

JOINT

Nature *News*

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

Going Global

Chairman's Introduction

~ IN THIS ISSUE ~

Inside this issue you'll find features on some of the key areas of work where JNCC is making a special contribution to nature conservation in the UK, Europe and internationally.

During November 2005 the Convention on Migratory Species held the Scientific Council and the Conference of the Parties (CoP) in Kenya, looking at issues facing migratory species as a result of climate change, together with the potential effects of Avian Influenza and other key issues.

JNCC's work advising on movements of migratory birds is featured in an article on Avian Influenza. Along with confirmation that culling of wild birds is not appropriate as a control measure for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

The latest volume in the Geological Conservation Review (GCR) has recently been published and charts the evolution of early mammals and birds.

An area often overlooked - that of geodiversity, and its benefits to people - are highlighted in the recent *Involving people in geodiversity* publication.

Widespread starvation of seabirds is reported in some of the UK's largest colonies. On St Kilda there was the unprecedented sight of puffin chicks starved to death in their burrows.

Further details on these and other initiatives can be found inside.

Increasingly, the focus of JNCC's work is on nature conservation worldwide. The publication of the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* reports provides us with an assessment of the status and trends in the natural environment around the world, and makes clear the unprecedented scale of the pressures that nature is facing globally.

I am a member of an Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity which is presently considering how best the UK can meet its international biodiversity commitments, in particular reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. The Group has asked JNCC to review the UK's present work in this area, and to advise what more we need to do to make a full contribution towards meeting these conservation targets. There are many important issues here, but one aspect I think we need to consider is how to ensure that governments everywhere value the benefits to people resulting from fully-functioning ecosystems. Environmental economics have an important role to play here.

One of the greatest pressures global biodiversity will face will be climate change. Not only do we need to mitigate its scale by reducing carbon emissions, but we need to manage land and water in ways that will enable nature to adapt to its inevitable impact. Climate change was discussed at the Conferences of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, and also at the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, which were held last autumn. Climate change is an issue which we will need to take account of in all our future work, both in the UK and abroad, and we must plan to meet this challenge.



A conservation issue for the greater horseshoe bat is the loss of insect-rich feeding habitats and flyways, due to loss of wetlands and hedgerows.

© Mike Hammett/English Nature

Another of the issues considered by the Bonn Convention Conference was the problem of Avian Influenza. JNCC is co-ordinating the advice of the UK nature conservation agencies to Government on this issue, which will need very careful monitoring over the coming months, together with good contingency planning to prepare for an outbreak, should one occur.

The next 12 months will be a time of change in UK nature conservation. Our colleagues at English Nature will be uniting with two other organisations to create Natural England, and, in Scotland, the Scottish Natural Heritage headquarters will be relocating to Inverness. Both are huge undertakings, and we wish them both well in orchestrating a successful conclusion.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff of the JNCC Support Co for ensuring that the transition from our previous operating arrangements to the new Company has gone so smoothly. We will now focus our full attention on delivering our strategy for nature conservation, both at home and abroad.

Adrian Darby OBE
Chairman, JNCC

“Wetlands no longer ‘cut and dried’”



Sléibhteán agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast) RAMSAR Site © David Stroud/JNCC

The Ramsar Convention on wetlands is the only global environmental treaty concerned with a specific biotope. It is one of the oldest of the global conventions and, as the UK was an early signatory, there has been a long history of national implementation. The Convention has moved from an early focus on the protection of wetlands solely for biodiversity conservation to a more holistic approach over the last decade. This sees wetlands as a central means of achieving sustainable development. They deliver ecosystem services to human populations, not only within wetlands, but also further afield.

The ninth Conference of the Parties (CoP 9) was held in Kampala, Uganda from 7-16 November 2005. It was the first time that a CoP had been held in a developing country; and in Africa, and was thus a significant event. A delegation of nine represented the UK, including two JNCC staff, a larger than usual number as a consequence of the UK's Presidency of the EU.

