

Wales Mammal Biodiversity Action Forum

Minutes of the 7th Meeting

24 April 2012, CCW Offices, Newtown

1. Welcome, introductions

Present: Liz Halliwell (CCW - Minutes), Rob Strachan (EA), Jean Matthews (CCW - Chair), Steve Lucas (BCT), Audrey Watson (BASC), Henry Schofield (VWT), Isabel Macho (Carmarthenshire CC)

Apologies:

Ian Danby (BASC), Ceri Morris (CCW – MISE), Rob Parry (WTSWW), Iolo Lloyd (FCW), Adrian Lloyd Jones (NWWT), Rob Parry (WTSWW), Jenny Macpherson (VWT – MISE), Lizzie Wilberforce (WTSWW), Kate Williamson (The Mammal Society), Rebecca Pritchard (Menter Môn), Sarah Bird (Chester Zoo)

Organisational updates

CCW/FCW/EAW – work continuing on the development of a single environment body (SB) in Wales. Minister due to make announcement to Plenary in May. Secondments to SB ongoing, including to the Living Wales programme (Jim Latham, CCW Woodlands Ecologist and Rhian Thomas CCW Freshwater Ecologist going to SB on 1st May).

2. BAP Process update

Species Expert Group – met on 8th April. SEG agreed still a need for BAP lead partners, but SEG needs to support the role. Plans to hold a workshop for lead partners once a formal process has been agreed.

Living Wales – consultation closing soon. Conference held recently and aspirations came across in a positive way, but there are many concerns about implementation. It is likely that the Welsh Government Ecosystem Resilience, Diversity and Compliance fund will be open again this year, but no details are available yet. WBP now chaired by Matthew Quinn rather than Diana Reynolds. NEF pilots have been shelved for the time being.

Article 17 reporting - requirement for UK to report to Europe on status of all species on Habitats Directive every 6 years. During the last reporting round in 2006 JNCC took the lead on preparing the reports, but this year the agencies, including CCW, will be responsible for preparing the reports. NGOs are to be consulted once draft reports have been produced, but could also be involved at an earlier stage.

Reporting requires information on range, population size, population trends, habitat availability and trend, pressures and threats. Exegesis is collating information data availability from other organisations. If data is not available it is possible to use 'expert opinion', although the UK was criticised for relying on this too much in the last report. Reports need to be completed by September.

Action Point 1 - Jean and Liz to send round links to Article 17 reports and guidance.

Action Point 2 - Steve to contact Kate in BCT to establish her role in collating data for the Article 17 reports.

3. Project/partner updates

VWT – have received funding from the Co-op of £75k for a new Welsh pine marten project. The project, called ‘People and Pine Martens’, will raise public awareness, look for evidence of pine martens and build a base of information for potential future restocking. VWT are also appointing a PhD at University of Exeter on effect of artificial lighting on invertebrates.

Carmarthenshire – Jacqueline Hartley been contracted to do dormouse surveys and work with other trusts to put up nest boxes, including in country park. Also had PTES Internship to look at connectivity around dormouse sites. Working well with MISE project too.

BASC – all Country and Regional officers have to spend third of their time on Biodiversity. New Wales Officer is David Williams and will be covering biodiversity projects outside North Wales which is covered by Audrey in the Greenshoots Project.

Action Point 3 – ALL to send in partner updates asap if not already done so.

4. BAP Action Plans

Steve has sent the bat Action Plans (with exception of LHS and GHS) to Sean McHugh for him to put them onto the WBP website, with the caveat that some targets etc may change.

Other plans are still in progress, and it was agreed that the priority is to publish the plans asap, even if it hasn't yet been possible to add the resilience and milestone information.

The targets review has been held up due to delays with collating existing data.

Action Point 4 – Steve to identify who is responsible for putting actions from the Wales mammal plans onto BARS – lead partners or LBAPs who are implementing the plans.

