



Bedfordshire and Luton Habitat Action Plan: Ponds

Updated September 2015



Foreword

We are fortunate in Bedfordshire to have a fantastic range of habitats and species within a relatively small geographical area. It is a county of marked contrasts, with the chalk habitats of the North Chilterns, the heathland and acid grassland of the Greensand Ridge and the woodlands and rolling countryside of the Ouse Valley. The fact that species such as adders, dormice and otters are all now expanding their ranges to varying degrees is something we should be proud of and testament to the work of the organisations and individuals involved, but we should not be complacent. There is much to be done, and these Biodiversity Action Plans set out the scale of that challenge very clearly. Only by continuing to work in partnership, putting the case for nature ever more strongly and clearly, can we hope to build on recent progress, bring the natural environment to the fore of the thinking of key decision-makers and reverse long-term declines.

Jon Balaam, Chair of Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership



Biodiversity Action Plans Overview

The **UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)** was created in response to a commitment at the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. It summarises the status of the most threatened habitats and species in the UK and then sets out a series of actions to halt their decline and then reverse it. There are National Action Plans for 1150 species and 65 habitats. The last meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity took place in Nagoya, Japan during October 2010. During the convention the BAP was replaced by the **Aichi Targets**, which were signed by 192 governments. These 20 Targets aim to halt the loss in biodiversity worldwide by 2020. Within the targets there are a range of challenges, from protecting our best habitats and rarest species, to restoring the services our natural environment provides and tackling climate change. The *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework* (July 2012) describes how the Aichi Targets will be implemented across the UK and is underpinned by a Biodiversity Strategy for each Country. In England this is *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* (August 2011).

Although the Aichi Targets are the focus from the most recent Convention on Biological Diversity, the BAP is still a very valuable reference nationally and locally. It has been used to draw up statutory lists in some of the more recent Acts of Parliament which aim to protect and enhance biodiversity. In 2006 the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC)** came into effect. In Section 41 of the Act there is a list of habitats and species which are “*of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity*”. This lists all the BAP habitats and species which are still regarded as priorities for conservation under the *UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework*. The list includes 56 habitats and 943 species. It was included to assist public bodies with the statutory duty placed on them by Section 40 of the Act. This is often referred to as the ‘Biodiversity Duty’ and states that public bodies have to:

“In exercising their functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.”

The aim of the Act is to embed nature conservation within all the relevant policies and decisions that public bodies make. Public bodies include a range of organisations from the Borough and Ward Councils to bodies carrying out functions of a public character under a statutory power. There is a Guidance Document that accompanies this Act to assist local authorities to implement the Biodiversity Duty.

Priority species and habitats are also recognised in the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which came into effect in early 2012. The NPPF replaced most of the planning guidance which was previously available. It promotes the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats and ecological networks as well as the protection and recovery of priority species (paragraph 117).

Although the BAP is no longer promoted nationally it is written into legislation and policies which are being currently used. To support this locally, the BAP is still in use to inform and guide many projects and is kept relevant.



Ponds

National lead organisation(s):
Freshwater Habitats Trust (formally Pond Conservation)

County lead organisation(s):
Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

Ponds are defined as “a body of water, seasonal or permanent, between 0.0001 ha (1mx1m) and 2 ha in area. Water is usually present for at least 4 months of the year during which time it may be of any depth” (Pond Conservation 2008).

Scope

This action plan covers all ponds meeting the UK BAP definition above. Priority Ponds, however, are a focus of the plan. There are five criteria used to identify Priority Ponds; these are listed below. Not all are relevant to Bedfordshire ponds.

1. Habitats of high conservation importance

Ponds that meet criteria under Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive

2. Ponds with species of high conservation importance

These are Red Data Book species, BAP species, species fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act Schedule 5 and 8, Habitats Directive Annex II species, a Nationally Scarce wetland plant species, or three Nationally Scarce aquatic invertebrate species.

