

Appendix 36: Biodiversity Action Plan Summary

Middle Level Commissioners



Biodiversity Action Plan Summary for the Middle Level Commissioners

The actions listed in this appendix summarise the Middle Level Commissioners' Biodiversity Action Plan as a part of the larger Middle Level Biodiversity Action Plan. The plan has been prepared in accordance with the commitment in the Implementation Plan of the DEFRA Internal Drainage Board Review for IDBs to produce their own Biodiversity Action Plans by April, 2010.

It also demonstrates the Board's commitment to fulfilling its duty as a public body under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to conserve biodiversity.

Many of the Board's activities have benefits for biodiversity, not least its water level management and ditch maintenance work. This Biodiversity Action Plan will help the Board to maximise the biodiversity benefits of its activities and demonstrate its contribution to the Government's UK Biodiversity Action Plan targets.

The Board has adopted the Biodiversity Action Plan as one of its policies and is committed to its implementation. It will review the plan periodically and update it as appropriate.

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Date

Duncan Boughton
Chairman of the Board

This Biodiversity Action Plan is a public statement by the Board of its biodiversity objectives and the methods by which it intends to achieve them.

We would welcome appropriate involvement in the delivery of the Plan from interested organisations, companies, and individuals.

You can contact us about this Biodiversity Action Plan by writing to the following address:

Middle Level Commissioners
Middle Level Offices
Dartford Road
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or by email: admin@middlelevel.gov.uk

Further information is available on the Middle Level Commissioners' website:
<http://www.middlelevel.gov.uk/>

or from the Environmental Officer employed by the Board to advise on biodiversity matters:
cliff.carson@middlelevel.gov.uk

Biodiversity Audit

Designated Sites

- International sites: 1
 - Woodwalton Fen (Ramsar, SAC)
- National and local statutory sites: 1
 - Woodwalton Fen (SSSI, NNR)
 - Ring's End LNR
- County Wildlife Sites : 2
 - Forty Foot Drain East
 - Nene Washes Counter Drain East
- Scheduled monuments: none

Habitats

Key habitats for the Middle Level Commissioners:

- Drainage ditch
- Rivers
- Reedbed
- Fen
- Floodplain grazing marsh
- Open water

Species

Key species for the Middle Level Commissioners:

- Water vole
- Otter
- Bats
- Kingfisher
- Barn owl
- Eel

Procedural

Training and capital works are covered by a Procedural Action Plan.

Notes

Water voles have been recorded on many of the main drains, though they seem to be less common than on the smaller watercourses. Water voles will be assumed to be present when carrying out work. Otters use many of the main drains and may be using them to become established in the Middle Level. Biological Records Centre data was not specific enough to attribute species records to specific main drains, however a species list for the entire Middle Level BAP Area is included in Appendix E of the main BAP document. The list is restricted to BAP species and species listed under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

N.B. Actions marked * will be carried out by the Environmental Officer.

Drainage Ditch Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
2 *	Identify ditches of conservation interest and manage appropriately	2.1	Assist the Wildlife Trust to identify and map ditches of County Wildlife Site quality	Wildlife Trust, Plantlife,	2012 and Ongoing	Map produced (numbers of CWS designated)	<i>Every 5 years</i>
3	Support the Environmental Officer in working with landowners to benefit wildlife in the district	3.1	Refer private landowners to the Environmental Officer for advice on creating field margin buffer zones and wildlife-friendly ditch management	Environmental Officer, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, FWAG	Ongoing	Number of contacts received and passed to Environmental Officer	<i>Annual</i>
5	Plant black poplars to increase existing population	5.1	Identify suitable sites and plant at least 10 young black poplars	Environmental Officer	2015	Number of trees planted	<i>2015 with annual progress reports</i>

Rivers Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Manage rivers and their banks for biodiversity as well as for drainage	1.1	Manage rivers according to conservation advice detailed in the Middle Level Operations Manual	Environmental Officer	2010 updated annually	Manual reviewed and followed each year	<i>Annual</i>
		1.2	Experiment with new biodiversity-friendly methods (for example coir rolls for revetment work) where appropriate	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of sites with soft revetment installed (b) Length of river with soft revetments installed	<i>Annual</i>