Action Point 5 – ALL other lead partners to finish action plans as far as possible ready to be published

Action Point 6 – JM/LHa to find out from WBP where plans are likely to be published.

5. SEG evidence gaps

SEG has requested that each taxon group identify the top three priorities for research. Also need to provide with list of academic institutions that are relevant to mammals in Wales, but are

Bats: Bristol, Exeter, Stirling, Leeds, Centre for Irish Bat Research (Belfast Queens University)

Other mammals: WildCRU Oxford, York, the Mammal Society.

Impact of roads on bats and dormice – CCW has already been having discussions with Defra regarding roads and severance issues for bats and dormice. Research needs to include the effectiveness of bat or dormice bridges.

Monitoring effectiveness of mitigation – problems with implementing post-construction monitoring. HS reported that the National Trust has recently done some survey work of properties that have been developed. The results have caused some concern. Lack of knowledge on how well mitigation works and affects our ability to provide recommendations and others' views of protected species.

What does resilience mean for mammals? – Tir Gofal monitoring aims to address this. But it would require a long term project to look at species response to climate change.

Lack of knowledge on some priority species – hedgehog, harvest mice, stoats and weasels have not had any stratified surveys to provide country wide information on the status of these species. In addition to doing this work, also need to develop novel long term monitoring techniques for key species.

6. Priority projects and funding opportunities

Rare woodland bats – models been completed and shown to identify hotspots for barbastelle and Bechstein's bats. Project could also be used to support for commercial management of woodlands and licensing.

Action point 7 - JM to draft rare woodland bats project proposal and circulate to SL and HS.

Harvest mouse surveys – Rob Parry had emailed a proposal for harvest mouse study at Parc Slip Nature Reserve. The harvest mouse survey work being undertaken by the MISE project needs to be rolled out to rest of Wales. Options involve using groups like GlamBAG and networks of local mammal groups. CCW could potentially fund training and analysis of bait pots in areas outside MISE project. Could also look to other groups such as dormouse groups and bat groups who might like something different to do.

RS noted that it would be useful to have some habitat targeting eg Upper salt marsh habitat, young forestry plantations with tussocky wet grassland, deschampia, molinia.

Action Point 8 – HS to talk to Jenny Macpherson about harvest mice survey work in Powys and SE Wales. Potential for her to do some training/visits in Swansea.

Action point 9 – LH to consider communication with Powys and SE Wales mammal workers to encourage them to do harvest mice surveys.

Water vole conservation – application to WG 2011/12 ecosystem funding was unsuccessful. AW suggested that resources for rafts not such a problem but that the limiting factor is availability of someone to despatch mink. Some areas quite well covered with keepers willing to help, but are significant gaps. Need to establish a fund to pay travel costs for river keepers to despatch mink?

Water vole genetics – MISE project to include work on water vole population genetics. Also potential for genotype work to look at gene flow, but would need more detailed research.

Isabel suggested that may potentially have some section 106 money for Llanelli, including £10k for water vole work in the wider area. It was also noted that we are still also waiting for Tir Gofal monitoring report which will have information on water voles.

Action Point 10 – Jenny, Jean and Rob to discuss water vole genetics project in MISE.

Otters

Spraint DNA work giving a lot more than has been possible previously. It would be interesting to focus work on SAC areas with otters as a feature. Coastal work is far more revealing than it has been before.

Hedgehog

Encourage people to do hedgehog tunnel surveys. Rob not sure that it is possible to validate density of signs with density of hedgehogs. The Mammal Society are keen to promote tracking tunnels as standard methodology. Suggested that hedgehogs should be on every LBAP list and encouraging volunteers to get trained up to do surveys.

Action Point 11 – KW to make sure reflected TMS hedgehog monitoring reflected in action plan

Dormice

MISE project doing survey and monitoring work and is organising a seminar in November. It is hoped to do some practical hedgerow conservation work with landowners in years 3 and 4 of the project. AW is working with landowners part of Greenshoots project to encourage them to plant hedgerows and improve management.