3. Ponds with exceptional populations or numbers of key species

This is based on

(i) criteria specified in guidelines for the selection of biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (currently amphibians and dragonflies only)

(ii) exceptionally rich sites for plants or invertebrates (supporting 30 or more wetland plant species or 50 or more aquatic macroinvertebrate species)

4. Ponds of high ecological quality

These are ponds classified in the top category for ecological quality as assessed by the standardised method for assessing the biological quality of still waters in England and Wales - the Predictive System for Multimetrics (PSYM).

5. Other important ponds

These are individual ponds or groups of ponds with a limited geographic distribution recognised as important because of their age, rarity of type or landscape context e.g., pingos, duneslack ponds, machair ponds.



Current status

National status

According to the Freshwater Habitats Trust 50% of ponds have been lost in Britain since the start of the 20th century and of those which remain 80% are in a poor condition. There are thought to be in the region of 400,000 ponds remaining in Britain excluding gardens; of these it is estimated that about 80,000 (20%) are Priority Ponds (Pond Conservation, 2008). Fairclough and Nicolet (2008) state that every year 1% of ponds are created or destroyed, but far more ponds than this are degraded or damaged but remain in place.

Local status

A sample survey of ponds in 31 1km grid squares in Bedfordshire has been completed every 15 years or so since 1976 (Balmer et al 2007). This survey shows an overall loss of 4% of ponds in the sample area. It does not however provide detailed information regarding the turnover rate of ponds, and likely under-represents ephemeral ponds. In 2007 50% of ponds were found to be in the process of disappearing through succession and other factors. Several ponds were surveyed in detail; only one was found to be of high wildlife value (as defined by the Bedfordshire and Luton County Wildlife Site Criteria).

Extrapolating from the figures in Balmer et al (2007) would yield 2,865 ponds in Bedfordshire, with 860 lost and 630 created since 1976 along with 1,433 of which are under immediate threat of loss. A more detailed analysis (Balmer pers. com.) of the Landline GIS overlay has shown approximately 3,680 ponds mapped in the county.

Given that 20% of ponds nationally are likely to be of Priority Pond status; this would equate to 736 Priority Ponds in Bedfordshire and Luton. However if Balmer et al (2007) reflects the true picture, only 1% - between 287 and 368 – of ponds may be Priority Ponds. A more thorough investigation of the actual number of ponds and Priority Ponds in the county is required before firm targets can be set but the county appears to have approximately 1% of the national pond resource.

As of May 2008 only one pond in Bedfordshire – Maulden Church Meadow Pond – is listed on the National Ponds register.



Current factors affecting Ponds

- Direct loss from neglect, infilling and drainage
- Ecological successional changes due to poor or absent pond management, eventually resulting in the loss of habitat for uncommon species of early and mid-succession ponds (e.g. great crested newt)
- Chemical pollution, nutrient enrichment and siltation with polluted sediments, which adversely affect the diversity of pond life
- Overstocking with fish and ducks
- The spread of exotic species (such as fish or terrapins and many invasive plant species)
- The spread of exotic disease, in particular Chytrid fungus which indiscriminately attacks amphibians
- Climate change, which may reduce the viability of shallow or ephemeral ponds (either by reducing, increasing or shifting the period of time over which they hold water)

Current action

Legal

The National Planning Policy Framework requires that local planning authorities take account of the potential impact of planning decisions on biodiversity. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) places a duty on all public bodies to conserve biodiversity. The duty is particularly relevant to national priority habitats and species. Ponds may be protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) by virtue of the species they support, such as white-clawed crayfish, great-crested newt and water vole. Ponds may also be protected by virtue of being within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

National action

A draft national Habitat Action Plan exists for ponds, led by the Freshwater Habitats Trust and the Environment Agency. The Freshwater Habitats Trust is running a number of projects aimed at increasing both the health and number of ponds in Britain as well as ongoing monitoring; these include the “Million Ponds Project” which is now in phase 2, PondNet using volunteer surveyors to collect trends in pond quality and pond species and a flagship pond guardian project.

