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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

UK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN - AN UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS

Paper by Ant Maddock

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its September 2006 meeting, the Joint Committee discussed the paper 'The UK Biodiversity Action Plan - an update on developments' (**JNCC 06 D10**).
- 1.2 Since September 2006, further progress has been made and a number of critical pieces of work have been completed or are nearing completion. This paper provides an update on progress since 2006 and provides an outline of JNCC's position and role in bringing outstanding pieces of work to fruition in line with the Joint Committee's guidance.

2. Progress since September 2006

- 2.1 The work to revise the UK BAP targets, making them relevant to the next 10-15 year timeframe, has been completed for all terrestrial, freshwater and coastal habitats and most species and can be viewed at <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/bapgroupage.aspx?id=98>. These targets have been the subject of a risk assessment exercise in the light of the probable implications of climate change. No revised targets are available for most marine habitats and species. The revision of the marine targets, together with those of the few terrestrial species for which no revised targets were submitted, will await completion of the Species and Habitat Review (see 2.2 below).
- 2.2 The UK List of Priority Species and Habitats was published in August 2007 after sign off by the ministers of the four countries <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/NewPriorityList.aspx>. The new list contains 49 habitats and 577 species. It has been agreed that action plans (or, more specifically, targets) will be needed for all of these habitats, and these will be developed for those habitats which do not already have them. It has been agreed that the actions required for priority species will vary in nature; some will be species specific, some will involve improved management of habitats, some will involve wider landscape measures and some will require further research or improved monitoring. A preliminary 'signposting' exercise was carried out to determine the nature of the actions required for the priority species and a more detailed signposting exercise will be concluded by the end of February 2008. Targets will be developed for those species which require them.

- 2.3 *Biodiversity Indicators in your Pocket* was published in June 2007 using the UK BAP species and habitat trend data from the 2005 reporting round <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/2010-BIYP2007.pdf>.
- 2.4 Work has been carried out to identify the new UK role in Biodiversity Action Plan work, and this has been outlined in two documents; *Conserving Biodiversity - a UK Approach* <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/library/UKSC/DEF-PB12772-ConBio-UK.pdf> and *UK BAP List of Priority Habitats and Species - Forward Process* which discusses in detail how the setting of targets, delivery of actions, and reporting of progress against these will be undertaken. These issues are considered further in sections 3.1 and 3.2 below.

3. **Future work**

- 3.1 In April 2006, the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee and the country biodiversity group chairs agreed that there needed to be a refreshment and refocusing of the UK role within the UK Biodiversity Partnership to:
- i. strengthen links with international biodiversity obligations;
 - ii. take account of new styles of working within the countries;
 - iii. give independent advice; and
 - iv. provide information.
- 3.2 In October 2007 the UK role under BAP, and its relationship to country and local delivery, was clarified by the UK Biodiversity Partnership and published as '*Conserving Biodiversity - a UK Approach*' at the Fifth UK BAP Partnership Conference in Aviemore. This document provides a vision for UK biodiversity and explains the nature of the roles within the UK BAP at UK, country and local levels. It has been agreed by all Governments in the UK.
- 3.3 Standing Committee charged its Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG), which JNCC chairs and services, with developing a process for taking the UK role forward. BRIG was charged, in particular, with developing a forward process for work relating to the new UK BAP priority habitats and species, and through JNCC, with developing a strategy to improve surveillance and monitoring, and the provision of essential information. BRIG is also responsible for co-ordinating reporting.
- 3.4 In response to this request JNCC, on behalf of BRIG, presented a paper to the November 2007 meeting of the Standing Committee outlining suggestions for a future process to take forward work on the new UK priority list of habitats and species.
- 3.5 This forward process paper related primarily to action at the UK level, making suggestions for country level work only for clarity. This was in recognition of the fact that countries would implement conservation action in different ways in accordance with the circumstances pertaining to the individual countries.

