

March West & White Fen DDC

Biodiversity Action Plan Report 2020-21

Note on 2020-21 report

In November 2020 ADA published the new updated IDB Biodiversity Plan along with guidance and a press release here:

<https://www.ada.org.uk/2020/11/ada-launches-updated-biodiversity-action-plan-for-idbs/>



Internal Drainage Board Biodiversity Action Plan

Guidance Document

November 2020

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The Conservation Officer will begin moving Board reports into this new format as soon as possible and keep the Board informed of progress. The new reports are good news for the drainage industry as they reflect years of work by many people to ensure that the most up to date legislation, policy and approaches are accessible and practicable for those involved with water level management and, by extension, wildlife conservation. The existing BAP reports provide a good foundation on which to build and update as necessary.

Report Summary

Invasive species

None noted during visits.

Floating Pennywort continues to be found sporadically at the fringes of the Middle Level system but has not currently found its way in. All Boards are asked to keep an eye out for large rafts of a 'lily-leaf type' mass floating in the main channels as this is likely where it will turn up first. An information sheet will be shared separately and a training session has been suggested for later in the year.

Barn Owls

Sightings welcomed by the Conservation Officer. 2020 was an exceptionally poor year across the region. All of the Boards boxes have been used – at least one by barn owls, others by kestrel and stock dove.

Water Voles

Many excellent drains are found in the District and water voles should be considered present in most. There is a good variety of marginal riparian vegetation including sedges, grassy banks and substantial reed edges.

Boards are reminded to contact the Conservation Officer *before* any bank reprofiling or other works that may impact water voles take place. If unsure, please contact the Conservation Officer regardless.



Figure 1 White Fen Drain with valuable reed margins left to benefit water voles and breeding birds

Mink

Mink project underway across the Middle Level; Cambridgeshire now has a dedicated mink officer, a funded position hosted by the Countryside Restoration Trust and Waterlife Recovery East (WRE). All sightings of this and other invasive species are important. A more comprehensive update is available in the 2020 Natural Level newsletter.

A Middle Level mink raft is in place at Duncombes PS to provide coverage of the Twenty Foot and surrounding catchment which has recorded mink in recent years.



Figure 2 mink raft at Duncombes PS

Kingfisher/Sand Martin

Sightings of these species in the breeding season are welcomed by the CO to help build a picture of how their populations fare across the region.

Badger

Badgers and their setts are protected in UK law but exclusion work is permissible under licence where a threat may be posed to land drainage. Such work is not always successful and can lead to further, more problematic, incursions so often the best course of action is to work around them. However, if this is not deemed possible the Conservation Officer should be contacted to determine the best course of action. Care must be taken not to disturb setts during routine management.

Otter

Sightings or reports welcomed. Signs indicate that otters are active in the District. A dead otter was retrieved from the Nene near West Fen PS in spring 2020 - from a location where illegal fishing had (and continues) to occur.