Local action

Individual ponds are lost and created every year as the result of development and other activities throughout Bedfordshire and Luton. The Greensand Trust, BRCC and Wildlife Trust provide information and help to landowners and managers wishing to create, restore or manage ponds. These activities are not monitored and there is currently no single place where details of this activity are kept.



Achievements since publication of first Action Plan

At least 46 new ponds and wet scrapes have been created in various locations in Bedfordshire including at Flitwick Moor SSSI, Marston Thrift SSSI, Icknield School CWS and Riverside Walk CWS plus further ponds to serve as surface water management facilities along new roads such as the A421. Major work has been done recently to restore 17 ponds and expand a further two. Restoration and management advice has been provided to landowners and managers by the Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and the Wildlife Trust. A two year Prosperous Ponds project was run by Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and the Greensand Trust creating and restoring ponds and scrapes, surveying for great crested newts and water voles and pond survey training for adults and children.

Ongoing pond management by the Wildlife Trust and Greensand Trust of around 30 ponds mainly involves clearing edge vegetation and invasive species. Plans are in place to create an additional 10 ponds in the south of the county and around 12 in Marston Vale. The Bedfordshire and Luton County Wildlife Site Panel have updated the County Wildlife Site Selection Guidelines to reflect Priority Pond assessment methods. Monitoring of ponds is variable with some sites getting more monitoring than others and with no consistent methodology used between organisations or sites. In 2013 a pond survey was carried out by Groundwork for Luton Borough Council and the Forest of Marston Vale has visited 116 ponds, yet no single ponds database exists to facilitate monitoring across the county. Without such it will be hard to achieve the target of 102 pond sites restored to high quality.

Action plan objectives and targets

Objective

Maintain and expand the number and geographical extent of high quality ponds in Bedfordshire and Luton

Targets

- A. Maintain the number of Priority Pond sites as established by survey
- B. By 2020 restore 102 pond sites to high quality status to deliver Species Action Plan targets
- C. Create 80 new pond sites of high quality potential by 2020

