

# Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan 2000 to 2010

## Revision 2008



Buckinghamshire  
& Milton Keynes  
Biodiversity Partnership

## **Acknowledgements**

To list everyone's contribution here would be too great a task; special thanks go to everyone who attended the workshops for sharing their ideas and experience which were essential to the production of the plan. Thanks also go to the members of the BAP Working Group and Promotions Group of the Bucks Nature Conservation Forum for their support and contributions. To RSPB we extend our thanks for assistance with the design, editing and illustration of the technical document.

Thanks also to the individuals and organisations that offered help, advice and comments during the revision of the BAP targets, in the consultations identifying the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and the ongoing delivery of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan.

## Foreword

The start of the new Millennium has been seen as an opportunity to take stock, to reflect on our lives and to consider the future. The quality of the environment in which we live has rightly been identified as one of our highest priorities if we are to sustain and build on our life experience and more importantly that of future generations. Fundamental to our environment and demanding a share of the space is our wildlife. The last century in particular, saw human beings exploit the natural world in order to progress themselves as a species. Attitudes are changing and there is now a real hope that the damage done in the last century of the second Millennium can be rectified in the first century of the new Millennium.

We have a modern word to describe the plants and animals that inhabit our planet – ‘biodiversity’. We do not have the rainforests of South America, or the coral reefs of the Red Sea in Buckinghamshire, however what we do have is still immensely important and is just as threatened. The response locally to this global concern has been the production of this Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. It is a testament to how strongly people feel about their local wildlife, but it is also a challenging document because it identifies just how much work there is to do for all of us. Members of the Buckinghamshire Nature Conservation Forum, with the input and support of many people who have generously given their time and support to attend workshops and help develop the plans, have produced this BAP. We have striven to capture the concerns and ideas of as many local people as possible and we hope that this is reflected in the Plan. What is clear though, is that without the strong partnerships, sheer hard work and commitment from all concerned, this document could not have been produced.

This is just the start of the process, we cannot rest on our laurels yet, now is the time to begin delivering the action essential for conserving and enhancing Buckinghamshire’s precious wildlife. Whoever you are, whatever your interests or influence in local government, commerce or voluntary organisations, wherever you live in Buckinghamshire or Milton Keynes, there is something in this document that you can do to make a difference. The BAP provides us with a clear vision of the hard work that is in front of us. We all want to do our individual bit in our own communities but for the sake of our wildlife we must go forward in a planned and co-ordinated way as outlined in the pages that follow. Only by working to the targets set in the BAP will we reverse the decline in our wildlife and hand over to our children and grandchildren the high quality environment that they so richly deserve.

Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher  
Chair, Buckinghamshire Nature Conservation Forum

## 1 Biodiversity

### What is biodiversity?

- 1.1 All around us, in our woodlands and hedgerows, our fields and rivers, even in our gardens, countless varieties of birds, plants, insects and other animals live out their lives. This is biodiversity – the richness and endless variety of life on earth.
- 1.2 Human beings are just one species amongst this amazing diversity of life. We have a unique responsibility amongst other animals, because we have the power to influence the future of not just the individual creatures around us, but of entire populations of species, even the future of the planet itself!
- 1.3 Biodiversity also includes our Earth Heritage - the geology beneath our feet. This is inseparable from the formation of the landscape and the types of habitats which occur upon it.
- 1.4 The conservation of biodiversity is not an issue that is confined to the rainforests of South America, the plains of Africa or the frozen expanse of Antarctica. It is about what we can do for wildlife in Aston Clinton, Amersham and Aylesbury.
- 1.5 We have many species of plants and animals in Buckinghamshire which are amongst the rarest and most important in the country. They may be important because they are nationally uncommon, but doing well here, like the Chiltern Gentian or they may have a small population in Buckinghamshire, which is sensitive to changes in the way their habitat is managed, like the Water Vole. There are also many species in the County which, though once common, are now in steep local and national decline, like the Skylark. We have a responsibility to ensure that these creatures have a bright future in Buckinghamshire.
- 1.6 Success stories are possible: just look at how the Red Kite, once extinct in England, now graces the Chilterns once again and is spreading to other parts of England and Scotland, thanks to the initial efforts of English Nature, RSPB, and local landowners to secure its future.