A major item discussed at CoP 9, in terms of its implications for the Convention, was a specially prepared synthesis report drawn from the reviews of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. This review concluded that:

“The degradation and loss of wetlands is more rapid than that for other ecosystems. The status of freshwater-dependent species (in both inland and coastal areas) is deteriorating faster than those of other ecosystems. Wetland-dependent biodiversity in many parts of the world is in continuing and accelerating decline.”

The main conclusions of the Conference were as follows:

- Agreement of a revised Strategic Framework and guidelines for the development of the list of Wetlands of International Importance. This includes additional guidance for Criteria 2, 3, 5 and 6, and the adoption of a new Criterion 9 (a ‘1% criterion’ for non-avian aquatic fauna). This new criterion will aid the identification of possible Ramsar sites, especially in Africa and other tropic regions with large aquatic animals.
- Adoption of a range of other guidance related to wetland and water management; and wetland inventory, monitoring and assessment.
- Agreement on the key needs for international collaboration on approaches to managing issues raised by the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1).
- Adoption in principle of ecological ‘outcome-based’ indicators for the assessment of the effectiveness of the Convention. Further work remains to develop these indicators.
- Adoption of guidance for the addressing of Ramsar sites (or parts thereof) which no longer meet the criteria for designation.
- Finalisation of priorities for the work of the Convention's Science Panel over the next three years, and means of implementing this.

For further information see:

www.ramsar.org/index_cop9_e.htm

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Taking flight for top honour

David Stroud (JNCC's Senior Ornithological Adviser) received the AEWA (African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement) Waterbird Conservation Award 2005 in the individual category, at a ceremony during the Third Meeting of the Parties in Dakar, Senegal. The award is for his outstanding contributions to the development and implementation of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement.

David has had a long career in the field of wetland and waterbird conservation. His special scientific interest in the Greenland white-fronted goose has significantly contributed to the understanding of the life cycle of this species.

Further information on the AEWA can be found at www.unep-aewa.org



Senior Ornithological Adviser David Stroud © JNCC

UK leads on conservation of sharks and petrels

The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) has 93 signed-up Parties and is the international agreement which enables many countries to take co-ordinated action to conserve migratory species around the world. Such species have been a powerful force for uniting countries around the globe in their shared desire to conserve birds and mammals that move between their territories, or range across the oceans. Every three years national delegates meet at the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to agree the future priorities and practical measures. CMS is supported by a strong science base, delivered by Scientific Councillors and others who meet at a Scientific Council immediately before each CoP, as well as once between the CoPs.

In 2005 the Scientific Council met in Nairobi, Kenya from 16 to 18 November, followed by round table events on 19 November that looked in detail at the issues facing migratory species as a result of global climate change together with the potential effects of Avian Influenza. The CoP followed from 20 to 25 November, with a full schedule of plenary sessions supported by working groups and side events on issues affecting migratory species.

The UK delegation was led by Martin Brasher (Defra) supported by Eric Blencowe and other Defra staff, with Prof Colin Galbraith (SNH) chairing the Scientific Council and Dr Ian McLean (JNCC) providing scientific advice. Biodiversity Minister Jim Knight attended the round table events and spoke at the opening ceremony of the CoP, highlighting key issues for attention during the meeting.



Henderson petrel © Peter Marriott/WML

The UK was successful in sponsoring a resolution on the effects of climate change, which threatens many migratory species. Presentations by the UK highlighted the need to protect key habitats that are under pressure from climate change, as well as being damaged directly by human activities.

Avian Influenza received much attention during the meetings, with a resolution highlighting the need for better understanding of the disease, and its effects on migratory species, in order to prevent or reduce future problems.

The UK pledged £100,000 to hold an inter-governmental meeting to begin the process of establishing an agreement to conserve migratory birds of prey within Europe, Africa and possibly Asia.

Basking shark and Henderson petrel were added to the Appendices of CMS as a result of proposals by the UK in conjunction with others. This should result in practical measures being taken to sustain these species in the face of threats such as bycatch and alien species.