Other Environmental issues

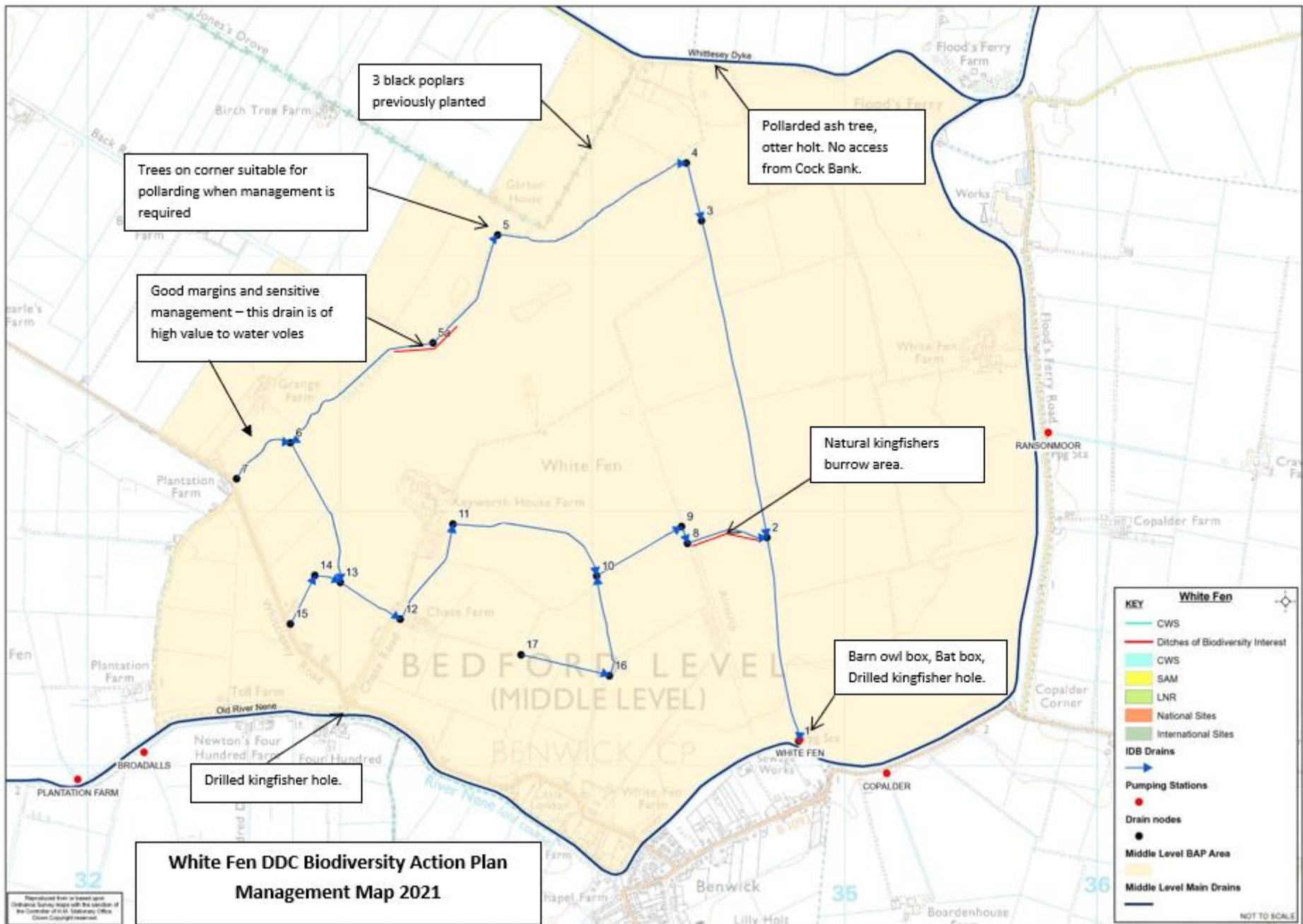
Outbreaks of Bird Flu were reported in small numbers across the fens through winter 2020. Please contact the CO if you come across dead wildfowl, birds of prey or gulls.

A national survey of Turtle Dove, one of the country's most endangered birds, is happening in 2021. Two survey squares fall within the District and the Conservation Officer will be surveying these in May 2021 on behalf of the project.

