

Highland Community Planning Partnership

Community Planning Board – 3 June 2015

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	CPB 08/15

Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (2015-2020)

Summary

The Highland Environment Forum has reviewed and updated the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan, and it will be launched in late June. This report provides an update on progress made by the partners to deliver the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (2010-2013); and a summary of the new Highland BAP (2015-2020).

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) are tools in a partnership process that aims to protect and enhance biodiversity through working together to identify and prioritise issues, and then deliver projects to address them. BAPs also aim to inform local strategic planning decisions and policy development.
- 1.2 The Highland Council and partners started the Biodiversity Action Planning process in 2002. Local Biodiversity Groups were set up and Local BAPs produced for the Council's eight administrative areas. The first Highland-wide BAP was produced to tackle strategic and Highland-wide issues in 2006.
- 1.3 The Highland Environment Forum now leads on the development of the Highland BAP.

2. Progress Update

- 2.1 Appendix 1 provides an update on progress made since the last Highland BAP was produced in 2010.
- 2.2 Over half (13/24) of the projects proposed in the 2010 Highland BAP have been delivered or are underway and making good progress, with key successes being made under the headings of invasive non-native species and awareness-raising, for example:
 - Projects to control Rhododendron, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, Giant hogweed and American mink have been taking place across Highland. The Highland Invasive Species Forum helps partners to share good practice and plan future work to achieve the greatest effect.
 - The Highland Seashore Project has engaged with a number of different audiences, helping people to learn about our coastal wildlife through providing a wide variety of training and family-friendly events, in addition to new web-based resources and hands-on materials.

2.3 Some progress has been made on a further eight projects. The main factors limiting success were lack of available funding, lack of officer time to work up and agree detailed proposals with the lead partners and, in some instances, lack of commitment from the partners due to the pressures of other work. No progress was made on three projects, again primarily due to lack of officer time.

3. Preparing and Delivering the New Plan

3.1 This is the third Highland BAP to be produced. The Highland Environment Forum appointed a sub group to review the existing Plan, and draft and consult on a new Highland BAP covering the period from 2015-2020.

3.2 Priorities for future work have come from the previous plans, discussions with Forum members, and feedback from a Biodiversity Conference held in February 2014. A draft Plan was drawn up and consulted on twice, early last year with Forum members and last autumn/winter via a larger, web-based open consultation exercise.

3.3 The Highland Environment Forum partners will be largely responsible for delivering the new Highland BAP, and discussions are underway with the lead partners on the scope and detail of the proposed projects.

3.4 The new Plan will be amended to reflect discussions with lead partners, and at this meeting and the meeting of the Highland Council Planning, Development & Infrastructure Committee. It will be launched and made available via the Highland Biodiversity website www.highlandbiodiversity.com before the end of June.

4. Highland BAP

4.1 The new Highland BAP provides an update on progress made since 2002, identifies the key strategic biodiversity issues that exist in Highland today, and proposes a range of future actions or projects that the Highland Environment Forum partners would like to undertake or see delivered by 2020.

4.2 The Plan has six objectives reflecting the main strategic issues (sustainable management of habitats and species, development & infrastructure, local projects, awareness & knowledge, invasive non-native species, and biological recording & data management), and each has a chapter devoted to it. These chapters explore the issues in more detail, identify opportunities, provide an update on projects and initiatives that are already underway, and propose future works that the partners would like to undertake in the next five years.

4.3 The main actions have been drawn together in a table which will be used to stimulate and record action with the partners. This will form the basis of an annual report to the Highland Environment Forum and the Community Planning Partnership. The Plan's objectives and action table is at Appendix 2. (Please note, as discussions are still ongoing with lead partners this action table is not yet finalised.)

4.4 All the projects identified in the new Highland BAP are achievable, although some will require additional staff time and funding to make them happen. The Highland Environment Forum envisages that the Plan will help partners deliver their Biodiversity Duty, and its members will be invited to use it to help prioritise future work, both internally and in joint partnership ventures.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Biodiversity Action Planning process is delivering some great projects to benefit Highland's wildlife and people. There is scope for further work, and the new Highland BAP identifies a range of projects for the Highland Environment Forum partners to undertake in the next five year period.

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APPENDIX 1: BIODIVERSITY ACTION TABLE

The following table shows progress made by the Highland Environment Forum partners towards delivering the 2010-2013 Biodiversity Action Plan. The rows have been shaded green where the project has been delivered or significant progress made, yellow where targets have not been met but some progress made, and orange where no progress has been made. A column has been added to highlight gaps and future project ideas, and this was used to start to formulate ideas for the 2015-2020 Highland BAP.