### Why the conservation of our biodiversity matters

- 1.7 Biodiversity is at least as important as the other parts of our heritage: historic castles, buildings and monuments, fine art, literature. In many ways it is much more important than any of these, but it is more fragile. Biodiversity underlies our existence. It feeds us - plants and animals provide all our food. It clothes us - many of our materials come directly from, or are derived from plants and animals.  
  
It cures us - plants are used in medicine and some promise potential cures. It inspires us - think of all the paintings and poems that were inspired by the natural world. No organism exists in isolation from other living things. Individually, each plant and animal has a role to play in the interconnections which make the natural world go round.
- 1.8 We might take our wildlife and wild places for granted, much as our grandparents might have taken for granted the Red-backed Shrike, the Large Blue butterfly and the Corncockle, all now lost from the English countryside. None of us want

our children to say, 'What were Lapwings like?' This is a real possibility if we do not take steps to halt the astonishingly rapid decline of this and other species that we may take for granted.

- 1.9 A diverse landscape, rich in wildlife, in our towns and cities as well as our countryside, plays an important role in ensuring that our quality of life remains high. It contributes to our physical and mental health and ensures that we remain in touch with the natural world around us. The dawn chorus is free but this is just the sort of benefit that we may only appreciate after it has gone.
- 1.10 This Biodiversity Action Plan is about just that - taking action for biodiversity in Buckinghamshire. It identifies important habitats and species for which a wide range of local and national organisations, as well as individuals, will take practical steps to conserve. It sets measurable targets and identifies the organisations and individuals responsible for meeting them, to attempt to map out a brighter future for biodiversity in Buckinghamshire.
- 1.11 We have to take action today for tomorrow's wildlife, to ensure that when future generations from Buckinghamshire ask, 'What is a Lapwing?' someone will be able to say, 'That's one over there' and not have to show them a picture in a book of lost creatures, or a stuffed specimen in a Museum.

## 2 Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Action Plan

### Background

- 2.1 In 1992 the UK Government signed the Convention on Biodiversity at the Earth Summit in Rio.
- 2.2 This was an agreement between countries about how to protect the diversity of species and habitats in the world. Virtually all the world leaders signed up to this Convention which required the drawing up of a National Action Plan. The UK's Action Plan was published in January 1994, with the expectation that regional and local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) would be produced.
- 2.3 In December 1993, the County Council, in consultation with 60 organisations produced a Nature Conservation Strategy for Buckinghamshire. The Nature Conservation Strategy is primarily a policy document with stated aims and targets under each policy; however many of the partner organisations committed themselves to helping to deliver these targets.
- 2.4 Policy 2 within the Nature Conservation Strategy was to deliver:  
'Effective communication and collaboration between all organisations involved in nature conservation.'
- 2.5 One of the main ways of delivering this was the formation of the Buckinghamshire Nature Conservation Forum (BNCF) which was established in 1994. The Forum aims to provide the means to improve communication and co-ordination between the main organisations involved in nature conservation across the County. There are a number of organisations represented including the local planning authorities, statutory agencies such as the Environment Agency and English Nature and voluntary bodies including the Wildlife Trust and Bucks Community Action. A full list can be found in Appendix 5, Sources of Advice.
- 2.6 In recognition that biodiversity is not governed by administrative boundaries, and of the need for cross-border working, English Nature has produced 'Natural Area Profiles'. These provide a framework for the conservation of species and habitats based on their distribution, not on where lines are drawn on maps. (See Appendix 2.) The Management Plan for the Chilterns AONB provides another example of this cross-boundary approach to nature conservation in Bucks and beyond.
- 2.7 With the publication of the UK BAP and the requirement to produce a regional Action Plan, the BNCF considered how this task should be carried out. The BNCF held a conference in January 1997, whose key objectives were:
- To inform key decision makers of the importance of nature conservation generally;
  - To review the progress of the Nature Conservation Strategy and the BNCF;
  - To examine the implications for Buckinghamshire of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan;