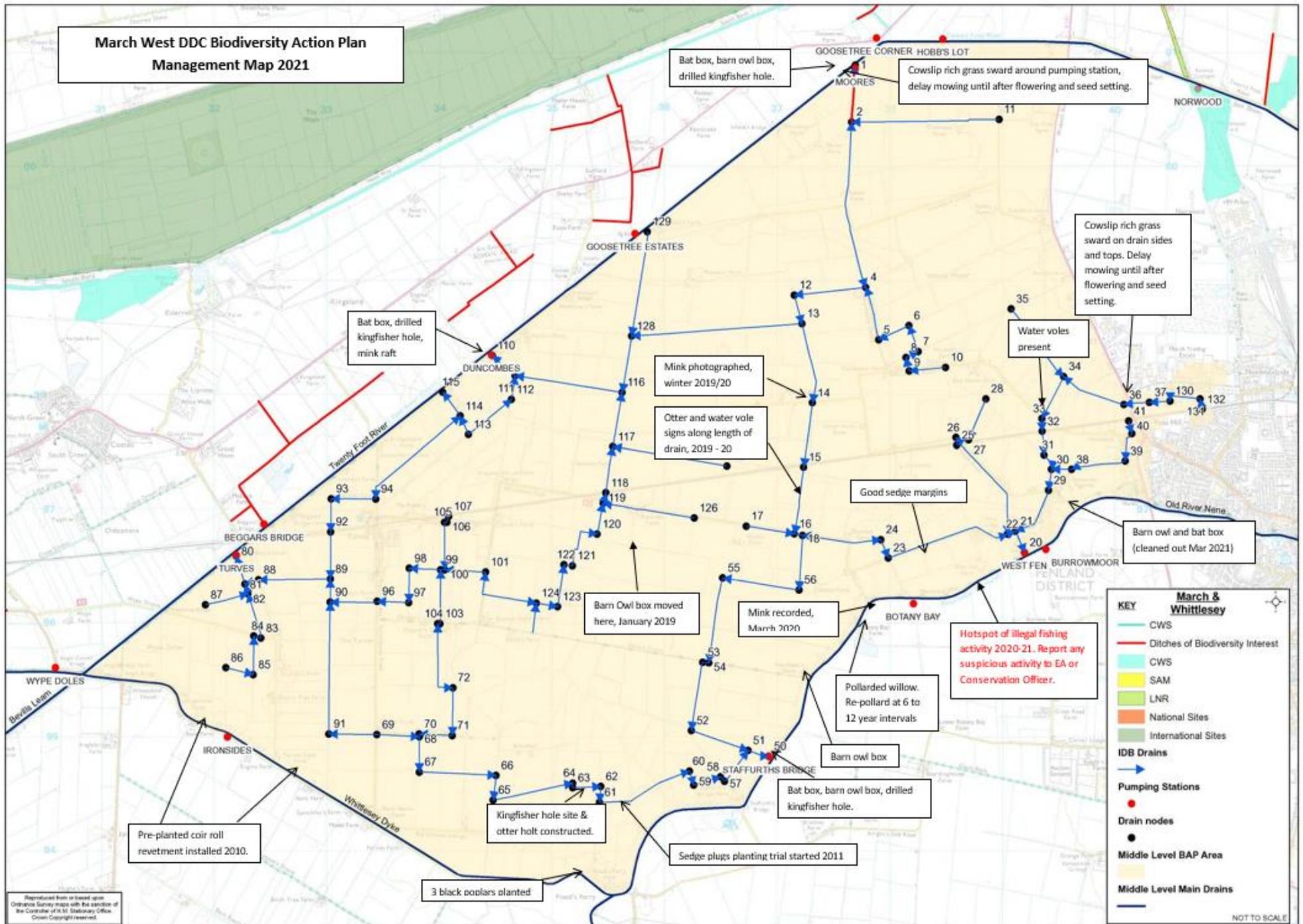
Training/Advice

At present, the ongoing situation regarding coronavirus means no public events are planned, however when it is deemed safe to restart events opportunities will be looked at and the Boards informed. In the meantime, the Conservation Officer is happy to assist with any enquiries.

Peter Beckenham
Peter.beckenham@middlelevel.gov.uk
07765 597775



**March West DDC Biodiversity Action Plan
Management Map 2021**



Bat box, drilled kingfisher hole, mink raft

Bat box, barn owl box, drilled kingfisher hole.

Cowslip rich grass sward around pumping station, delay mowing until after flowering and seed setting.

Cowslip rich grass sward on drain sides and tops. Delay mowing until after flowering and seed setting.

Mink photographed, winter 2019/20

Otter and water vole signs along length of drain, 2019 - 20

Water voles present

Good sedge margins

Barn owl and bat box (cleaned out Mar 2021)

Barn Owl box moved here, January 2019

Mink recorded, March 2020

Hotspot of illegal fishing activity 2020-21. Report any suspicious activity to EA or Conservation Officer.