Suggested Action	Target (Lead Partner)	Progress since 2010	Gap / Next Steps
1. Recording & Data Management 1.1 Project Facilitation	7 projects linking national partners with local biodiversity groups to be worked up by 2013 (<i>Scientific & Technical Advisory Group</i>)	STAG not currently operational but local projects have been delivered e.g. Bumblebee Conservation Trust is working with the Caithness Biodiversity Group, Scottish Agricultural College & land managers to improve habitats for great yellow bumblebees.	Lack of guidance on local priorities and possibilities for local action, lack of capacity in some local groups. – Potential to reform STAG & help make connections.
2. Local Biodiversity Groups 2.1 Capacity Building Programme	7 LBAP Project Plans, 7 funding bids, 21 events, 7 leaflets, 7 websites, 7 training courses by June 2012 (<i>HC & Local Biodiversity Groups</i>)	The Capacity Building Programme ran from 2009 to 2013 with funding from Leader, SNH, Highland Council and RSPB. The targets were met but local groups are still experiencing capacity issues.	Lack of capacity within some local groups, increased bureaucracy & difficulty in accessing small grants. - Potential for small grants scheme.
2.2 Volunteering	3 practical projects involving volunteers to be initiated by 2011, 7 local groups to have representation from local volunteers by end 2011 (<i>Local Biodiversity Groups</i>)	27 biodiversity projects were delivered by volunteers from the local biodiversity groups through the Capacity Building Programme. Volunteering Groups are represented on the Caithness and Easter Ross Biodiversity Groups. There are lots more volunteering groups in Highland that do valuable biodiversity work.	Lack of clarity on local volunteering opportunities & connection, ERBG is trying to address this and publicise opportunities locally. - Potential to extend to cover Highland, perhaps through HEF sub group.
3. Invasive Non-Native Species 3.1 Mapping Project	Database, maps & report to be delivered by March 2010 (<i>Invasive Species Forum</i>)	Project completed on time – Database, maps and Report held by Highland Council and used by Invasive Species Forum to prioritise future work.	Work complete, ISF meets regularly to discuss future priorities.

Suggested Action	Target (Lead Partner)	Progress since 2010	Gap / Next Steps
3.2 Giant Hogweed Control Co-ordinator	Co-ordinator post February 2010 – March 2012 (<i>Highland Council / SNH</i>)	Project began in 2009 and secured further funding from SNH and Highland Council to continue. Very positive results - in 2013 both the Nairn and Wick Rivers had control programmes in place, so all known areas of Giant Hogweed in Highland are being controlled.	Work ongoing, all areas under control & project extended to 2016 when we hope GH will cease to be a major issue in Highland.
3.3 Rhododendron Strategic Control Project	One-year project to start in Summer 2010, funding sought for extension (<i>Forestry Commission / SNH</i>)	The Highland Rhododendron Project employed a Project Officer from 2010-12, now the project continues without one. 14 Sols (Statement of Intent) for Rhododendron control were submitted to the Scotland Rural Development Programme by the time the scheme shut. The project has prioritised key areas of control and funded surveys to expedite future SRDP applications. FES Rhododendron Strategy was produced and significant clearance work carried out in Highland. NTS is running a plant swap initiative at Torridon, replacing ponticum with non-invasive ornamental rhododendrons, producing & selling rhododendron charcoal, & providing training & interpretation.	SRDP = only source of funding for private land Rhododendron clearance. Lack of action on roads & railways across Highland – potential reinfestation along linear routes. Lack of public support. - Need for further Rhododendron Project Officer to co-ordinate applications & road / railway action & raise awareness of issue. - Possible extension to NTS plant swap project (targeting cleared areas where Rhododendrons remain in gardens).
3.4 Invasive Species Apprentice - BTCV Natural Talent. (BTCV now The Conservation Volunteers TCV)	One-year apprentice placement starting 2010 (<i>Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust / British Trust for Conservation Volunteers</i>)	The first apprenticeship was very successful, so much so that the Cromarty Firth Fishery Trust appointed a second apprentice. RSPB also had a successful apprenticeship at Abernethy.	- Possibility for further apprenticeships elsewhere in Highland.

Suggested Action	Target (Lead Partner)	Progress since 2010	Gap / Next Steps
4. Biodiversity Awareness 4.1 Awareness Raising	Regularly updated website, 1 Forum event, 1 newsletter & 4 press releases per annum <i>(Highland Council)</i>	The website has been renewed, and continues to grow, news and events sections are regularly added (as time allows). Annual forum events are held in Inverness & Nairn and Easter Ross, and conferences / networking events are held each Spring. www.highlandbiodiversity.com	Lack of time to update website & run conferences & events. - Work currently undertaken by Highland Environment Network (HEN) as part of wider HEF contract, with input from Biodiversity Officers.
4.2 Nature Detectives	Primary School Booklet produced by June 2010, trialled in E Ross & if successful, rolled out to other Highland schools in 2011/12 <i>(Highland Council)</i>	Project delivered, the booklets are now being used in 38 Highland schools, and Highland Council is working on a Gaelic version.	Lack of time – Gaelic version delayed & no follow-up in schools. - Potential for follow-up project using booklet & web-based resources, needs dedicated support from HC Care & Learning Service.
4.3 School Biodiversity Resources	1 Local Biodiversity Group to contact & work with a High School biology or geography teacher per annum <i>(Local Biodiversity Groups)</i>	No progress by Local Biodiversity Groups but several HEF partners work with schools (e.g. Council Rangers, RSPB, RAFTS & Wildthings) and there is a lot of information available on various websites (e.g. Grounds for Learning, Woodland Trust nature detectives).	Difficulty in contacting & liaising with busy Teachers. - Potential for project linking resources with teachers (little & often) & maintaining support for HC Rangers in schools.
4.4 Marine Sub Group	Presentation to the 2010 Highland Biodiversity Forum <i>(Environmental Research Institute)</i>	Delivered, the 2011 Forum focused on marine biodiversity, and a presentation on underwater biodiversity was given to the first meeting of the expanded Highland Environment Forum in Sept 2013.	Marine Project Group meets twice annually to deliver Seashore Project, wider issues (e.g. seabed habitat loss) not covered.