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		1.3	Improve habitat for fish, especially eels, by removal or modification of barriers where possible	Environment Agency	Ongoing	(a) Number of barriers with potential for modification (b) Number of barriers modified	<i>Every 5 years</i>
2	Control invasive species	2.1	Report all sightings of invasive species to the Operations Engineer and/or the Environmental Officer and control as appropriate	Environmental Officer, Environment Agency	Ongoing	(a) Number of incidents reported (b) Number of incidents dealt with	<i>Annual</i>
3	Be aware of and manage species-rich hedgerow	3.1	Consider gapping-up or extending areas of species-rich hedgerow on the Middle Level Main Drain	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	Length of hedge maintained / planted	<i>Every 5 years</i>

Reedbed Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Identify, assess and map any areas of reedbed over 0.5ha in size	1.1	Pass details of any known areas to MLC Environmental Officer	Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency	2012	Review of reedbed areas carried out	<i>2013</i>
		1.2 *	Assist the Wildlife Trust to assess against County Wildlife Site criteria	Wildlife Trust	2013	Information forwarded to Wildlife Trust	<i>2013</i>

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2	Support appropriate reedbed creation	2.1	Liaise with major habitat creation projects such as the Great Fen and gravel pit restorations	Natural England, Wildlife Trust, RSPB, WWT, Environment Agency	Ongoing	Formal contact made with project	<i>Annual</i>
		2.2	Manage the Middle Level main drains, where possible, to assist private landowners who wish to create areas of reedbed on their own land	Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency	Ongoing	(a) Number of requests received (b) Number of landowners assisted	<i>In response to approaches</i>
3	Take conservation value of reedbed into account when planning and carrying out ditch and river maintenance	3.1	Retain existing reed fringes at the toe of the bank, where possible, when desilting larger rivers	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of opportunities identified (b) Number of operations retaining a percentage of reed fringe	<i>Annual</i>
		3.2	Where reeds are present, commence mowing or cleansing work outside the bird breeding season (7 th April – 15 th July). Where reeds are growing in water be aware of the potential for late-nesting reed warblers being present until late August and avoid mowing in that location. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible, seek advice from the Environmental Officer.	Environmental Officer, Wildlife Trust, RSPB	Ongoing	Reeds not cut during bird nesting season	<i>Annual</i>

Fen Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Identify, assess and map areas of existing fen habitat	1.1	Pass details of any known areas to Environmental Officer	Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency	2012	Review of potential fen areas carried out	2013
		1.2 *	Assist the Wildlife Trust to assess against County Wildlife Site criteria	Wildlife Trust	2013	Information forwarded to Wildlife Trust	2013
2	Support fen habitat conservation and creation through the Great Fen Project	2.1	Manage Middle Level Main Drains to contribute to the Great Fen Project and support appropriate water level management and flood storage	Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency	Ongoing	Number of meetings / contacts that contribute to management target	Annual
3	Support conservation measures for existing major fen sites	3.1	Contribute to implementation of WLMP for Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen	Natural England, Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	WLMP actions implemented where within MLC's control	Annual

Floodplain Grazing Marsh Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Identify, assess and map areas of existing floodplain grazing marsh	1.1	Pass details of any known areas to Environmental Officer	Wildlife Trust, RSPB, WWT, Natural England, Environment Agency	2012	Review of potential grazing marsh area carried out	2013
		1.2 *	Assist the Wildlife Trust to assess against County Wildlife Site criteria	Wildlife Trust	2013	Information forwarded to Wildlife Trust	2013

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2	Support landowners in creating or restoring grazing marsh / wet grassland	2.1	Manage Middle Level Main Drains where possible to assist private landowners and organisations undertaking habitat creation	Environmental Officer, Natural England, RSPB, WWT, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	(a) Number of requests received (b) Number of landowners assisted	<i>Annual</i>
3	Support appropriate management of the Ouse Washes	3.1	Contribute to implementation of all relevant plans (e.g. site management plan and WLMP)	Environmental Officer, Natural England, RSPB, WWT, Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	All relevant actions implemented	<i>Annual</i>
		3.2	Promote and support measures to limit spring and summer flooding of the Ouse Washes	Environmental Officer, Natural England, RSPB, WWT, Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	(a) Number of opportunities to comment on flood-limiting measures (b) Number of comment opportunities taken up	<i>Annual</i>