Pollarded willow. Re-pollard at 6 to 12 year intervals

Barn owl box

Bat box, barn owl box, drilled kingfisher hole.

Sedge plugs planting trial started 2011

Kingfisher hole site & otter holt constructed.

3 black poplars planted

Pre-planted coir roll revetment installed 2010.

KEY

- CWS
- Ditches of Biodiversity Interest
- CWS
- SAM
- LNR
- National Sites
- International Sites
- IDB Drains**
- Pumping Stations
- Drain nodes
- Middle Level BAP Area
- Middle Level Main Drains

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Drainage Ditch Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Manage ditches for biodiversity as well as for drainage	1.1	Establish and maintain a management plan for routine IDB operations incorporating key biodiversity features	Conservation Officer	2015	Plan finalised and followed each year	<i>A map-based plan has been produced and will continue to be developed annually.</i>
		1.2	Look for opportunities to provide natural erosion protection such as marginal plant ledges when re-profiling ditches	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	If re-profiling is carried out, opportunities identified	<i>No re-profiling opportunities occurred during the period.</i>
		1.3	Provide natural erosion protection as in 1.2 if opportunities available	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Length of ditch with ledge / natural vegetation revetment	<i>As above.</i>
2	Identify ditches of conservation interest and manage appropriately	2.2	Ensure appropriate management of ditches for priority species	Conservation Officer, Plantlife, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	Specified in management plan	<i>Priority ditches have been identified and mapped on the management plan.</i>
3	Support the Conservation Officer in working with landowners to benefit wildlife in the district	3.1	Refer private landowners to the Conservation Officer for advice on creating field margin buffer zones and wildlife-friendly ditch management	Conservation Officer, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, FWAG	Ongoing	Number of contacts received and passed to Conservation Officer	<i>No contacts received during the period.</i>
4	Control invasive species	4.1	Report any sightings of non-native invasive species immediately to the Conservation Officer and control as appropriate	Conservation Officer, Environment Agency, Plantlife, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	Reports to Conservation Officer	<i>Azolla blooms have previously been recorded but not in 2020/21.</i>

Reedbed Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Identify, assess and map any areas of reedbed over 0.5ha in size	1.1	Pass details of any known areas to Conservation Officer	Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency	2012	Review of reedbed areas carried out	<i>No areas of reedbed over 0.5ha identified.</i>
2	Support appropriate reedbed creation	2.2	Manage the District adopted 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>No requests received.</i>
3	Take conservation value of reedbed into account when planning and carrying out ditch and river maintenance	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.	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust, RSPB	Ongoing	Reeds not cut during bird nesting season	<i>No marginal vegetation was cut during the bird nesting season.</i>

Open Water Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
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>(a) No ditch infilling occurred, (b) No pond creation opportunities in mitigation available.</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>No application for flood storage areas or reservoirs received.</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>(a) No formal information requests received, (b) no responses required. Informal advice given.</i>
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)	Conservation Officer	2010	One pool successfully created	<i>No opportunities of this type occurred during the period.</i>

Water Vole Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
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 Conservation Officer) and follow the ADA water vole mitigation guide	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Measures incorporated in management plans	<i>Water vole friendly ditch maintenance practices were adhered to.</i>
		1.2	Publicise good practice for rat control near drainage ditches	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust	Ongoing	Good practice publicised	<i>Good practice for rat control near ditches was publicised via the Environmental Officers newsletter number 5.</i>
2	Enhance drainage ditch habitat to benefit water vole	2.1	Look for opportunities to add a marginal shelf when re-profiling banks	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	(a) Opportunities identified (b) Measures taken	<i>(a) No opportunities occurred during the period (b) no measures taken.</i>