Suggested Action	Target (Lead Partner)	Progress since 2010	Gap / Next Steps
4.5 Marine Biodiversity Project	Marine Awareness Raising Project to be presented to the Highland Biodiversity Partnership in December 2010 (<i>Marine Project Group</i>)	Highland Seashore Project running 2013-2015 delivering multiple outputs (training, resources, surveyors network, awareness-raising materials & events, roadshow, arts & cultural heritage festival, schools competition).	Seashore project, underwater & offshore issues not covered. - Great potential for Highland Marine Project building on successes of Seashore Project.
4.6 Soil Biodiversity	Newsletter & website article, press release, presentation at 2011 Forum (<i>Highland Biodiversity Partnership</i>)	28 events were held by local biodiversity groups and partners as part of the Highland Soil Biodiversity Festival (2012). FCS completed soil map digitisation and created a Soil GIS Data model to enhance data accessibility.	Events held but turnout was low & didn't target land managers. - Potential project to raise awareness of soil-related issues with land managers.
5. Planning, Building & Infrastructure 5.1 Road Verge Biodiversity Project	Joint project to be agreed in 2010 (<i>Highland Council / Transerv (now BEAR Scotland)</i>)	Following a successful trial in Caithness, Highland Council and BEAR Scotland started to incorporate wildflower friendly mowing regimes where operational constraints allow. Guidance was produced for tractor drivers, and nearly 30 roadside sites were identified by the public for their biodiversity value.	Staff & organisational changes have delayed action, Council now not cutting verges in rural areas. - Need for verge project to encourage e.g. autumn cut to reduce invasive weeds (e.g. docks, creeping thistle).
5.2 Biodiversity & Planning Guidance & Training	European Protected Species Guidance Note launched early 2010, standard planning conditions produced with training for planners by end 2010 (<i>Highland Council</i>)	EPS Supplementary Guidance produced in 2011, formally adopted into the Highland-wide Development Plan in March 2013. Planners training on EPS and biodiversity has run annually since 2011.	- Potential for further co-ordinated training. - Potential for Green Network biodiversity project.
6. Sustainable Use 6.1 Local Habitats & Species Priorities Lists	7 lists agreed & guidance available by end 2010, training for potential applicants, agents & case officers in 2011 (<i>Management Sub Group</i>)	After discussion it was agreed that producing species lists would only complicate the situation. RSPB & SNH provided training for agents & case officers on management for waders.	The next stage of the SRDP will run from 2015-2020, uncertainty as to detail and levels of funding available. - Potential awareness raising project for land managers on SRDP biodiversity options.

Suggested Action	Target (Lead Partner)	Progress since 2010	Gap / Next Steps
6.2 Developing Links Between Land Managers & Conservationists	7 meetings / guided walks & 7 articles in journals / newsletters over the 2011 / 2012 period (<i>Highland Biodiversity Partnership</i>)	No progress by HBP but SNH has produced lots of materials aimed at this user group ¹ . RSPB's Volunteer & Farm Alliance project was running for number of years in Highland (now closed). FCS published UK Forestry Standard and Guidelines on Water & Soil, Biodiversity and Climate Change.	- Potential for series of training events building on existing initiatives to raise awareness of good practice & SRDP / low cost / no cost options for agents & land managers?
6.3 Native Woodland Project	Project worked up and funding identified by 2012 (<i>Management Sub Group</i>)	No progress. FCS completed the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland, Highland Report produced & is available on FC website.	Desire to start the Atlantic Hazelwoods Project in Highland (Aygyll project running for 7 years) - Start Highland Hazelwoods Project on sites identified by FCS.
6.4 Deer Management	Presentation & discussion at 2010 Partnership meeting (<i>Deer Commission Scotland (now SNH)</i>)	Deer Legislation approved in Parliament under WANE bill. SNH published Code of Practice on Deer Management & concluded Review of Wild Deer – a National Approach which sets priorities for deer management in next 5 years. SG Rural Affairs Committee carried out review of deer management arrangements and produced a series of recommendations.	This issue needs to be tackled at a Scottish level (through Government, SNH) and a local level (through Deer Management Groups & their Deer Management Plans) - No clear role for Highland BAP here.
6.5 Uncontrolled Muirburning	Presentation to 2011 Forum. Newsletter & website article, press release (<i>Highland Fire & Rescue Service</i>)	Presentations given to the Highland Biodiversity Partnership and Highland Environment Forum by Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, but no progress made on issue of uncontrolled muirburning & accidental wildfires.	Wildfires seem to be increasing in number and extent across Highland, lack of awareness of biodiversity impacts amongst land managers. - Awareness raising project with land managers.

¹ Further information is at www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/

Suggested Action	Target (Lead Partner)	Progress since 2010	Gap / Next Steps
6.6 Wild Harvesting PhD	Universities to be contacted by end 2010 with a view to student starting work in 2011/12 <i>(Management Sub Group)</i>	No progress due to lack of interest from partners & lack of officer time to pursue potential leads, but interest (and demand) for wild foods continues to increase.	Project on hold due to lack of interest & lead partner.
7. Local Plant Sources 7.1 Highland Wildflower Nursery	Site identified by Spring 2010, Business Plan written by the end of 2010, Nursery started in 2011 <i>(British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (now The Conservation Volunteers))</i>	Feasibility study undertaken showing the value of the proposal, the need for it and its great potential. TCV took on this project but, despite their best efforts, failed to secure funding. The Caithness Biodiversity Group operates a wildflower nursery with Key Community Supports in Thurso (Planting the Future Project). Tree nurseries are operating at Little Assynt (Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Project) and Kincaig & Fort Augustus (Highland Aspen Group).	Although the Highland proposal fell through there are local initiatives around the Highlands. - Support local initiatives and help them to deliver wildflower and tree nursery projects at that scale, no potential for Highland-wide approach.
8. Local Nature Reserves 8.1 LNRs	1 Local Nature Reserve (or equivalent e.g. community woodland) to be created per annum <i>(Highland Biodiversity Partnership)</i>	Guidance and support is available from the Council Biodiversity Officers. Meetings have taken place with 2 interested groups, but designation relies on community groups wishing to designate their local area and so far, Merkinch remains the only LNR in Highland.	Guidance & support is available for any potential LNR groups online & via Biodiversity Officers. - No interest from community groups so project dropped.
8.2 Community Gardens	List to be drawn up by end 2010, future Forum to focus on gardening for wildlife in communities <i>(Highland Biodiversity Partnership)</i>	No progress Sunny Lochaber United Gardeners (SLUG): FES purchased an area of land by Fort William to allow them to provide land and facilities to enable the local community to enjoy gardening, grow their own produce, make friends and get fit.	- Potential for a pan-Highland Wildlife Gardening Project funded by HEF partners & led by Local Biodiversity Groups with links to local allotment & gardening groups. Could have events, competitions & garden visits.

