

Managing for species: Integrating the needs of England's priority species into habitat management

We are seeing a shift to a more integrated approach to biodiversity conservation with the aim of recovering both habitats and species as well as the 'ecosystem services' (the value of natural systems in reducing environmental impacts such as flooding and carbon emissions) that they underpin. There are two main reasons for this change of approach.

- Firstly, although successful at recovering the rarest species, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan has been less successful at achieving the recovery of threatened habitats and widespread species. Shifting the emphasis to habitat-based work will, hopefully, help achieve habitat-based targets as well as benefitting those species less suited to very narrowly focused recovery work.
- Secondly, the recent review of the UK BAP priority list in 2007 has generated a large increase in the number of habitats and species requiring action, with the new list containing 65 habitats and 1150 species. A broader, habitat-based approach is thus necessary to allow effective action planning and reporting without significantly adding to BAP bureaucracy which would place a greater burden on limited resources.

The results of the analyses presented in this report indicate how integration between priority species and habitats could be achieved.

What was done

Information on the requirements of UK BAP priority species in England, based on reference texts and expert opinion, was reviewed and collated. The resultant pen pictures of habitat requirements for each species were divided into broad component requirements (for example, bare ground, shelter, flower-rich grasslands,

etc). An analysis of the component requirements was then undertaken to give an overall picture of habitat niches/components required by species within each priority habitat.

As an example, for the Lowland Heathland priority habitat, over 60% of species were found to require some form of shelter (in terms of scrub and topography to provide shelter from the wind but exposure to sunlight), 55% of species were associated with bare ground and 37% of species required some grasslands or grass-heath matrices.

Reports have been produced for each Biodiversity Integration Group (established to bring together habitat and associated species interests at an England level) and for each priority habitat within them.

Results and conclusions

Our analyses suggest that for species conservation to be effectively integrated into a habitat-based approach we need to place much greater emphasis on creating the component niches and resources required by BAP species, rather than managing habitats generically.

For example, structural variation within and between habitats is often an important factor, both because different species require different structural states and because many species rely on many

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different states to complete their life cycles. For wetlands, hydrology, water quality and the transitional zone between aquatic and terrestrial habitats are all critical components of priority species requirements.

Natural England's viewpoint

This report is relevant to one of Natural England's key objectives: to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed in a sustainable way.

This report completes work undertaken by J Webb in 2008 under the auspices of the England Biodiversity Strategy. This culminated in presentations of results to various stakeholder events and, as a result, elements of this work have already been utilised by conservation agencies and NGOs alike.

It is expected that the analyses in this document will provide guidance for Biodiversity Integration Groups (BIGs) and other biodiversity practitioners in providing and planning for 'species-friendly' habitats.

Selected references

BROTHERTON, P. 2008. *A new framework for the delivery of priority habitats and species in England*. Natural England internal report.

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Further information

For the full details of the research covered by this information note see Natural England Research Report NERR024 - *Managing for species: Integrating the needs of England's priority species into habitat management*.

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