Bycatch is a problem for many migratory marine fish, and birds that are killed as a result of intensive fishing operations.

Hence, the proposed appointment of a Scientific Councillor to lead and co-ordinate bycatch work for CMS is a welcome move to increase the effectiveness of measures to reduce the size of kills in future.

Sustainable use was a hot topic during the meetings in Nairobi. The Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines (AAPGs) for the sustainable use of biodiversity comprise 14 principles seeking to ensure that future use of biodiversity is sustainable. These principles were developed under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity to help governments, local communities, the private sector and others to use biodiversity in ways that do not lead to future declines. After some intensive debates, it was agreed to evaluate the AAPGs at the next meeting of the Scientific Council, to see how they can contribute to the conservation of migratory species in future. For further information see:

www.cms.int/bodies/cop/cop8/cop8mainpage.htm

www.iisd.ca/cms/cop8/

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Committee *Briefs*

JNCC is currently made up of thirteen members: a Chairman and three independent members, the Chairmen and one other member from each of the three country agencies, the Chairman of the Countryside Agency, and two (non-voting) members appointed by the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland).

The Committee meets four times a year, in March, June, September and December. The March, September and December meetings are held at Monkstone House, in Peterborough, and the June meeting at a range of venues around the UK.



Adrian Darby OBE
Chairman, Independent

With vast experience at national and international levels, Adrian has a record of achievement on nature conservation issues and rural affairs partnerships.



Professor David Ingram OBE
Independent

David has been Master at St Catharine's College, Cambridge since October 2000. Formerly he was Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.



Professor Jan Pentreath
Independent

Jan was formerly Chief Scientist at the Environment Agency. He is a marine scientist by background, and his earlier career was in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF).



Professor Peter Doyle
Independent

Peter holds the honorary title of visiting Professor in Earth Sciences at University College London. He has previously worked as a research scientist with the Natural History Museum and the British Antarctic Survey.



Reverend Dr Stuart Burgess
Countryside Agency

Stuart is the Chair of the Countryside Agency and the Government's new Rural Advocate. He has been chair of York & Hull Methodist District since 1989.



Dr Mike E Moser
English Nature

Mike is Acting Chairman of English Nature and a part-time independent consultant. He has extensive international experience in nature conservation, particularly wetlands and migratory waterbirds.



Dr John Markland CBE
Scottish Natural Heritage

John is Chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage. Prior to this he was the Chief Executive of Fife Council.



Mr John Lloyd Jones OBE
Countryside Council for Wales

John is Chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales. He is a farmer from Tywyn Gwynedd and is a former chair of the National Farmers Union (NFU). He is also a former member of the Snowdonia National Park Authority.



Dr Lucinda Blakiston Houston
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC), NI

Lucinda is currently the Chairman of CNCC. She is an environmental consultant, and has worked in the Middle East and Wales as a marine chemist.



Ms Sarah Fowler OBE
English Nature

Sarah has worked in marine biodiversity conservation for well over 20 years. She is actively involved in the voluntary marine conservation sector.



Professor Janet Sprent OBE
Scottish Natural Heritage

Janet is the Chairman of SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee. She is Emeritus Professor of Plant Biology at the University of Dundee.



Mr Bryan Riddleston
Countryside Council For Wales

Bryan is a trustee for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Chairman of the RSPB Welsh Committee. He is a former member of the Environment Agency Advisory Committee.



Dr Bob Brown
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC), NI

Bob is Chairman of the Northern Ireland biodiversity group. He is a marine biologist and ornithologist and a member of the Rural Stakeholders Forum.

Seabed mapping programmes will plug knowledge gaps for new European Marine Directive

In October 2005 the European Commission released its proposals for a new Marine Strategy Directive, which will complement the existing Water Framework Directive and seek to address three key issues:

1. **Increasing pressures** on the marine environment (for example, land-based pollution, over fishing, oil spills, shipping, oil and gas exploration) and threats to marine ecosystems (biodiversity loss, habitat destruction, and the capacity of our seas to provide food).
2. **Knowledge gaps**, as assessment and monitoring programmes are not integrated or complete, and there are weak links between research needs and policy priorities.
3. **Governance systems** which lack co-ordination across Europe. The many regional and global strategies and environmental agreements, institutions and policies affecting the marine environment (for example, Common Fisheries Policy, Marine Transport Policy, Common Agricultural Policy, Water Policy) are poorly integrated and often not specifically designed to protect the marine environment.