Appendix 2: Highland Biodiversity Action Plan

2015-2020

Foreword

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) are tools in a process that aims to protect and enhance biodiversity through working together to identify and prioritise issues, and then deliver projects to address them. They also aim to influence local strategic planning decisions and policy development.

This Highland Biodiversity Action Plan was drawn up by the Highland Biodiversity Working Group on behalf of the Highland Environment Forum (HEF). HEF is made up of representatives from nearly 50 organisations, groups and bodies that have come together to foster and co-ordinate environmental activity across Highland as part of the Community Planning Partnership. In Autumn 2013 HEF replaced the Highland Biodiversity Partnership as the primary forum for discussing strategic biodiversity issues across Highland, and its members are responsible for delivering this Plan.

Highland Council and partners started this process back in 2002. Local BAPs were produced for the Council's eight administrative areas, and the first Highland-wide BAP was produced in 2006. Badenoch & Strathspey was not included in this process as it is already covered by the Cairngorms Biodiversity Action Plan, now 'Cairngorms Nature', which is administered through the National Park Authority. The Park Authority is represented on the Highland Environment Forum and has fed into the development of this Plan.

This is the third Highland Biodiversity Action Plan. It provides an update on progress made since 2002, identifies the key strategic biodiversity issues that exist in Highland today, and proposes a range of future actions or projects that the Highland Environment Forum would like to undertake by 2020.

Highland BAP Objectives

- To encourage and promote land management for biodiversity.
- To help planners, developers and land managers to take biodiversity into account during building and maintenance works.
- To encourage and help communities, local groups and volunteers to carry out practical biodiversity projects.
- To raise awareness of biodiversity and related issues, and help children and young people to learn about local nature and wildlife.
- To tackle invasive non-native species by undertaking practical projects and spreading good practice.
- To improve the management and sharing of biological records, and encourage the collection of new records, specifically targeting under-recorded species.

Priority Projects for 2015-2020

The projects identified in the new Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (2015-2020) have been brought together in the following table. They are grouped under the six broad objectives of the plan, and listed according to the issues identified under each objective. A list of key partners is suggested, with the lead partners identified in bold text. Initial progress towards delivering the projects is shown where appropriate in the final column, and this will be updated on an annual basis so that progress made by the Highland Environment Forum partners towards delivering this Highland BAP can be easily reported and viewed at a glance.

The Plan is still in draft format, and the exact wording of the project proposals will be agreed with the lead partners before it is launched.

Action / Project Title & Rationale	Suggested Partners	Project proposals	Progress (May 15)
SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT			
Issues: Lack of funding & advice / Low native woodland cover / Need for peatland restoration / High deer numbers / Wildlife crime / Habitat destruction by wildfires / Litter & pollution / Seabed habitat loss / Fish farming impacts on wild fish / Species issues			
KNOWLEDGE SHARING & BEST PRACTICE			
<p>1. Promote Land Management for Wildlife</p> <p>The new Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) will support improved land management for wildlife but, out-with the Cairngorms National Park, there is little encouragement and support for farmers, crofters and land managers wishing to maximise the benefit of the SRDP & low cost / no cost options to help them manage their ground for wildlife.</p> <p>The SRDP was reviewed and re-launched in early 2015. There is an opportunity to raise awareness of its new options amongst land managers, agents and case officers to maximise the benefit to Highland biodiversity and the wider ecosystem services that land managers provide.</p>	<p>1.1 Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, CNPA, Highland Council, NFUS, Crofters Commission, SCF, SLE, RAFTS, RSPB, Trees for Life, Scotland's Rural College, Lantra, James Hutton Institute, ICF, GWCT, BASC, BBCT</p> <p>1.2 Above partners</p> <p>1.3 Scottish Wildlife Estates, Local Biodiversity Groups, CNPA, SNH, TfL, SWT, BBCT</p>	<p>1.1 Organise a series of training events for land managers, agents and case officers to raise awareness of good practice and SRDP / low costs / no cost options. This would build on existing initiatives such as the Cairngorms National Park Authority's land management support, encourage more monitoring and dissemination of results, and provide demonstration sites and case studies as well as distributing guidance and codes of good practice.</p> <p>1.2 Investigate the possibility of using the Monitor Farms Programme to help a farm improve its management for biodiversity, making the most of grants and demonstrating the economic and environmental results to land managers, agents and agency staff.</p> <p>1.3 Provide opportunities for wildlife and biodiversity groups to work with estates on citizen science or habitat management projects arising from the Wildlife Estates Scotland initiative.</p>	