- To seek consensus on the way forward for nature conservation in the County.
- 2.8 A highlight of the day was the signing of the Buckinghamshire Nature Conservation Charter by representatives of each of the County's local authorities, statutory agencies and representatives of local wildlife conservation groups. Workshop sessions looked at how the Bucks BAP should be implemented, who should be involved, who would provide funds and what the time scale should be. For further information about the Conference, proceedings can be obtained from the BNCF.
- 2.9 It was very clear that as many people as possible should be involved, preferably with a 'bottom up' approach, based on the view that actions supported by local communities would be more likely to succeed in the long term.

### **Production of the Plan**

- 2.10 Following the Conference in January 1997, a BAP Working Group was set up under the BNCF to further the production of the County BAP. To begin the process, factual information about the County's key habitats was collated into habitat statements, following the format of those produced nationally by the UK Biodiversity Group. The information was incorporated into the final action plans. The Plan has been produced for the administrative County of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Unitary Authority. For the purposes of this document the terms 'the County' and 'Buckinghamshire' include Milton Keynes Council.
- 2.11 The BAP Working Group envisaged a BAP built on participation, partnership, empowerment and information and the Working Group selected the method of Participatory Appraisal.
- 2.12 Participatory Appraisal (PA) can be described as:
- 'a growing family of approaches and methods used to enable people to analyse and share their knowledge of life and local conditions. Through PA local people are able to identify their own priorities and make decisions about the future.'
- 2.13 PA developed out of appraisal techniques used in rural communities in South Asia and East Africa. It uses group work and visual methods as a tool for structuring discussion and as a basis for communication, not only generating information which can be used by others, but enabling the sharing of ideas. The methods employed are intended to be enjoyable, inclusive, empowering, inventive and flexible. They include a wide range of tools such as pictures, flow diagrams, matrices and maps.
- 2.14 The Working Group sought the assistance of the Oxford Forestry Institute and PA trainers, to train people from member organisations of the BNCF as PA facilitators. The PA process was then tested to see how effective it would be as a tool in the development of the BAP. This was undertaken by interviewing members of the public in Aylesbury town centre and holding two evening workshops designed to develop Habitat Action Plans for neutral grassland, urban habitats and hedgerows.

2.15 These meetings demonstrated that PA:

- was an effective tool in enabling workshop participants to voice their opinions and ideas;
- encouraged group work, discussion, and reaching consensus;
- raised awareness and enthusiasm of the BAP process;
- helped engage people in the process of Biodiversity Action Planning – participation initiates a sense of ownership and hopefully long-term involvement in the Plan's implementation;
- identified clear threats, opportunities, constraints and action points to be incorporated into the Habitat Action Plans;
- was considered by some to be controversial.

2.16 Following these meetings, a series of evening workshops took place throughout 1998 and early 1999, each on one of the habitats for which an Action Plan was required.

2.17 Following the workshops, a lead officer from within the BNCF pulled together the information and ideas generated, into a draft Habitat Action Plan (HAP). These drafts were then made available for consultation and comment. Every participant who attended a workshop received a draft of the HAP for the workshop they attended. In addition, complete copies of the draft BAP were placed in libraries and council offices and circulated to members of the BNCF.

All parish councils were notified of where the full consultation document was available and invited to comment. Comments have been incorporated where appropriate and this working BAP document produced.

2.18 The BAP is by no means static, reflecting the dynamic nature of biodiversity. Its loose-leaf format will allow for additions and revisions as required.

2.19 Throughout this process of producing the Plan, BNCF members have been struck by the interest and support that the people of Buckinghamshire have given. By involving hundreds of people in the Conference and the workshops, this Plan has been produced with a high degree of participation and consensus.

