

Minutes of the Wales Biodiversity Lowland Farmland Ecosystem Group (LFEG)

Crown Building, Northgate Street, Aberystwyth, 24 June 2009.

- Chair: Caryn Le Roux (Welsh Assembly Government)
- Present: Gethin Davies (Snowdonia National Park)
Charles Grisedale (Cambrian Lapwing Recovery Trust)
Clare Burrows (Countryside Council for Wales)
Trevor Dines (Plantlife)
Hilary Miller (Countryside Council for Wales)
Dave Lamacraft (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
Candace Brown (Welsh Assembly Government)
Glenda Thomas (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group)
Juliet Hynes (Wales Biodiversity Partnership)
Dafydd Jarrett (National Farmers Union)
- Minutes: Andrew Chambers (Welsh Assembly Government)
- Apologies: Charles Morgan (Pori Natur a Threftadaeth)

1. Introductions

- 1.1. The Chair opened the meeting at 11.00 and confirmed that the focus of the group is hedgerows, orchards, and arable field margins. The inclusion of 'lowland' in the Group's title is to differentiate from uplands, although all 3 habitats are included in the group's remit whether lowland or upland.
- 1.2. The chair confirmed that she has, and will continue to make representations to Policy on behalf of the group.

2. Action Plan Targets

2.1. T1: Maintain the net extent of hedgerows across the UK (KM)

- 2.1.1. It was identified that T1 figures in the Countryside Survey are limited in sample size but that they are the best figures available. It was agreed that these figures should be used as a baseline.

Action: Chair to confirm if 106K km figure is the correct figure for the length of hedgerow in Wales in favourable condition.

- 2.1.2. It was noted that county records hold information on hedgerow losses and Juliet pointed out that in future these will, or at least should be notified to BARS.

2.1.3. There was a discussion surrounding the mechanisms of hedgerow losses and road maintenance and works were considered to be a main factor.

2.1.4. It was agreed that information regarding losses and expansion of hedgerows needs to be sought.

Action: Clare Burrows to look at whether the Countryside Survey has losses/expansion information.

2.2. T2: Maintain the overall number of individual, isolated hedgerow and veteran trees.

2.2.1. Issues highlighted were that there are difficulties in monitoring hedgerow trees, farmers tend to be wary of mature trees due to public liability and therefore there is a tendency for them to be cut down. Highways Agency also looks out for older trees which may raise concern for public safety. Hedgerow trees are often cut for wood for personal use and for sale. Utility companies face penalties for interruptions in services and therefore have a tendency to clear trees close to overhead cables.

2.2.2. Pollarding was highlighted as a possible mechanism to address the above issues.

2.2.3. It was suggested that the Forestry Commission could be one avenue for funding to promote trees and hedgerow trees and that local authorities have responsibility for single trees.

2.2.4. It was considered that mechanisms need to be put in place to protect trees with important lichens and that this is especially important for veteran trees.

2.2.5. Tree preservation order legislation is being updated in Scotland and England and needs to be done for Wales (as well as a review of hedgerow regulations).

Action: CLR to collate policy issues for passing to WBP Policy Group.

2.3. T3: Ensure that between 2005-2010 hedgerows remain at least as rich in native woody species.

2.3.1. It was pointed out that the Colin Barr report contains more species information than the Wales report, that T3 targets only relate to woodland species and it was agreed that the UK list of species is sufficient for requirements for T3 targets.

2.3.2. A schedule of targets has been proposed – 2010-2015/15-20/20-25.

2.3.3. There was a discussion as to whether T3 and T6 targets should be amalgamated, however it was agreed that due to the different factors affecting different species there is no need.

2.3.4. It was considered that although the targets set are realistic, the species list may need to be revised to discourage planting of non-native hedgerow species. It was however pointed out that it is difficult to determine what is native – i.e. what is native to South Wales may not be native to North Wales.

2.4. T4: Achieve Favourable Condition of 35% of Hedgerows by 2010 and 50% by 2015.

2.4.1. Only 7% of hedgerows in Wales are currently in favourable condition, assessed by minimum height, width, gappiness and alien species.

2.4.2. A discussion was had regarding the issues affecting favourable condition, verge management, runoff, atmospheric pollution and appropriate levels of grazing were considered to be the main drivers for failure.