<p>2. Develop & Trial the Ecosystem Approach Despite lots of discussion & several landscape-scale projects there are still no real working examples of the Ecosystem Approach.</p>	<p>2.1 Highland Council, HEF partners 2.2 University of the Highlands & Islands, HC, SNH, FCS, SEPA, THC, SGRPID, RAFTS, TfL, SLE, NFUS, SCF, RSPB, SGA, CNPA, CALL</p>	<p>2.1 Establish an online database of landscape-scale projects in Highland, and facilitate opportunities for knowledge sharing and joint working. 2.2 Develop a demonstration project to trial the Ecosystem Approach on a Highland catchment, and convey the results to decision makers at Highland, Scottish and European levels, linking with other studies elsewhere in the UK and Europe.</p>	
<p>NATIVE WOODLAND EXPANSION</p>			
<p>3. Develop the Atlantic Hazelwoods Project in West Highland This project is improving the management of hazel woods in Argyll & Bute, but as yet no sites have been taken forward in Highland.</p>	<p>SNH, FCS, SCF, SLE, Plantlife, CALL</p>	<p>3.1 Improve the management of hazel woods in Highland through the Atlantic Hazelwoods Project. Forestry Commission Scotland has identified a number of woods that could be a starter for this project.</p>	
<p>4. The Lonesome Pine (& other species) – Identify, protect & expand isolated pockets of woodland Large areas of Highland remain devoid of trees due to historical deforestation and high deer numbers, but there are isolated pockets that could provide a seed source for future regeneration.</p>	<p>4.1 Forestry Commission Scotland, HBRG, Local Biodiversity Groups, TfL, OU iSpot 4.2 Forestry Commission Scotland, SNH, SLE, JMT, NTS, RSPB, TfL 4.3 Trees for Life, partners listed above</p>	<p>4.1 Identify isolated patches of trees across Highland – this could involve a citizen science element, linking in with existing projects such as iSpot. 4.2 Agree ways to protect and expand isolated patches of trees, with the ambition of creating connecting corridors for wildlife. 4.3 Deliver a trial project, enabling volunteers to work with local nurseries to collect seed and grow on / plant out local provenance trees to enhance regeneration.</p>	
<p>5. Expand Riparian Woodlands Riparian woodlands are very beneficial to biodiversity but usually require long expanses of fencing to become established.</p>	<p>RAFTS, FCS, TfL, CNPA, SNH, SEPA</p>	<p>5.1 Encourage woodland regeneration and planting on the banks of rivers and streams across Highland. This project fits in with current initiatives such as the Pearls in Peril Project, and could link in with the Lonesome Pine (& other species) in terms of mapping seed sources along rivers & streams.</p>	

<p>6. Develop Natural Treelines</p> <p>Transitional woodland is an important habitat that is missing from the Highlands. The idea is to encourage native woodland at low density that is controlled largely by 'natural' factors - climate in the case of mountains and hydrology/paludification in the case of bogs. There are concerns about deer numbers and expanding woodland onto heaths & bogs, but the biodiversity benefits are likely to be great.</p>	<p>6.1 Forestry Commission Scotland, SNH, TfL, NTS, CNPA, JMT, Woodland Trust, Highland Birchwoods, RSPB, Highland Council</p> <p>6.2 Partners listed above, lead partner to be identified through 6.1</p>	<p>6.1 Identify potential sites and establish transitional woodlands through woodland expansion up hills and onto bogs.</p> <p>6.2 Demonstrate the value & management requirements of transitional woodlands on bogs through a trial project.</p> <p>This approach is already underway at several mountain sites in the Cairngorms National Park, Glen Affric etc. and this project would build on the Highland Birchwoods Montane Scrub Project. However, there are currently no initiatives to develop transitional woodland onto bogs.</p>	
PEATLAND RESTORATION			
<p>7. Restore Peatlands across Highland</p> <p>Peatland restoration is taking place in Caithness & Sutherland through the Flow to the Future Project and in the Cairngorms with Green Stimulus funding, but there are other areas in Highland that need assistance.</p>	<p>SNH, RSPB, FCS, CNPA</p>	<p>7.1 Identify sites elsewhere in Highland that would be suitable for drain blocking and tree removal, and draw together a funding bid.</p> <p>This work would be influenced by the outcome of the National Peatland Action Plan consultation. Recently commissioned research identified some priority areas e.g. Monadhliaths.</p>	
<p>8. Survey In-bye Land adjacent to Peatlands</p> <p>A suggestion from the Flows to the Future Project.</p>	<p>SNH, RSPB, other Peatland Partnership members</p>	<p>8.1 Conduct a survey of in-bye land adjacent to the peatlands of Caithness & Sutherland to ascertain its value for wildlife, identify future management requirements and recommend ways of helping farmers and crofters to continue to manage this land for wildlife.</p>	
DEER MANAGEMENT			
<p>This issue is being addressed though the work of SNH and the Deer Management Groups, no further role identified for HEF partners.</p>	<p>SNH</p>	<p>Although no additional role identified for HEF, SNH to report progress on deer management in Highland to HEF at regular intervals.</p>	
WILDLIFE CRIME & WILDFIRES			