Open Water Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Promote the creation of ponds, lakes and reservoirs in appropriate areas	1.1	Consider pond creation as mitigation when a ditch has to be filled in or culverted	Local authorities, Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	(a) Number of mitigation opportunities (b) Number of ponds created	<i>Annual</i>
		1.2	Support creation of flood storage areas and reservoirs	Environment Agency, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, RSPB	Ongoing	Number of projects involved with	<i>Annual</i>
		1.3	Assist private landowners with advice, information or contacts as necessary	Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	(a) Number of information requests (b) Number responded to	<i>Annual</i>

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2	Look for opportunities to create open water habitat when managing ditches	2.1	Create a pool at an appropriate ditch junction when re-profiling (see the Drainage Channel Biodiversity Manual, technique CL3))	Environmental Officer	2010	One pool successfully created	<i>When created or every 5 years</i>
3	Support appropriate habitat creation as part of gravel pit restoration	3.1	Support inclusion of wetland habitats such as wet woodland, wet grassland, scrub and open water in gravel pit restoration schemes	Aggregates companies, local authorities, RSPB, WWT, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	Number of schemes involved with	<i>Every 10 years</i>

Water Vole Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Manage ditches according to the law and to best practice for water vole	1.1	Assume water voles are present when carrying out works (discuss special circumstances with the Environmental Officer) and follow the ADA water vole mitigation guide	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	Measures incorporated in management plans	<i>Annual</i>
		1.2	Publicise good practice for rat control near drainage ditches	Environmental Officer, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	Good practice publicised	<i>Annual</i>
2	Enhance drainage ditch habitat to benefit water vole	2.1	Look for opportunities to add a marginal shelf when re-profiling banks	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	(a) Opportunities identified (b) Measures taken	<i>Annual</i>
3	Monitor water vole populations	3.1	Set up a survey programme to monitor water vole populations	Environmental Officer, Wildlife Trust	2010	Surveys carried out	<i>Annual</i>

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		3.2	Provide data on water vole to the relevant Biological Records Centres	Environmental Officer, CPBRC, NBIS	Ongoing	Data sent via Environmental Officer annually	<i>Annual</i>
4	Control mink as necessary	4.1	Promote and support the Middle Level mink control programme		Ongoing	Measures taken	<i>Annual</i>
		4.2	Carry out mink control as part of the Middle Level programme and report all sightings to the Environmental Officer	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of trapping days (b) Number of mink caught	<i>Annual</i>

Otter Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Improve otter habitat	1.1	Identify and maintain existing key bushes and trees near watercourses likely to be important for otters	Environmental Officer	2012 and ongoing	Sites identified and listed in management plans	<i>Annual</i>
		1.2	Create small habitat triangles incorporating “mini-holts” at agreed sites	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	Number of sites created	<i>Annual</i>
		1.3	Provide at least 4 artificial otter holts	Environmental Officer	2015	Number of holts provided	<i>2015</i>
2	Monitor otter populations	2.1	Set up and maintain a survey programme to monitor otter presence throughout the Middle Level BAP Area	Environmental Officer, Wildlife Trust, Mammal Group	2010	Surveys carried out	<i>Annual</i>
		2.2	Provide data on otter presence to the relevant Biological Records Centres and the National Otter Survey	CPBRC, NBIS	Ongoing	Data sent to BRC annually	<i>Annual</i>
		2.3	Ensure any dead otters are reported to the Environmental Officer and transferred to the Environment Agency for post mortem	Environment Agency	Ongoing	Otters reported to Environmental Officer, if found	<i>Annual</i>

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3	Reduce otter deaths related to eel and crayfish trapping and road traffic	3.1	Report incidents of suspected illegal netting, trapping or fishing to the Environment Agency Fisheries Officers and the MLC Environmental Officer	Environment Agency, Angling Clubs & syndicates	Ongoing	Incidents reported, if discovered	<i>Annual</i>
		3.2	Publicise the dangers presented to otters of crayfish traps and eel traps without otter guards fitted	Environment Agency, Angling Clubs & syndicates	Ongoing	Number of publicity opportunities taken.	<i>Annual</i>
		3.3	Consider the provision of bridge ledges at potential road mortality bridges	Environment Agency, Cambridgeshire County Council, private bridge owners	Ongoing	Number of ledges provided	<i>Every 5 years</i>