3.6 The Standing Committee agreed a forward process. The main points of this are:

- i. priority habitats will be grouped into Habitat Groups (to encourage ecosystem working) at a country level. The country groups will be responsible for setting country targets and for reporting on progress against those. There will also be UK Habitat Groups whose function will be to help co-ordinate this work (e.g. helping to ensure that targets and reports can be aggregated at the UK level);
- ii. the delivery of action to achieve these targets is a matter for the countries to determine for themselves; it is assumed that the country biodiversity groups will have an important role in assigning responsibilities here;
- iii. conservation action for some marine habitats and pelagic marine species will be at a UK and probably international, as well as a country, level;
- iv. the needs of many species (those requiring improved management action) can be addressed, at least in part, through habitat action and country and UK habitat groups are charged with ensuring this is taken into account in the setting of targets and through management action;
- v. specific management action (action plans), which may involve targets, will be needed for only a proportion of the 1149 species (*ca* 400). For these species, each country will identify a lead body to be responsible for organising the management action relating to these species in its country (where the species occurs). Where the species occurs in more than one country the countries will consider working together to achieve effective action;
- vi. following completion of the signposting exercise, country biodiversity groups, and also the UK Government in relation to widespread marine habitats and species, will consider how to deliver the wider actions required in relation to priority species;
- vii. for habitats and species not having specific targets, success criteria will be developed to enable them to be removed from the priority list when these criteria have been met;
- viii. reporting on progress will be done at a country level and consolidated at a UK level.

3.7 The intention is that work to prepare for the new arrangements outlined above will be undertaken during 2008 and early 2009, with the new arrangements being operable from mid 2009. Both the countries and BRIG have a significant amount of work they need to undertake to achieve this. The most urgent for BRIG is that, by the next Standing Committee meeting in April 2008, JNCC, though BRIG, will need to:

- i. build on the signposting exercise and determine which species will require specific management action;

- ii. advise on co-ordination arrangements between country lead organisations in relation to such species occurring in more than one country;
 - iii. develop success criteria for species not having specific targets;
 - iv. advise on methods for meeting species habitat needs through habitat management action, i.e. help the Habitat Groups discharge their role in this;
 - v. advise on the terms of reference and methods of working of the eight UK Habitat Groups.
- 3.8 To support this work, JNCC is planning to develop a database to provide information associated with the UK List of Priority Species and Habitats. This will be proposed as a work theme during the 2008/9 financial year and will include all data collected on the priority species and habitats during the Species and Habitat Review with an audit trail of decisions and links to NBN, Wildlife Statistics and the Biodiversity Action Reporting System.

Reporting

- 3.9 The same Reporting Round process that was used in 2005 will be followed in 2008, including the use of Biodiversity Action Reporting System to manage the data. The 2008 Reporting Round will focus on the original UK BAP priorities and not the new UK BAP List of Species and Habitats in order to maintain continuity of data for comparison with previous reports which is essential for the CBD 2010 targets. In a parallel exercise, however, baseline data will be collated for the additional habitats and species on the new list, building on the data exercise referred to in 3.2vii above, to assist in post 2008 reporting rounds.
- 3.10 Following preliminary work the 2008 reporting round will open on 1 September 2008, close on 30 November 2008 and report in the Spring of 2009. Information obtained in the 2008 reporting round will be used in the UK Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity due in March 2009.

Indicators

- 3.11 The latest issue of *Biodiversity Indicators in your Pocket* was published in June 2007 using trend data from the 2005 Reporting Round.
- 3.12 The timetable for the 2008 Reporting Round accommodates the need to get the relevant UK BAP trend data to the Indicators Group so that these data can be incorporated into the UK report on the CBD 2010 targets.

Surveillance and Research

- 3.13 The UK Biodiversity Standing Committee charged JNCC, through BRIG, with developing proposals for filling the information gaps identified in the 2002 and 2005 BAP reports. JNCC prepared a report for BRIG at the end of 2007 outlining the coverage and costs associated with surveying the UK BAP species and habitats (excluding marine). However, subsequent discussions have identified the need to

set those proposals within the context of the need to revise surveillance arrangements to deliver against a range of objectives (not just UK BAP) and a revised paper is being prepared to achieve this (JNCC 08 D02 refers). This paper will be considered by Standing Committee at its April 2008 meeting.

- 3.14 The UK Biodiversity Partnership mechanism for addressing priority research needs is the Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) which Defra chair and for which JNCC provides the Secretariat. BRAG has undertaken significant work to develop overall biodiversity research priorities but this work has not yet addressed the research needs relating to individual priority habitats and species. Standing Committee has charged BRIG to work with BRAG to consider how this issue can best be addressed.