<p>9. Set up a Highland PAW Group Wildlife Crime is being addressed nationally through PAW Scotland, but local groups can be established under this initiative to tackle local issues.</p>	<p>Police Scotland, SNH, RSPB, SLE, other HEF partners</p>	<p>9.1 Establish a Highland Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Group to address local concerns and help with early communication, information sharing, awareness raising and publicity management.ⁱ</p>	
<p>10. Raise Awareness of Wildfires & Associated Damage to Habitats & Species Wildfires, often resulting from deliberate and uncontrolled burning of heather moorland, are causing damage to moorland and mountain habitats and species.</p>	<p>Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, SNH, DMGs, Scottish Gamekeepers Association, North Highland College, SLE, Crofters Commission, SCF</p>	<p>10.1 Work with gamekeepers, crofters and other land managers to raise awareness of whether or not burning is needed, appropriate muirburning practices, wildfires and the likely impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems. Promote the Muirburn Code through case studies & demonstration sites, and encourage joint working to tackle wildfires.</p>	
<p>MARINE ISSUES</p>			
<p>11. Marine Litter Project Although there are national campaigns and local beach clean-ups, marine litter is still increasing on Highland beaches.</p>	<p>Highland Council, Moray Firth Partnership, MCS, marine industries</p>	<p>11.1 Raise awareness of litter and its devastating impact on marine wildlife through promoting national campaigns, and improve waste collection facilities at harbours and ports.</p>	
<p>12. Improve Protection for Seabed Habitats through Marine Protected Area discussions Inshore trawling & dredging are destroying seabed habitats, and there are concerns that the Marine Protected Area designations will not fully address this problem.</p>	<p>HEF Partners, Highland Council, local communities, fishing groups</p>	<p>12.1 Lobby the Scottish Government to further investigate inshore fisheries management measures to increase the number and extent of areas that are closed to mobile fishing gear. Highland Council raised these issues in recent MPA consultations, HEF members could focus on this issue at a future meeting and add their voice to the discussions.</p>	<p>HEF's Autumn 2015 meeting is to focus on marine issues.</p>
<p>13. Address Fish Farming Concerns through Forward Planning for Aquaculture Several Local BAPs in North & West Highland identified impacts from aquaculture on wild salmonids & related species as a concern.</p>	<p>HEF partners, Highland Council</p>	<p>13.1 Contribute to the consultations on the forthcoming Highland Aquaculture Strategy. Highland Council is planning to consult on the Aquaculture Strategy in early 2015, HEF members could focus on this issue at a future meeting and add their voice to the discussions.</p>	<p>HEF's Autumn 2015 meeting is to focus on marine issues.</p>
<p>SPECIES FOCUSED PROJECTS</p>			

<p>14. Reintroduce Species to the Highlands Beavers have been successfully reintroduced into Argyll, and it is anticipated that this will be extended to Highland catchments in 2015. Highland is one of the most likely locations for the reintroduction of other species.</p>	<p>14.1 SNH, RAFTS, SEPA, SLE, TfL, SWT 14.2 HEF partners</p>	<p>14.1 Contribute to discussions on where reintroductions could take place and if they will be allowed, or if beaver will just be left to colonise naturally from the Tay catchment and the official release site in Argyll. 14.2 Encourage research into the reintroduction of other species e.g. lynx.</p>	
<p>DEVELOPMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE Issues: Lack of sensitivity in road construction & maintenance / Lack of ecological advice to planners / Development pressures (inc. Renewable installations)</p>			
<p>CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC SPACES FOR WILDLIFE</p>			
<p>15. Manage Road Verges for Wildlife Road verges provide a valuable habitat for wildflowers, invertebrates and other wildlife, if the flowers are allowed to set seeds. A Road Verge Project was trialled in Caithness with some success.</p>	<p>Highland Council, Transport Scotland, BEAR Scotland, Local Biodiversity Groups, Plantlife, BBCT</p>	<p>15.1 Liaise with and train Council, BEAR Scotland and contractors' staff in appropriate verge management for wildlife, and raise awareness of the benefits of 'untidy' verges in the countryside amongst the general public. Cab notes have been prepared to help tractor drivers identify and avoid cutting biodiverse verges.</p>	<p>In late 2014, HC agreed to reduce verge mowing to a single autumn cut in rural areas (outwith 30mph restrictions).</p>
<p>16. Provide Training in Wildflower Meadow Creation & Management There is interest in creating wildflower meadows as an alternative to mown grass in public spaces.</p>	<p>Highland Council, UHI, SNH, NTS, BBCT, Flora Locale, Scotia Seeds, Plantlife</p>	<p>16.1 Run a training course for Council grounds staff and community groups wishing to create and manage wildflower meadows, perhaps linking in with land management courses and a demonstration site. Council Rangers would be ideally placed to deliver this project.</p>	
<p>BIODIVERSITY INPUT TO LOCAL PLANS & DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE</p>			