The Strategy's vision is that "we and future generations can enjoy and benefit from biologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas that are safe, clean, healthy and productive". The proposed Directive aims to translate this vision into a legal objective to achieve good environmental status of the EU's marine waters by 2021. It is expected that the detailed application and implementation of the Directive will be through the regional sea conventions including the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment for the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR). It is expected to have the following elements:

- Description and assessment of current environmental status including the environmental impact of human activities.
- Determination of good environmental status.
- Establishment of environmental targets.
- A monitoring programme.
- A programme of measures towards good environmental status.

The Marine Strategy is intended to deliver the environmental pillar of the future EU Maritime Policy Green Paper, scheduled for Spring 2006. Defra have established an interdepartmental group to co-ordinate input to the Marine Strategy and Green Paper. JNCC advice is being co-ordinated by Head of Marine Advice Mark Tasker (tel: +44 (0) 1224 655701) and International Officer Jessica Magnus (+44 (0) 1733 866856).

For further information visit

www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/marine.htm

www.forum.europa.eu.int/Public/irc/env/marine/library

EUNIS habitat map for the Wash from the MESH web mapping GIS



Marine mapping programmes

JNCC is leading on three mapping programmes which together aim to improve our knowledge of the distribution of marine habitats significantly both at a UK level and across adjacent European waters. The maps will contribute to a number of information needs within JNCC (such as protection of priority habitats, Marine Protected Areas, advice to industry) as well as provide a much needed source of information for external policy and management issues, such as marine spatial planning.

For the OSPAR habitat mapping programme, JNCC has co-ordinated the collation of data by twelve OSPAR Contracting Parties on 14 priority habitats across the north-east Atlantic. The data are available in a specially designed extension to the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (NBN) and can now be accessed at

www.searchnbn.net/hosted/ospar/ospar_text.html

Within the Interreg-funded Mapping European Seabed Habitats (MESH) project, which JNCC leads on behalf of 12 partners, and habitat mapping data across five countries are being collated and harmonised. The maps will be presented according to the European Nature Information System (EUNIS) classification, Habitats Directive Annex I types, OSPAR priority types and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) types, and made available to key stakeholders in a web-mapping GIS application in early 2006; see

www.searchMESH.net

To complement the more detailed maps available via MESH, the UKSeaMap project aims to provide a broadscale map of seabed and water column features for all UK seas, based on a series of underlying thematic data layers (including bathymetry, seabed sediments, salinity and temperature). This project is due for completion in the summer of 2006; see www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2117

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“Analysing the clues on Avian Influenza”

Avian Influenza (AI) is a common virus in wild birds usually causing only mild symptoms. Rarely, and typically in poultry flocks, highly pathogenic (HPAI) forms arise. A strain of the H5N1 subtype, highly pathogenic to poultry, emerged in South East Asia in 2003, spreading to Russia and Eastern Europe in late 2005. This HPAI causes very high levels of mortality in poultry, and millions of birds have since died or been slaughtered, with significant economic impacts for these developing countries. H5N1 can also infect people, but to date less than a hundred have died, and the virus does not appear to spread between humans. However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has warned that if H5N1 re-assorts with a human influenza virus, or mutates, it could lead to a human influenza pandemic, killing millions.

H5N1 has also killed wild birds, and migratory birds have been implicated in the spread of the disease, although evidence is lacking. Because the issues raised by the spread of H5N1 are of such high concern, understanding the possible role of wild birds in its spread has become a priority. Studies of bird movements across the EU have been initiated by the European Commission, using ringing data from across the region (including those gathered under the BTO/JNCC Partnership). Surveillance for AI in wild birds in the UK is underway, funded by Government. JNCC is advising on movements of migratory birds in international, European and national fora. Information from our partnership work with the BTO, WWT and RSPB, especially drawn from waterbird monitoring and ringing programmes, has proved vital.