Red squirrel

MISE project working in North and West Wales. CCW and VWT reprofiling budgets with a view to take on contractor to do some squirrel work.

LHB and GHB interactions

VWT don't yet know whether modifications to exclude GHB bats from LHB roosts will work. Very few VWT LHB sites that haven't had GHB.

Stoats and weasels

A new hair tube design is being trialled by Jenny. She is running a training workshop in the SW in May and may wish to roll out later on.

Funding opportunities

LAs can't apply to Environment Wales funding.

Action point 12 – Steve to feedback to SEG that projects are ecosystem focussed and don't deliver or provide opportunities for species.

Action Point 13 – Liz and Jean to contact Kate for update on Mammal Atlas

Priority projects

The following were agreed as priority projects:

Mink and water voles

Mid-Wales red squirrels – particularly Tywi area that isn't covered by MISE project.

Hedgehog tubes

8. Minutes and action points from meeting on meeting 20 June 2011.

No comments on the minutes were received.

AP1 – JM/LHa (or others) to find out more information on NEF pilots.

Update given at meeting.

New Action point 14 - Steve to circulate note he has received from WBP regarding NEF pilots.

AP2 - JM/LHa to contact Mike Bruford to disseminate findings of research into polecat genetics and identify implications for conservation. Do they need samples for analysis?

Work has come to a halt at the moment and he is not sure if further samples are needed.

AP3 – ALL to send in partner updates asap if not already done so.

Those received have been circulated

Action Point 4: JM/LHa to circulate format for resilience section of Action Plan.

Completed

Action Point 5: JM to incorporate RS email on water vole into Action Plan format & circulate draft. Completed

Action point – Jean to amend water vole map to include reintroduction sites.

Completed

Action Point 6: ALL to send any milestone monitoring ideas to appropriate species lead. Species lead reported at meeting

Action Point 7: MISE project to collate harvest mouse records or CCW as part of data review. Target to be reviewed in the light of new knowledge to give minimum target.

Included as part of CCW data review. Data review is ongoing.

Action Point 8: LHa to review dormouse targets and check data availability with PTES.

Data collation exercise underway with PTES. Targets will be reviewed once data collation complete.

Action point 9: SL to email BGs to ask for presence and location of known noctule roosts to start process of collating records and estimate target.

Completed, but nothing received from Bat Groups.

New Action point 15 – Steve to raise need for noctule records at Bat Workers Day.

Action point 10: SL to ask how many Soprano pip sites are being monitored in NBMP

Completed. BCT been asked by CCW to comment on wider monitoring issues.

Action point 11: JM/LHa to include BLE as part of LRC data search. SL to ask NBMP re how many more sites needed for Wales trend data (need 40 sites for trend analysis). Been included in data collation exercise.

New Action Point 16 – Jean and Liz to circulate data collation results for harvest mouse, etc as soon as available.

Action point 12: JM to collate GHB data and add note re range expansion. Ongoing
Action point 13: JM to use LHB habitat suitability model to check number of squares currently occupied and for range expansion. Ongoing

Action point 14: LHa to review red squirrel targets. Not completed

Action point 15: Deadline for action plan revisions – 23th January, to send to Sean McHugh by 27th January. Steve has submitted bat APs (except LHB and GHB) to Sean. Others to be completed.

Action point 16: All species leads to send list of LBAP areas to JM/LHa to produce maps. Ongoing

Action point 17: Rare woodland bats teleconference to be arranged. Complete

Action Point 18: JM to draft report on 2010/11 work for next meeting. Not completed.

9. Any other business

None

10. Date of next meeting

Tues 4th October 2012

Key Messages from meeting

1. Priority projects for funding are mink control project and Mid-Wales red squirrel project.
2. Need to encourage widespread uptake of hedgehog and harvest mouse surveys.