<p>17. Improve Ecological Input to the Local Planning Process (including Green Networks and Biodiversity Offsetting)</p> <p>There was considerable work on green networks to prepare supplementary guidance to the Highland wide Local Development Plan, but further work is needed to turn this into a reality on the ground.</p> <p>Biodiversity offsetting requires land where habitat creation or management can offset the loss of biodiversity on a development site. Some Local Authorities are developing this approach and some renewables developments are offsetting on land owned by the developer, but there is currently no agreement or mechanism for biodiversity offsetting in Highland.</p>	<p>17.1 Highland Council, SNH, RSPB, SWT, Local Biodiversity Groups</p> <p>17.2 Highland Council, SNH, RSPB, SWT, BBCT, Local Biodiversity Groups</p> <p>17.3 Highland Council, SNH, RSPB, other HEF partners, developers</p>	<p>17.1 Work more closely with the Council planners over the Highland-wide Local Development Plan and Area Plans, and ensure that biodiversity offsetting and green networks are taken forward through the development planning process.</p> <p>17.2 Develop green networks within the larger settlements and in the A96 corridor and Inner Moray Firth through the planning process.</p> <p>17.3 Identify a mechanism for biodiversity offsetting in Highland. If a suitable mechanism can be agreed, identify potential sites and habitat improvements, and undertake a Highland pilot project.</p> <p>The Green Networks would seem obvious locations for local offsetting. It is hoped that improved biodiversity input to local plans, developing green networks and, in time, biodiversity offsetting will address development pressures on wildlife in expanding areas.</p>	
<p>18. SuDS Graduate Internship</p> <p>Sustainable Drainage Systems are a sequence of water management practices and facilities designed to drain surface water more sustainably. They often involve ponds, and these could have higher biodiversity value.</p>	<p>Highland Council, SNH</p>	<p>18.1 Employ an officer through the graduate internship programme within Highland Council to assess SuDS ponds in the A96 corridor as part of the Green Network, create local best practice guidance, and see how future ponds in developments can be designed and sited to maximise their benefit to wildlife and residents.</p>	<p>SuDS Officer in post January 2015 (1 year project)</p>
ADDRESSING CONCERNS OVER RENEWABLES INSTALLATIONS			
<p>19. Monadhliath Golden Eagle Project</p> <p>A number of wind farms have been granted planning permission in the Monadhliaths, as well as elsewhere in Highland, resulting in increased pressures on eagles and other species of birds.</p>	<p>19.1 SSE, Natural Research, HC, SNH, RSPB, Raptor Study Group, Estates & developers</p> <p>19.2 Highland Council, DIGG, partners listed above</p>	<p>19.1 Employ a Golden Eagle Officer to survey and monitor eagle populations, work with land managers and help raise awareness of eagle issues in the Monadhliaths.</p> <p>19.2 As further windfarm applications go through the planning process, encourage other developers to contribute to this work and establish similar projects elsewhere in Highland.</p>	<p>Eagle Officer in post January 2015.</p>

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS			
Issues: Lack of capacity within Local Biodiversity Groups / Lack of co-ordinated support for volunteers / Lack of easily accessible funding for small projects			
CAPACITY BUILDING			
<p>20. Local Biodiversity Action Plans</p> <p>National agencies are looking to local groups to deliver regional and national biodiversity objectives, but there is no easily accessible fund or support to help them undertake this.</p> <p>The Highland LBAPs are all over ten years old, and the local groups do not have the capacity to update them.</p>	<p>20.1 Highland Environment Forum, Highland Council, SNH, other HEF partners, Local Biodiversity Groups</p> <p>20.2 Highland Environment Forum (local partners)</p>	<p>20.1 Help local groups to identify current local priorities, and work up projects which address them.</p> <p>20.2 Help local groups to secure funding and deliver these projects. Mentoring project leaders could be one way to address the lack of capacity.</p>	<p>3 Groups received help to update their LBAPs in 2013-15, but further work is required to develop projects in these areas.</p>
SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERING			
<p>21. Improve Volunteering Information</p> <p>Several Local Biodiversity Groups have identified a need to improve links between volunteering projects and volunteers.</p>	<p>Highland Environment Forum, THC, SNH, TCV, RAFTS, FCS, RSPB, NTS, TfL, TSI, CVS</p>	<p>21.1 Improve linkages between volunteering groups and opportunities, bringing together groups with suggestions for local projects, and making opportunities and contacts more visible to the public as well as improving the links with health and social enterprises.</p>	<p>Environmental Volunteering Conference held March 2015</p>
<p>22. Highland Green Gyms</p> <p>There is growing recognition of the link between biodiversity & health, and support for practical projects involving volunteers.</p>	<p>The Conservation Volunteers, Highland Council, Local Biodiversity Groups, TfL, BBCT</p>	<p>22.1 Encourage volunteering projects such as Green Gyms, linking biodiversity and health, with input from the Local Biodiversity Groups and Council Rangers and funding from the Landfill Communities Fund.</p>	<p>Funding applications submitted Spring 2015, projects planned 2015/16</p>
FUNDING FOR SMALL PROJECTS			
<p>23. Urban Biodiversity Project</p> <p>Brownfield sites often provide valuable wild plants for insects and habitats for small mammals & birds. There is a need to identify good sites as well as provide advice on the potential for improvements on public buildings & sites in urban areas.</p>	<p>Local Biodiversity Groups, Highland Council, SWT, other HEF partners</p>	<p>23.1 Identify local brownfield sites that are good for wildlife, as well as public buildings where nest boxes for swifts, bats etc. could be put. Educate public officers as to the benefits of such actions.</p> <p>This project could be carried out by volunteers from the Local Biodiversity Groups, with support from Highland Council officers.</p>	

<p>24. Wildlife Gardening Project</p> <p>There is greater interest in growing food and demand for allotments. Some local groups have identified the potential to work with new audiences through a gardening project, and the Caithness Biodiversity Group has started a similar project in Thurso.</p>	<p>Local Biodiversity Groups, Plantlife, BBCT, Highland Council, SNH, RSPB, other HEF partners, Gardening Groups, Garden Centres & Nurseries</p>	<p>24.1 Develop links with local allotment and gardening groups, and provide advice on gardening for wildlife.</p> <p>24.2 Run a pan-Highland Wildlife Gardening Project with events, competitions & garden visits, funded by HEF partners & led by the Local Biodiversity Groups.</p>	
<p>AWARENESS & KNOWLEDGE Issues: Lack of interest & awareness of nature & wildlife generally / amongst children & young people / in seashore & marine biodiversity</p>			
<p>RAISING AWARENESS GENERALLY</p>			
<p>25. Nature Connections</p> <p>Local wildlife knowledge is being lost due to our lack of connection with the natural world.</p> <p>Older members of the community and those involved in managing the land often have a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the natural world, and there could be great benefit in helping others to learn from them.</p>	<p>Local Biodiversity Groups, Highland Council, SNH, SGA, OU iSpot</p>	<p>25.1 Run a nature project for all ages to help communities to learn from their elderly members.</p>	
<p>RAISING AWARENESS WITH CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE</p>			
<p>26. Eco Schools Co-Ordinator</p> <p>The Eco Schools programme lost its officer support, and some Highland schools are losing their green flag status.</p> <p>The Council Rangers do a wonderful job raising awareness of wildlife and green issues in local schools, but there is no central officer support to help and encourage schools to continue with this programme.</p>	<p>Highland Council, HEF partners</p>	<p>26.1 Employ a dedicated volunteer or member of staff to work closely with Teachers and Rangers, helping Schools to re-engage with the Eco Schools Programme and other green initiatives such as the John Muir Award, and to access resources and support for wildlife-related work as they need it.</p>	
<p>RAISING AWARENESS OF MARINE BIODIVERSITY</p>			