2.5. T5: Reverse the unfavourable condition of over-managed hedgerows by reducing annual trimming to 60% by 2010.

2.5.1. A discussion on T5 targets identified that the frequency of cutting is significant in halting the regeneration of hedges into favourable condition. It was considered that the mindset of contractors needs to be influenced to ensure hedges are not trimmed unnecessarily and that the reduction in costs afforded by 3 yearly trimmings, the benefit to species and preventing branches dying off should be pointed out to farmers.

2.5.2. It was agreed that hedges shouldn't be cut back to the previous cut back position and should be allowed to increase in size over time and that mechanism need to be put in place to ensure diversity, i.e. some hedges cut yearly, some 3 yearly, some laid etc.

2.5.3. It was pointed out that England has a telephone survey to monitor hedge condition but that Wales has no such mechanism.

2.5.4. It was agreed that a more relevant target would be in relation to encouraging traditional management, instead of reducing trimming

2.6. T6: Halt the decline in the condition of herbaceous hedgerow flora by 2010 and improve by 2015.

2.6.1. It was noted that there is no mechanism to deal with eutrophication and that targets are for flowers and grasses, not mosses.

2.7. T7: Improve the condition of the hedgerow tree population by increasing numbers of young trees.

2.7.1. T7 requires the planting of young trees, however it was noted that there are no grant aids available.

2.7.2. It was agreed by the group that there were similar issues in T7 to T2 and therefore they could be amalgamated but with additions for planting and support for veteran trees.

Action: CLR to address the amalgamation of T2 and T7.

2.7.3. It was identified that mechanisms to achieve T7 outside of agri-environment schemes need to be identified, possibly including those for tree tagging which would require contractors to be kept involved for which a remit for communication will be required.

2.8. T8: Achieve a net increase in the length of hedgerows of an average of 90km per year to 2010 and 2015.

2.8.1. Juliet Hynes suggested that T8 could be divided into two targets of a) restoration, b) expansion, in terms of BARS.

2.8.2. It was confirmed that the definition is any type of hedgerow so could be single species but this would be reflected in the 'condition' targets.

2.8.3. It was highlighted that the Countryside Survey shows no net increase, which suggests a significant amount of loss, especially as there are large amounts of hedges being planted through TG and therefore it is important to establish losses and figures for this.

2.8.4. Juliet Hynes confirmed that information on habitats/restoration/expansion needs to be supplied to BARS and that LBAP officers will be the mechanism for checking data being inputted.

Action: Juliet Hynes to collate data from LBAP officers on expansion/losses from LA data.

Action: CLR to update targets and issues, following this discussion.

3. Arable Field Margins

3.1. It was decided due to the amount of time available that the targets for Arable Field Margins would be dealt by a sub-group including Dave

Lamacraft, Trevor Dines, Claire Burrows, Charles Grisedale and Candace Brown.

4. Traditional Orchards

- 4.1 A discussion on traditional orchards was entered into and it was noted that at present there are no BAP actions and that baseline surveys need to be carried out. The priority is for the determination of the extent of traditional orchards and methodology.

Action: Hilary Miller to circulate Habitat Action Plan as it becomes available.

Action: Hilary Miller to liaise with Juliet Hynes regarding information held by LBAP officers.

5. Glastir

5.1 The Chair explained that:

- the Glastir fiche will be put to the European Union for a modification to the Rural Development Plan in July.
- The whole farm code is under review, but that the new scheme will be in a similar format to other schemes.
- Farms will sign up to certain options.
- X no. of points needed to enter scheme applicants will need to select a range of options to get enough points to enter scheme.

5.2 The Chair explained that the remit of the group in relation to Glastir is to determine if the draft options will deliver for hedgerows/ orchards/ arable field margins.

5.3 The group felt that a lack of project officers will affect value for money as farmers will be undertaking work without any advice.

5.4 The group had grave concerns that if there is low uptake then there will be no achievable aims for this group on its remit.

5.5 Glenda Thomas highlighted the need for positive messages to come from WAG reports.

5.6 The group then reviewed the draft options for hedgerows and orchards. The draft options for arable field margins to be reviewed by the sub group of Claire Burrows, Dave Lamacraft and Trevor Dines, and circulated to the rest of the group prior to submission to the Glastir development team.

Action: CLR to collate LFEG's response to Glastir pan Wales option and forward to Glastir development team.

9. Next meeting: 7th October

The meeting was closed at 4pm