2.20 The aspiration is that through involving a wider group of people in the production of this document, that true local action will be stimulated. The actions that have been identified are those which are felt to be of importance by the people who have supported this process. The Plan aims to give the inspiration and support for many of these ideas to be followed through by local people taking action to conserve the biodiversity of Buckinghamshire.

2.21 In 2006 the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership was formed. This enabled the creation of the post of Biodiversity Project Officer to take forward the delivery of the BAP. In 2006/7 the HAP targets were reviewed and revised in consultation with the organisations that had been involved in the BNCF along with other relevant partner organisations.

- 2.22 In 2007 the UK BAP Species and Habitat Review revised some of the national HAP definitions and proposed some new HAPs – three of which were included in the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes BAP
- 2.23 This version of the BAP contains the revised targets produced in 2007/8.

### **3 The Biodiversity of Buckinghamshire**

- 3.1 The varied geology and topography of Buckinghamshire gives rise to a countryside rich in landscape and wildlife, many of the habitats and associated species found are of national, and in some instances international, importance.
- 3.2 In the very north of the County, wide, meandering alluvial floodplains lie interspersed with harder limestone outcrops. The remains of historic hunting forests, networks of hedgerows, flood meadows and wet pastures along river corridors and the enigmatic patterns of ancient ridge and furrow, combine to provide a variety of habitat types. Brown and black hairstreak butterflies, barn owls and green-winged orchids may be found where suitable conditions persist.
- 3.3 In the Brickhills area on the Bedfordshire border, the acidic soils of the greensands, with its many springs, relics of heathland vegetation and pockets of marshy ground, support unusual species such as marsh fern and bog bush cricket.
- 3.4 The clay vales immediately to the north of the Chilterns are characterised by pasture, the damper grasslands being occasionally carpeted with ragged robin, marsh marigolds and very occasionally, snake's-head fritillaries. Slow flowing brooks are lined with willow pollards and black poplars, the latter being found in greater numbers in Buckinghamshire than anywhere else in the UK. Regular winter flooding provides good feeding grounds for wetland birds such as snipe and curlew.
- 3.5 Rising from the vale is the chalky backbone of Buckinghamshire, the Chiltern Hills. Here, the now familiar red kites soar above the steep scarp and arterial valleys and mosaic of habitats. In many areas, the scarp is cloaked by species-rich grassland where chalkhill blue butterflies, glow worms and roman snails are found amongst aromatic swards of thyme and marjoram. Luxuriant stands of orchid rich turf and other specialities such as the Chiltern gentian are a vital component of the distinctiveness of this part of the County.
- 3.6 Scrub also plays an important role. Three valleys in the hills at Ellesborough are covered in rare box woodland. Elsewhere along the escarpment, stands of juniper still remain. Cathedral-like beech hangers, heathy wooded commons and the more elusive chalk heaths are a feature of the clay-capped hills with fast-flowing chalk streams running through the valleys below.
- 3.7 To the south, the chalky dip slope gives way to the acid drift gravels, where the largest extent of heathlands in the County are found.

These heathlands frequently include pockets of acid grassland, bare ground and birch woodland, which offer valuable niches to invertebrates and reptiles. Notable bird species of our heathlands include nightjar, woodlark and hobby. The wetter areas are home to some of our more unusual plants, like the insectivorous bladderwort and sundews, whilst in tiny bog pools and ditches, patches of sphagnum mosses are found. These bodies of standing water are also readily utilised by resident populations of darting bejewelled dragonflies and beetles.

Scattered clumps of hilltop and valley side woodland may host wild service tree, early purple orchid and white admiral butterfly.