<p>27. Marine Heritage Project</p> <p>The Highland Seashore Biodiversity Project identified a tremendous interest in seashore wildlife, and there is a desire to continue the momentum established through this Project and find out more through further marine events.</p>	<p>Highland Environment Forum, Highland Council, SNH, MCS, SEPA, Moray Firth Partnership, Museums, Fishing Groups, RAFTS, Crown Estate</p>	<p>27.1 Secure funding for and run a second marine awareness raising project, focusing on Highland’s coastal heritage and traditional links with the sea.</p> <p>A funding bid was worked up for a Wester Ross Herring Rediscovery Project which would improve our understanding of the life cycle and spawning grounds, and teach children about marine biology and our cultural links with herring fishing. It was thought this would be better delivered across Highland, and this could form a major part of any Highland Marine Heritage Project.</p>	
<p>INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES Issues: Lack of long term funding / Difficulties of scale / Lack of guidance & support / New INNS threats</p>			
<p>FUNDING & SUPPORT FOR INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES PROJECTS</p>			
<p>28. Highland Rhododendron Project</p> <p><i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> is a major threat to biodiversity. The first Highland Rhododendron Project co-ordinated funding applications & clearance work to give eradication projects the best chance of success, but this has ended.</p>	<p>Invasive Species Forum partners</p>	<p>28.1 Secure funding for and employ a further Rhododendron Project Officer to co-ordinate applications to the new SRDP within the four priority areas identified by the last project, instigate action on road and railway verges, facilitate community surveillance of ‘cleared’ areas (to stop recolonisation), and secure public support for Rhododendron removal.</p>	
<p>29. Invasive Non-Native Species Projects</p> <p>The Highland Invasive Species Forum identified and prioritised the main invasive non-native species threatening Highland Biodiversity as <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>, American mink, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam. Rhododendron, mink and giant hogweed are being tackled through various projects, but there is a need for additional work on Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam, and there are other locally important threats such as Salmonberry in Caithness.</p>	<p>29.1 Invasive Species Forum, RAFTS, TCV, NTS, Highland Council, SNH, HBRG, local biodiversity groups 29.2 Partners listed above 29.3 Local Biodiversity Group members, TCV, Partners listed above</p>	<p>29.1 Run a project to train volunteers and survey urban areas for invasive non-native species. This would inform future co-ordinated control programmes.</p> <p>29.2 Control / eradicate problem species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and Salmonberry, particularly in urban areas and along road verges and streams where these species escape from gardens.</p> <p>29.3 Replicate the TCV Apprenticeship Programme, which proved a very effective way of co-ordinating INNS projects on the Cromarty Firth, on other Highland catchments.</p>	

DEALING WITH NEW INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES THREATS			
<p>30. Rapid Response Pathway More and new INNS are being found throughout Highland, and there is a need to clarify reporting procedures & action.</p>	<p>Invasive Species Forum partners</p>	<p>30.1 Identify and agree clear rapid response pathways for new species that may start to colonise, as well as raise awareness amongst the general public.</p>	
BIOLOGICAL RECORDING & DATA MANAGEMENT			
Issues: Lack of information / Lack of capacity to manage biological records / Data capture			
BIOLOGICAL INFORMATION			
<p>31. Specialist Species Advice The Local Biodiversity Groups are keen to undertake species related projects, and need specialist advice.</p>	<p>Highland Environment Forum, Highland Council, SNH, RSPB, HBRG, BBCT, OU iSpot</p>	<p>31.1 Re-form the specialist group to identify area-based citizen science projects that the Local Groups could carry out, and make the linkages with the national priority species lead partners.</p>	
RECORDS MANAGEMENT			
<p>32. Highland Biological Database Project We await clarity on the national situation regarding the storage and management of biological records, but we lack adequate facilities in Highland.</p>	<p>HBRG, SNH, Highland Council, Highland Environment Forum partners</p>	<p>32.1 Once the national situation is clearer, secure funding for and run a project to create a Highland data management and biological volunteer co-ordination hub, building on the existing Highland Biological Database Project.</p>	
DATA CAPTURE			
<p>33. Data Collection Lots of species records are collected but not passed on by specialists and companies undertaking Environmental Impact Assessment surveys.</p>	<p>Highland Council, SNH, HBRG</p>	<p>33.1 Employ a volunteer or student within the Highland Council Development & Infrastructure Department to look into data collection from new developments and establish a protocol to ensure records are passed on to the National Biodiversity Network.</p>	

¹ Wildlife crime should be reported to the police as soon as possible. Never intervene, take photos and notes, including grid refs, don't touch or move evidence. See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/paw-scotland/> for more information.