Continued spread and presence of HPAI is of significant conservation concern. Not only could outbreaks cause high mortality in wild birds, but authorities in some countries have culled wild birds in an attempt to



European Pochard © Paul Hobson/naturepl.com

control the disease, despite statements from the WHO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Organisation for Animal Health that such actions are ineffective and ill-advised (since it may result in dispersion of infected birds).

Recently, JNCC has worked with the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, and to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) to formalise international statements outlining desirable collaborations, identifying key research needs and re-affirming that culling of wild birds is not an appropriate control response for H5N1.

To view JNCC's position statement on Avian Influenza visit:

www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3519

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Fossil mammals and birds, before the Ice Age

Mammals and birds are one of the most conspicuous parts of the modern fauna, but in evolutionary terms, they are relative newcomers to life on Earth. Nevertheless, we know that these groups have a long geological history in Britain, because our fossil record provides rare remains of ancient mammals and birds, which have helped us to understand their evolution and the environments in which they lived. Our mammal ancestors – the early mammals – originated in the Triassic Period, part of the Mesozoic Era, over 225 million years (Ma) ago, and the first birds arose in the Jurassic Period, over 150 Ma. A new book, published by JNCC, charts the evolution of early mammals and birds, as represented by the sites in Britain that have yielded important fossils. *British Mesozoic and Tertiary Mammals and Birds of Great Britain* is volume number 32 in the Geological Conservation Review Series, which describes Britain's finest geological sites. It will be followed by a book on Pleistocene vertebrates ('Ice Age' faunas, such as mammoths and woolly rhinos) this year.

MJ Benton, E Cook and JJ Hooker
'British Mesozoic and Tertiary Mammals and Birds of Great Britain'
ISBN 1 86107 480 8
Price £55.

For further details about the GCR project, visit

www.jncc.gov.uk/earthheritage

By registering a pre-publication order with JNCC's distributors, a saving of up to 20% can be made on forthcoming GCR titles – for details, and ordering information, contact NHBS Ltd www.nhbs.com

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MESHing together

MESH partners attend an intercalibration workshop in Brest, France

In September 2005, the JNCC Marine Habitats Team was invited to attend an intercalibration workshop organised by Ifremer, our French



Workshop participants about to board the *Survex* shallow water survey vessel.

partner in the Mapping European Seabed Habitats (MESH) project. The workshop aimed to test methods for processing and interpreting data from different mapping techniques among the MESH partners who work in intertidal and shallow water areas. The meeting gathered 27 researchers from the MESH partnership, plus three participants from outside the partnership.

The agenda was designed to discuss mapping strategies frequently used by the seabed mapping community, followed by detailed discussions in small working groups on a specific theme. The working groups trialled processing visible remote sensing and acoustic datasets, using a variety of tools. There was also a fieldwork element to the workshop: participants explored a test site at Les Abers in North Brittany during a one-day field trip to gain an understanding of the different types

of seabed habitats encountered in rocky shore environments. Some participants enjoyed a short trip on a local, shallow survey vessel, equipped with a variety of remote sensing acoustic instruments, to look at the shallow sub-tidal seabed habitats.

In addition to the working elements, Ifremer laid on a series of extremely convivial social events, including a dinner cruise around the huge natural harbour of Brest that offered some dramatic sunset views. These social events enabled partners to really improve working relationships and thus benefit from the transnational nature of the MESH project.

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Scottish seabirds starve

Widespread starvation of seabirds occurred in some of the UK's largest and most renowned colonies around Scotland's north-west coast. On St Kilda, at the UK's largest puffin colony, there was the unprecedented sight of puffin chicks starved to death in their burrows as their parents failed to find sufficient sandeels on which to feed them. Many other species in north-west Scotland suffered from a shortage of sandeels in 2005 and as a result, produced far fewer chicks than normal. These are just some of the findings published by JNCC in *UK Seabirds in 2005* - the second, annual stand-alone executive summary of the results of the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP); the full results will appear in *Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland*, published annually in May.