- 3.8 Burnham Beeches, a tract of ancient wood-pasture, is found in the south of the County, where majestic pollards stand as venerable observers to an ever-changing world. As individuals they are unique and they stand singly as an ecosystem in their own right, where complex, often hidden, interrelationships occur, particularly with fungi and insects. They are found within a diverse area of habitats and species, including woodland, grassland, heath, bog, ponds and ditches. Their inhabitants also have equally intricate relationships. The exceptionally rare bladderseed occurs here, as do notable species such as marsh violet and the black darter dragonfly. Over 60 Red Data Book species have been recorded, most of which are flies and beetles, as well as rare woodland slugs.
- 3.9 It is important that we conserve these different types of habitats. However, it is their interaction, that allows wildlife to abound and makes these areas especially important. These rich tapestries of interconnected habitats must be the goal we aim for if we are to maintain and enhance the wildlife heritage of Buckinghamshire.
- 3.10 We must strive to expand the remaining areas of semi-natural habitat. Where these places are isolated and fragmented, we must reverse this trend and form links between sites. The maintenance, restoration and creation of the numerous habitats we have in Buckinghamshire presents us with a massive task and this document sets out the objectives and actions to reach this goal.
- 3.11 It is perhaps worth pausing for a moment to ask how common are the common? So often emphasis is placed almost exclusively on the rarer and more sought-after species of the County, but all elements of our natural world are of importance to the whole.
- 3.12 The power to protect and enhance the wildlife of Buckinghamshire rests in our hands. It is our actions, as individuals and as a species, that shape the environment around us. The biodiversity of Buckinghamshire is in our hands. The Biodiversity Action Plan represents a commitment to securing a brighter future for the wildlife and wild places of the County.

We need to embrace this commitment together and ensure that we work together to meet the objectives set out in this document. If everybody does something, no matter how small, then the wildlife of Buckinghamshire will continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

## **4 Implementation of the Plan**

### **The way forward**

- 4.1 Members of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership are committed to working together to carry forward the Biodiversity Action Plan. The

key aim of the Plan is to stimulate action. Successful implementation of the BAP will be measured in terms of how far the objectives for each species and habitat are met.

The BAP has a long-term vision. Many of the actions proposed may take several years to produce measurable success, whilst others will be readily achievable, or are already taking place. The implementation of the Plan is a dynamic process, adapting and evolving as circumstances change, much in the same way as biodiversity itself does.

- 4.2 Taking actions for wildlife will involve people and organisations from all walks of life and some of these are described below. However, every single one of us has responsibility for the conservation of biodiversity. Although many people recognise the need to conserve biodiversity, they do not always appreciate that it concerns them directly; our choices and our actions make a difference.

### **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership**

- 4.3 Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership will continue to provide a forum for collaboration and partnership between those organisations involved in biodiversity work. It will act as the 'biodiversity partnership' in the County, monitoring overall progress of the BAP. All member organisations have commitment to the BAP; some organisations will be involved in varying ways.

### **Local Authorities and Parish Councils**

- 4.4 Local authorities have a key role to play in conserving the biodiversity of the County and many are already engaged in a range of activities in their area.

All levels of local authorities, whether county councils, district councils or parish councils have a statutory duty to consider biodiversity while undertaking all of their functions. This duty is set out in Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 and states “ *Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, in the purpose of conserving biodiversity*”.

Through the statutory planning process, the framework provided by international and national legislation and government planning policy guidance, such as 'Planning Policy Statement: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9)', they will ensure biodiversity conservation is given high priority in land-use planning. They will also promote nature conservation within the wider countryside and urban areas.

Local Authorities should seek to manage their land in a sustainable way, with biodiversity given priority where appropriate. They will continue to support initiatives which conserve, or raise awareness of biodiversity eg Countryside Management Projects, Local Agenda 21 initiatives, Environmental Records Centres. They also have a major role to play in integrating biodiversity issues into formal education. Parish and Neighbourhood councils have a role in promoting awareness and encouraging local people to participate in 'doorstep' initiatives where wildlife conservation is potentially part of their daily experience.

### **Statutory Agencies**

4.5 Statutory Agencies have national responsibilities regarding biodiversity, including advising on national policies, designating and managing land which is of national importance for its biodiversity, research, and protecting species, as well as being involved locally. They will continue to support biodiversity initiatives. Statutory Agencies, such as Natural England and DEFRA are also important sources of grants which ensure many habitats and species are protected and managed appropriately.