		2.2	Consider using coir roll to stabilise banks and provide marginal vegetation	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	(a) Sites considered (b) Measures taken	<i>No appropriate sites for this measure were identified.</i>
3	Monitor water vole populations	3.1	Set up a survey programme to monitor water vole populations	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust	2010	Surveys carried out	<i>Informal surveys are carried out. Water voles are present throughout the Districts.</i>
		3.2	Provide data on water vole to the relevant Biological Records Centres	Conservation Officer, CPBRC, NBIS	Ongoing	Data sent via Conservation Officer annually	<i>Records passed to CPERC.</i>
4	Control mink as necessary	4.2	Carry out mink control as part of the Middle Level programme and report all sightings to the Conservation Officer	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of trapping days (b) Number of mink caught	<i>A trap is in place at Duncombes PS.</i>

Otter Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Improve otter habitat	1.1	Identify and maintain existing key bushes and trees near watercourses likely to be important for otters	Conservation Officer	2012 and ongoing	Sites identified and listed in management plans	<i>Key bushes and trees are identified on the management plan map.</i>
2	Monitor otter populations	2.3	Ensure any dead otters are reported to the Conservation Officer and transferred to the Environment Agency for post mortem	Environment Agency	Ongoing	Otters reported to Conservation Officer, if found	<i>No dead otters recorded.</i>
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 Conservation Officer	Environment Agency, Angling Clubs & syndicates	Ongoing	Incidents reported, if discovered	<i>The stretch of the Nene between Staffurth's and West Fen PS has suffered illegal fishing. Please report any incidences to the CO.</i>

Bats Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Improve habitat for bats	1.1	Put up at least one bat box at an appropriate site, e.g. a pumping station	Bat Conservation Trust	2015	Number of bat boxes sited	<i>Bat boxes previously installed at 4 locations.</i>
		1.2	Pollard suitable trees to provide bat roosts		Ongoing	Number of trees pollarded	<i>None.</i>
		1.3	Identify potential sites for a bat hibernaculum, e.g. in disused buildings or tunnels	Conservation Officer, Bat Conservation Trust	As opportunities arise	(a) Potential sites looked for (b) Site created	<i>No potential sites identified.</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>Monitoring ongoing.</i>
		2.2	Pass bat box information to CPBRC and NBIS	Conservation Officer, CPBRC, NBIS	2015 onwards	Data via Conservation Officer annually	<i>Annual, when data available.</i>

Kingfisher Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Improve the quality of kingfisher habitat	1.1	Provide at least 2 potential nest holes in sheet pilings	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Number of nest sites provided	<i>Several holes. Some maintenance still required</i>
		1.2	Leave kingfisher fishing perches where possible (e.g. occasional branch)	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Number of perch sites left	<i>Many natural fishing perch sites exist within the District.</i>

2	Collect records of kingfisher breeding between March and July	2.1	Note sightings of potential breeding kingfisher and pass information to the Conservation Officer	Conservation Officer, CPBRC, NBIS	Ongoing	Data sent via Conservation Officer annually	<i>Data collection ongoing.</i>
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Barn Owl Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Improve the quality of barn owl habitat	1.1	Put up at least one barn owl nest box in a suitable location	Wildlife Conservation Partnership	2015	Number of nest boxes provided	<i>5 boxes provided</i>
		1.2	Pollard suitable trees to provide natural nest sites	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Number of trees pollarded	<i>Any suitable trees identified on management plan.</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>Boxes routinely checked when possible.</i>
		2.2	Pass barn owl box information to CPBRC and NBIS	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Conservation Partnership, CPBRC, NBIS	2015	Data sent via Conservation Officer annually	<i>Annual, once occupied by barn owls.</i>

Procedural Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
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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 IDB staff and members	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust, Natural England, other specialists	2013	(a) Number of courses held (b) Number of Board members / staff attending courses	<i>None. Board will be notified of opportunities.</i>
		1.2	Establish suitable training for contractors' staff	Conservation Officer, Contractors	2013	Contractors attended training course	<i>Contractors have attended training courses previously.</i>
2	Take biodiversity into account when planning and undertaking capital works	2.1	Consult with the Conservation Officer and choose the best possible mitigation solutions for biodiversity, e.g. fish-friendly pumps	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of capital schemes undertaken (b) Number of schemes commented on	<i>(a) No capital schemes undertaken (b) No schemes to comment on.</i>