The breeding failures in north-west Scotland are unusual given that seabirds in this region have generally done much better than those along the North Sea coast of Britain, where in recent years, a presumed scarcity of sandeels culminated in 2004 with widespread starvation of chicks and the worst breeding season on record for many species in the Northern Isles and eastern Britain (see *Nature News* issue 10). However, in 2005, along the same stretches of coast, seabirds were generally more productive than in 2004, but the likely knock-on effect from 2004 was that there were few larger sandeels present in 2005 (those that hatched in 2004). It is thought that feeding on these fish allow adults to attain breeding condition in spring and that a scarcity of food combined with unusually cold weather in spring 2005 led to what was among the

latest breeding seasons on record. However, a late appearance of young sandeels meant that common guillemots and black-legged kittiwakes in Orkney and Shetland, that had suffered a disastrous season in 2004, were able to raise at least some chicks successfully (see Figure 1).



Partners in the SMP include the country nature conservation agencies, RSPB, The Seabird Group, Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group, CEH, BirdWatch Ireland and National Parks and Wildlife Service (Republic of Ireland).

UK seabirds in 2005 is available to download www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3627

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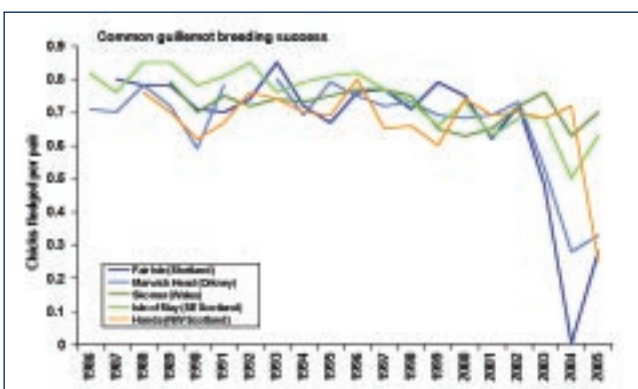


Figure 1. Breeding success of common guillemot at colonies throughout the UK, 1986-2005.

Involving People in *Geodiversity*

As a follow-up to the successful *Earth Heritage: World Heritage* conference hosted by JNCC in Dorset in September 2004, a short booklet entitled *Involving People in Geodiversity* has recently been published by JNCC and English Nature.

The booklet provides a summary of the discussions and conclusions of a two-day workshop held to mark the end of the conference, organised by English Nature, Dorset County Council and JNCC. The workshop addressed ways of promoting geodiversity and geological conservation, and provided delegates with the opportunity to share their experiences through the presentation and discussion of case studies and examples, and to recommend successful strategies to involve people in geodiversity.

The importance of geodiversity and its benefits to people are often overlooked. Not only does geodiversity offer practical benefits, through the provision of resources and materials such as coal, iron and building stone, it also shapes the landscape, influencing the habitats and species surrounding us and creating scenery and geological attractions. Geodiversity has an educational value, allowing us to understand the evolution and history of the planet, and to interpret present and future processes by reconstructing the past. It also has a cultural role to play, via its inspiration to art, and in providing a sense of place and identity for local communities.

The case studies and discussions demonstrated that much innovation is being used to interest and involve people in geodiversity, and that the audience can include everybody, from the general public, children, families, schools and local communities, to land owners, hotel managers, local councillors and politicians.



To make geodiversity appealing it needs to be interesting, relevant and accessible. Different approaches are also required, not just for different sites, but for different audiences.

Further information can be found in the *Involving People in Geodiversity* booklet. Aimed at a wide audience, the booklet provides practical examples to help those interested in involving people in geodiversity and is available free of charge.

Copies of the booklet can be obtained by contacting GeoConference@jncc.gov.uk, and further information can be found at:

www.geoconservation.com/ehwh/conference/ipg.htm

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