

Cross Party Group for Biodiversity

Wednesday 3rd February 2016, 12.15pm – 13.15pm

Conference Room 24, Ty Hywel, Cardiff

MINUTES

Attendees

Russel Hobson	Butterfly Conservation Trust	(RH)
Steve Lucas	Bat Conservation	(SL-2)
Nigel Ajax-Lewis	Wildlife Trusts Wales	(NA-L)
Scott Fryer	Wildlife Trusts Wales	(SF)
Andrew Whitehouse	Buglife	(AW)
Clare Dinham	Buglife	(CD)
Natalie Buttriss	The Vincent Wildlife Trust	(NB)
Dr Jenny McPherson	The Vincent Wildlife Trust	(JM)
Sinead Lynch	Bumblebee Conservation	(SL-1)
Rowland Pittard	Youth Hostel Association	(RP)
Sean McHugh	Wales Biodiversity Partnership	(SM)
Rosanna Raison	Researcher, William Powell AM	
Karen Whitfield	Wales Environment Link	(KW)
Lydia Beaman	Wales Environment Link	(LB)
Chris Tucker	Natural Resources Wales	(CT)
Llyr Gruffydd AM	Chair	(LG)
William Powell AM	Welsh Liberal Democrats	(WP)
Dai Harris	Welsh Government	(DH)
Steve Spode	Welsh Government	
Luke Nicholas	Plaid Cymru Researcher	
Nia Seaton	Research Service	
Rachel Prior	Research Service	
Ben Lake	Plaid Cymru Researcher	

Key Points from the Meeting

1 – Annual General Meeting

- LG stated that all CPGs will be coming to an end as we approach the end of this Assembly's term. Therefore after the forthcoming election, this CPG on Biodiversity will need to be re-established. LG confirmed he would like there to be a new CPG on Biodiversity and that this shall be re-assessed after the election.
- RH put forward WEL's offer of secretariat support and LG offered to chair for the remainder of this assembly. SL proposed LG as future chair if the CPG is relaunched and SF seconded this. LG thanked all for their support.

2 – Terrestrial Species Project Summaries

- RH welcomed the terrestrial species project presentations, showing the wider benefits of wildlife projects and the benefits of engaging the public.

- **Benefits to Wales of a Pine Marten Recovery, Natalie Buttriss and Dr Jenny McPherson, Vincent Wildlife Trust**



Although previously common and widespread across the UK, by 1915 pine martens were close to extinction everywhere except the northwest of Scotland, with only small pockets left in the uplands in Wales and northern England. With no noticeable recovery, the Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) are working on pine martens to re-establish them in Wales and England. The project is being carried out in accordance with IUCN species translocation guidelines, and central Wales was identified as a priority location. They are in the early stages of a 7 year £1.4 million programme. In 2015, 20 pine martens were translocated from Scotland to Mid-Wales and another 20 will be released in 2016. So far, all have settled within their area of release. In Ireland, a significant correlation has been identified between the numbers of pine martens and a decline in grey squirrels. This is being researched further in mid Wales to see if the same effect occurs. This is a key project supporting Nature Recovery policy.

- **Monitoring Bumblebees: Canaries in the Coalmine, Sinead Lynch, Bumblebee Conservation Trust**

Bumblebees have suffered huge decline across Europe. In particular, the Great yellow bumblebee is now only found on the north coast and some islands of Scotland. This species previously had a wide distribution throughout the UK, but habitat degradation has seen its numbers decline dramatically in most places. Similarly, the Shril carder bee used to be ubiquitous and has suffered severe contraction in its distribution in the last century, making it one of the UK's rarest bumblebees. The Shril carder bee is now only found in 7 areas in southern England and Wales (Gwent, Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire in Wales). The principal causes of decline are the loss of flower-rich meadows and the intensification of farming and grazing practices. Because bumblebees feed on wildflowers they are very good environmental indicators, helping us to gauge the

'naturalness' of an area. Bumblebees are the only insect that can pollinate tomatoes, raspberries and other crops, so are vital to our food security and therefore a priority species for conservation. In support of the Nature Recovery Plan, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust are running a 'Beewalk' monitoring scheme, where volunteers across the UK take guided walks to record species as well as develop new skills such as habitat management. Wannabe Beewalkers – sign up!



- **Questions**

1. AW noted the problem relating to the shortage of information on abundance data. SL-1 agreed that the same data points in one location could refer to a completely different level of abundance in another.
1. SL-2 mentioned that he'd seen great feedback from public / community involvement in public science projects. SL-1 remarked on the positive feedback we received from our survey of Beewalk volunteers, and how volunteers like getting out and about, but also want to feel they are contributing to something 'bigger' - they want to know their data will be used for something.
2. SM mentioned the benefits of the pine martens for red squirrels and asked if there had been studies on the impacts to other species. JM responded that you'd expect indirect effect and benefits and that one of the hypotheses is trophic cascades. LG asked if they are treating this a specific management technique or as a by-product of translocation. It is not a specific management technique but certainly one of the anticipated ecosystem benefits.
3. SB asked about pine marten density. JM said that depending on habitat quality, density is variable but on average would be about 1 pine marten per 2 kilometre squares. The pine marten is solitary except briefly in late summer when they mate.
4. LG asked, following on from the Mid-Wales example, when will you be in a position to look elsewhere? JM said that at the moment close monitoring is

very important, looking at age, numbers, number of females, mortality rates, but that they will be bringing in another 20 this year. Population viability analysis suggests that this number will have a high probability of establishment. LG asked if they have other locations in mind, JM said they are considering other locations.

5. AW asked if they are legally protected. He stated that most landowners have been keen crayfish introductions, but wondered if landowners get nervous with pine martens? JM said that it is protected but there are provisions within the law to exclude it from inhabited houses, NB added that there is a leaflet on this and on how to exclude martens from traps for other species.
6. LG said that he had not come across the term 'naturalness' before and wondered if it was a specific term or indicator? SL-1 replied that she uses the term to refer to a more heterogeneous landscape, with a variety of natural habitats.
7. DH asked what could be done to improve things for pollinators. How do we achieve more take up of Glastir? Are there options in Glastir for pollinators? SL-1 said the options in Glastir are not being effective for pollinators because of the way the options are prescribed, but also that not enough farmers take up Glastir, and of those that do, not enough take up the pollinator-friendly options. AW stated that agri-environment schemes are not sufficient as they are too limited and don't provide nesting habitat, and that few species can utilise that resource and it won't therefore support species recovery. We need permanent wildflower rich areas. SL-1 agreed and said that a little bit spread across a landscape goes a long way.

3 – Final Comments

LG stated that there is the full intention of re-establishing the Cross Party Group post-election and we'll have both the WFG Act and the Environment Act which will give a framework for much more robust action, which is where the focus needs to be over the coming years.