, due to costs, upland grassland is changing due to lack of fertiliser and lime as farmers are concentrating on lowland grassland which they are managing more intensively. Costs of introducing Electronic Identification (EID) could also lower stock numbers, also lacking cattle grazing on hills, all changing quite quickly.

Vision for lowland grassland – need to look at long term planning for lowland grasslands, sub group proposed to investigate this (complete draft by June 2010) Members JJ, HB, CR, SS, IB. May also be useful to involve Miles King.

Disaggregation of Lowland Meadow targets. Original disaggregated targets were worked out for habitat areas in Priority Habitats Wales. Most LBAPs will have corrected these based on local knowledge and ground truthing. CR will work out from current disaggregated targets (as adjusted by LBAPs local knowledge)

TD compiling consensus messages to take from all ESG to feed to Glas Tir through WBP.

28. CM email upland group action plan template to NS

29. HB check with Barbara whether upland group is covering upland dry acid and other grassland, suggest sensible way forward.

In touch with BJ – will be able to update at the meeting

30. JJ lead group, check with Barbara (upland group) how long it took to set up upland vision. Arrange 1st meeting

ongoing

31. JH obtain current disaggregated targets from LBAPs and send to CR

Done

32. CR work on new disaggregated targets once received from JH.

In progress

4. Axis II: Glas Tir

1) the level of funding for the entry level is such that farmers won't take it up (£28 per ha). If this is so then what is the point of taking time to put the prescriptions together. – the whole group fully supported this, farming representation agreed this is likely to happen.

2) All the good that had been done through Tir Gofal can be undone very quickly, needs to be a good continuity plan in place. – TD looking for examples where good work done through Tir gofal would be undone if no Agri-env scheme in place.

3) Fear that the easiest options will be the only ones taken on as they are the cheapest, due to fixed payment method. Must give harder prescriptions more weight in the scheme to encourage uptake.

Additional discussion from G&H group: Because of gap between withdraw of ESA's and introduction of Tir Gofal, were examples of work being undone, don't want this to happen again, WAG should learn from mistakes of the past.

Tir Cynnon was very successful from farmers point of view.

WAG should note that labour is not there on farms and that farm payments need to cover contractor costs. Must avoid the delays in payments that occurred when Tir Gofal transferred from CCW to WAG. Some farmers that did good work for biodiversity, said that had they known what the system would be like they would not have bothered.

Arable options are the most likely to be dropped as they are of no benefit financially.

A meeting is going to be arranged between Diana Reynolds and

33. All, send JH any examples of farms with good work that would be undone, JH Collate and pass to HB

34. HB take collated examples to meeting of Chairs and Diana Reynolds

33. Possibly a problem because until we have had TG monitoring we don't know how successful these have been. JS will trawl around local staff/contacts to see if there any farms where we definitely have good data to say there has been an improvement and will bring to the next meeting

the ESG Chairs to discuss the higher scheme.

As a wider issue, if reductions in animal numbers are required, what happens to quality animals, they shouldn't be slaughtered, need to be redistributed.

5. Species Action Plans

Species Expert Group (SEG) developing signposted top 3 priority actions for species in Wales. Will allocate actions to:

Lead partner – site specific work

Policy actions – Policy Group

Specific actions – ESG

ESGs actions should hopefully slot into some of the actions in the G&H ESG action plan.

Lead partners responsible for setting priority actions and targets, these will be trickling out over the next year.

The Species action plan template is similar to the ESG actions and targets template.

Is also an exercise to identify potential conflicts between species so that more straight forward information can be passed on to landowners.

The species actions are quite generic at the moment, could make them more specific by adding list of appropriate sites to the LBAP areas boxes, could also tighten up the timescales.

6. Funding

Saving our magnificent meadows – continuity of funding been an obstacle so group been set up to facilitate funding. Donna Radley

35. Add quality animals issue to policy group template

Added to new template

36. All, if disagree with any of the species placement within habitats then contact JS in first instance.

37. JH look into putting the ESG action plan spreadsheets onto BARS with ">>more" hyperlink to appropriate species actions

Ongoing – waiting for next phase of BARS development

38. TD take these suggestions to SEG

39. DL provide update on birds action signposting for the next meeting.

has been employed as the 1st funding officer. Keen to apply for Life + funding for a series of grassland projects across the UK. Planning to put application in, Sept 2010. We need to decide our priorities for grassland projects over the next few months. Donna is keen to come to Wales to talk to those involved.

Life+ requires match funding, Donna is working closely with HLF (and others) to try and get match funding, though we may need to prioritise projects that have a hope of match funding.

It might be possible to put into Life+ communication this September for lowland grassland ambassadors, but we are running out of time for this at the moment.

Project list prioritisation, the following comments were made:

HB – WWGAS because it will target the most sites for our habitats, SB – Application is going into BIFFAWARD for project at Sarn, Bridgend and another in North Swansea, could use these to match Life+ funding.

RE - requested more details before being able to make any decisions.

TD – North Wales limestone as the sites are so threatened.

JJ – Living highways, was good project, though come to an end would be good to follow it up, Powys have group of 50 volunteers monitoring road side nature reserves. Also Monmouthshire meadows and Powys private nature reserves provided self help network for smallholders.

CM – AGAP working well but would have to be tweaked for other areas. Could expand Ivy's work, working with local farmers.

SS - WWGAS – lack of grazing management is a major issue.

Limestone as 2nd priority.

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| 40. All interested in meeting Donna, provide JH with availability for weeks of 28 th Sept and 5 th Oct | Done – meeting arranged for 5 th oct |
| 41. SB send project details to CR | |
| 42. Get John (limestone project) along to meeting with Donna | Asked Carrie to email John for dates |
| 43. CM do presentation on WWGAS at meeting with Donna | Done |
| 44. CM talk to Mark Sutton about whether WWGAS would cover his 2 projects | Done |
| 45. Ask Emma Durward (Powys) to talk about living highways at the meeting | Emailed Emma to check Dates |
| 46. CR check up on Shared | To report at |

CW – Grasslands that are too small for agri-environment schemes.

Earth Trust and their work meeting

TD is collecting info on other road verge schemes so can feed into Emma Durward's talk.

Date of next meeting

47. JH check with DL what would be a good date for the next G&H meeting in relation to timing of Glas-Tir input to higher tier. Done

48. JH circulate potential meeting dates. done