Bats Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Improve habitat for bats	1.1	Put up at least 8 bat boxes at appropriate sites, e.g. pumping stations	Bat Conservation Trust	2015	Number of bat boxes sited	<i>2015 with annual progress report</i>
		1.2	Pollard suitable trees to provide bat roosts		Ongoing	Number of trees pollarded	<i>Annual</i>
		1.3	Identify potential sites for a bat hibernaculum, e.g. in disused buildings or tunnels	Environmental Officer, Bat Conservation Trust	As opportunities arise	(a) Potential sites looked for (b) Site created	<i>Annual</i>
2	Collect information on bat populations	2.1	Monitor bat boxes	Bat Conservation Trust	2015 onwards	(a) Number of boxes monitored (b) Number of boxes used by bats	<i>Annual</i>

		2.2	Pass bat box information to CPBRC and NBIS	Environmental Officer, CPBRC, NBIS	2015 onwards	Data via Environmental Officer annually	<i>Annual</i>
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Kingfisher Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Improve the quality of kingfisher habitat	1.1	Provide at least 4 potential nest holes in sheet pilings	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	Number of nest sites provided	<i>2015 with annual progress report</i>
		1.2	Leave kingfisher fishing perches where possible (e.g. occasional branch)	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	Number of perch sites left	<i>Annual</i>
2	Collect records of kingfisher breeding between March and July	2.1	Note sightings of potential breeding kingfisher and pass information to CPBRC and NBIS	CPBRC, NBIS	Ongoing	Data sent via Environmental Officer annually	<i>Annual</i>

Barn Owl Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Improve the quality of barn owl habitat	1.1	Put up at least 8 barn owl nest boxes in suitable locations	Wildlife Conservation Partnership	2015	Number of nest boxes provided	<i>2015 with annual progress report</i>

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		1.2	Pollard suitable trees to provide natural nest sites	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	Number of trees pollarded	<i>Annual</i>
2	Collect records of barn owl presence	2.1	Monitor nest boxes for use. Have occupied boxes checked for success by licensed barn owl ringers.	Wildlife Conservation Partnership	2015	(a) Number of nest boxes checked by licensed ringers (b) Number of nest boxes used	<i>Annual once boxes installed</i>
		2.2	Pass barn owl box information to CPBRC and NBIS	Environmental Officer, Wildlife Conservation Partnership, CPBRC, NBIS	2015	Data sent via Environmental Officer annually	<i>Annual once boxes installed</i>

Eel Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Provide elver passes at barrier points	1.1	Install an elver pass at St Germans as part of the pumping station improvements	Environment Agency	2010	(a) Elver pass complete (b) Number of elvers recorded using pass	<i>(a) 2010 (b) Annual</i>
		1.2	Identify any further barrier points where there is a need for an elver pass and consider opportunities for installation	Environment Agency	2011	(a) Number of sites identified (b) Number of passes installed	<i>Annual</i>
2	Facilitate the safe passage of mature eels on their migration out of the Middle Level system.	2.1	Devise and operate 'eel-friendly' slow start-up methods at St Germans Pumping Station to allow safe passage of 'silver' eels on return migration.	Environment Agency	Ongoing	Absence of eel and fish casualties and associated scavengers downstream of pumping station.	<i>Annual</i>

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3	Collect information on eel populations	3.1	Work with the Environment Agency to collect information on the status of eels	Environment Agency	Ongoing	Surveys carried out	<i>Annual</i>
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Procedural Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Reporting
1	Provide training on IDB BAP and conservation management of drainage channels for all relevant staff by 2013	1.1	Establish programme of 1-day courses for MLC or IDB staff and members	Environmental Officer, Wildlife Trust, Natural England, other specialists	2013	(a) Number of courses held (b) Number of Board members / staff attending courses	<i>Annual</i>
		1.2	Establish suitable training for contractors' staff	Environmental Officer, Contractors	2013	Contractors attended training course	<i>Annual</i>
2	Take biodiversity into account when planning and undertaking capital works	2.1	Consult with the Environmental Officer and choose the best possible mitigation solutions for biodiversity, e.g. fish-friendly pumps	Environmental Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of capital schemes undertaken (b) Number of schemes commented on	<i>Annual</i>