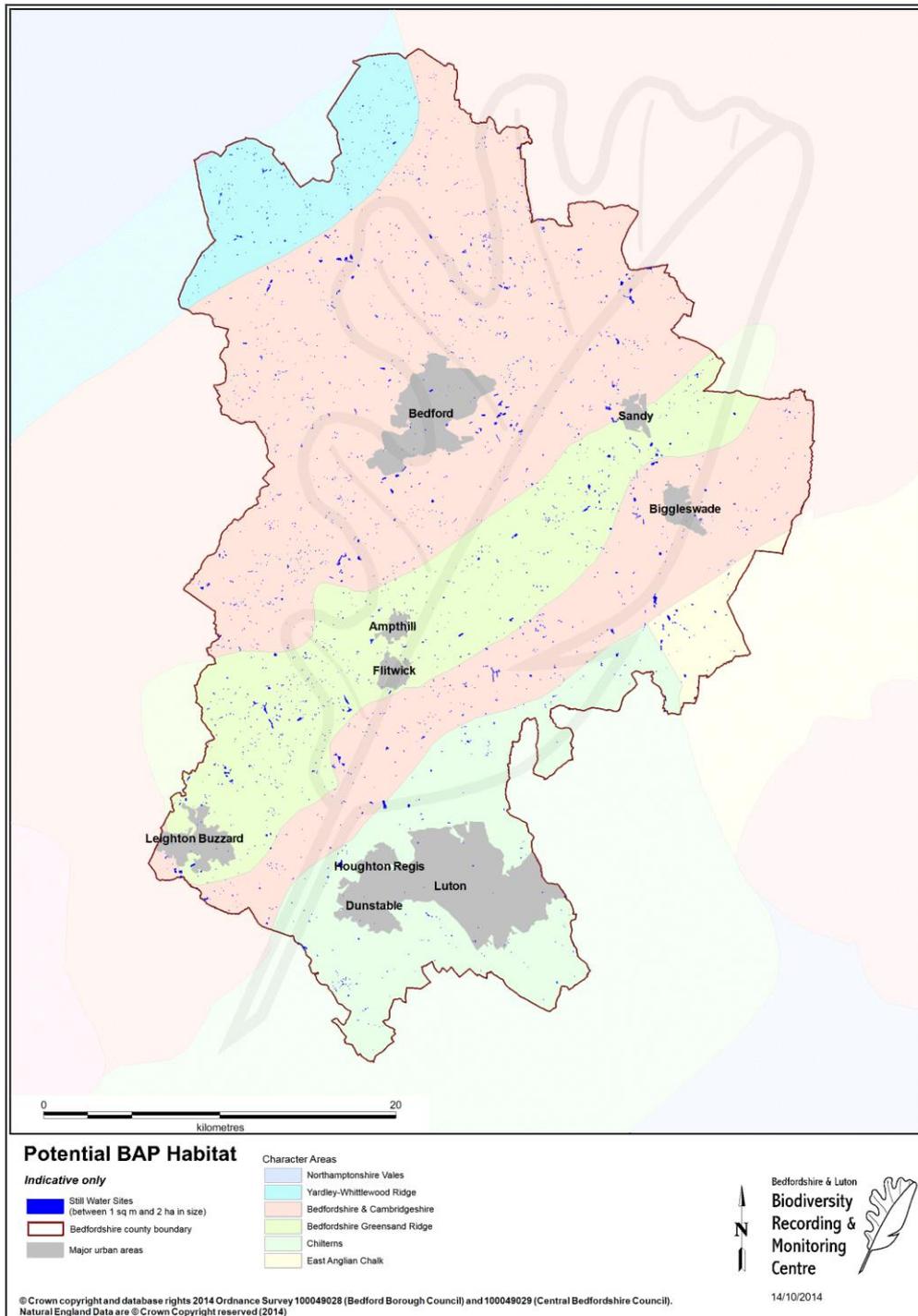


Figure 1: Still water sites in Bedfordshire and Luton

Proposed action

Partners

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
Biodiversity Recording & Monitoring Centre
Bedfordshire & Luton County Wildlife Site Panel
Forest of Marston Vale
Greensand Trust

Local authorities
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Wildlife Trust
Woodland Trust

Action

Policy and legislation

No local action identified

Site safeguard and management

1. Ensure by 2020 positive management or restoration of all Priority Ponds requiring management or restoration
2. All local authorities and NGOs to survey the ponds on their land and establish appropriate management regimes by 2020
3. LA to ensure that the development control process protects all Priority Ponds and results in an annual net increase in the number of ponds in Bedfordshire and Luton

Advisory

4. Inform and provide information for all landowners with Priority Ponds on their land by 2020
5. Ensure that pond owners and managers are kept informed of developments in pond conservation and know where and how to access resources

Future research and monitoring

6. Undertake surveys to identify Priority Ponds and produce a database of those ponds within Bedfordshire by 2020. Submit all results to the National Ponds Register
7. Identify by 2020 areas where ponds of high quality potential can be created

8. Identify by 2020 Important Areas for Ponds

Communication and publicity

9. Highlight the importance of ponds and their creation and protection to all pond (not just Priority Pond) owners and managers by 2020



Monitoring the Action Plan

This action plan will be reviewed every five years as part of a wider BAP review.

Complementary plans

A UK action plan exists for ponds.

Northamptonshire has written a habitat action plan for ponds; Buckinghamshire has written one for standing open waters.

This action plan links to other Bedfordshire and Luton action plans, in particular those for great-crested newt, woodland and lowland meadow.

Acknowledgements

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