### **Non-governmental organisations**

4.6 Non-governmental organisations, such as conservation charities, environmental groups and other community groups have a key role in the implementation of the Plan. Such organisations often own, or manage areas of high biodiversity, have valuable expertise and ideas, and are expert at fostering community action – the cornerstone of conservation.

### **Landowners and land managers**

4.7 Individual landowners and land managers, both public and private, have a vital part to play in the implementation of the Plan. The land they own or manage may support important habitats and species. The stewardship such people provide to biodiversity benefits us all. Easy access to information, advice and support is essential in order to encourage sensitive stewardship. Landowners can be encouraged to consider the impacts of their activities upon wildlife and habitats.

### **Business and industry**

4.8 As well as strengthening existing partnerships, the Plan seeks to forge new ones. Business and industry can play a major part in the Plan, through sponsorship of a habitat or species, funding a project, creating and managing wildlife areas on their land, or taking part at grass roots level, through voluntary conservation work. Every business should be encouraged to consider the effects of its activities on biodiversity, perhaps by undertaking an environmental audit, seeking to reduce any harmful impacts and encourage sustainable practices. Simple activities like recycling all the office paper, using recycled products where possible, efficient energy use and wise-use of water will make a difference by reducing pressure on the environment and could save a business money.

### **Individuals**

4.9 Whether biodiversity continues to decline, depends largely on the actions and commitment of each individual within our community.

Decisions taken by those in positions of authority are key to the future of biodiversity, but the community is a powerful force in influencing these decisions.

4.10 Every action that benefits biodiversity at whatever level is important. Everyone can do something for biodiversity:

- lobbying MPs on some of the issues in this Plan
- joining a local conservation group
- having a wildlife-friendly garden

- recycling paper, cans, plastics
- using energy and water wisely
- simply putting the spider out of the window instead of squashing it.

### **Costs of implementation**

- 4.11 Wherever possible, the actions that appear within each Habitat Plan and the Generic Issues are given estimated costs. The costings were produced in 2000, with a total minimum cost of £6.5 million for delivering the 10 year Plan. The costings will be revised in Summer / Autumn 2009. The costs within the Plan are based on current estimates of carrying out practical conservation works, surveys and employment of staff. Some of the actions have yet to be costed. The figures exclude costs of current staffing and do not reflect the tremendous value of work carried out on a voluntary basis.
- 4.12 These are additional costs for which the funds must either be redirecting from existing expenditure or by the winning of grants or other sources of funding. This is not however, a definitive total, for other actions and associated costs, will emerge as the Plan progresses.
- 4.13 The total cost of delivering the Plan should be seen in context. A typical authority in Buckinghamshire spends over £2.1 million alone on refuse collection and household recycling each year (new figure needed here?)

## **5 Monitoring and Review of the Plan**

- 5.1 Every action within the Habitat Action Plans and the Species Action Plans has a lead organisation responsible for gathering information about work in progress and the meeting of targets and for the reporting of progress. Organisations named as 'lead' will champion various actions and take responsibility for driving them forward. They will encourage, co-ordinate and undertake relevant action. They should not be expected to take sole responsibility for the habitat, species or action for which they play a major role, nor should the identification of a lead agency prevent other groups from working to a similar goal. The entire BAP process has been founded on strong working partnerships which must continue if the implementation of the Plan is to succeed.
- 5.2 All the partner organisations listed in the Plan have a responsibility to feed back information to the lead organisation about progress on their actions. Individuals and other groups can also feed back to the lead organisation, or a local contact, a list of which appears in Appendix 5. It is important that all action is reported, so that a true picture of the effectiveness of the Plan and its successes and failures can be determined. The information generated by habitat and species surveys will be copied to the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centres.
- 5.3 The lead organisation will report to the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership, who will in turn report progress to the National Lead partners for each habitat and species.
- 5.4 The Partnership will prepare an annual report on the progress towards meeting the targets set out in the Plan. This will help all those involved in its implementation to target their resources to greatest effect