

# Sutton & Mepal IDB

## 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/>



Representing Drainage  
Water Level & Flood Risk  
Management Authorities

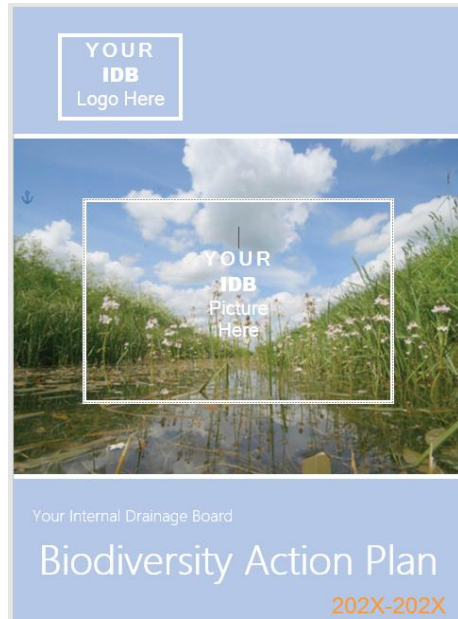
Internal Drainage Board Biodiversity Action Plan

### 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**

2020 was an exceptionally poor year across the region. Thank you to the District Officer for providing updates from the Pumping Station box. CO to look at further opportunities as this is likely a significant District for the species.

## **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.

The CO has been in contact with the Board Chairman and District Officer regarding water vole best practice

## **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.

## **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 and how they might be supported.

## **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.

## **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 in the vicinity of Board drains.

The District Officer has enquired about hedgerow management. Hedgerows are a notable feature around the District and the CO will provide a summary of best practice management.

The CO has offered comments regarding environmental constraints to bore hole works in the Block Fen area. Consultation was also given regarding private drainage works at Colne Fen Farm where water voles were present near node C7.

## **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.

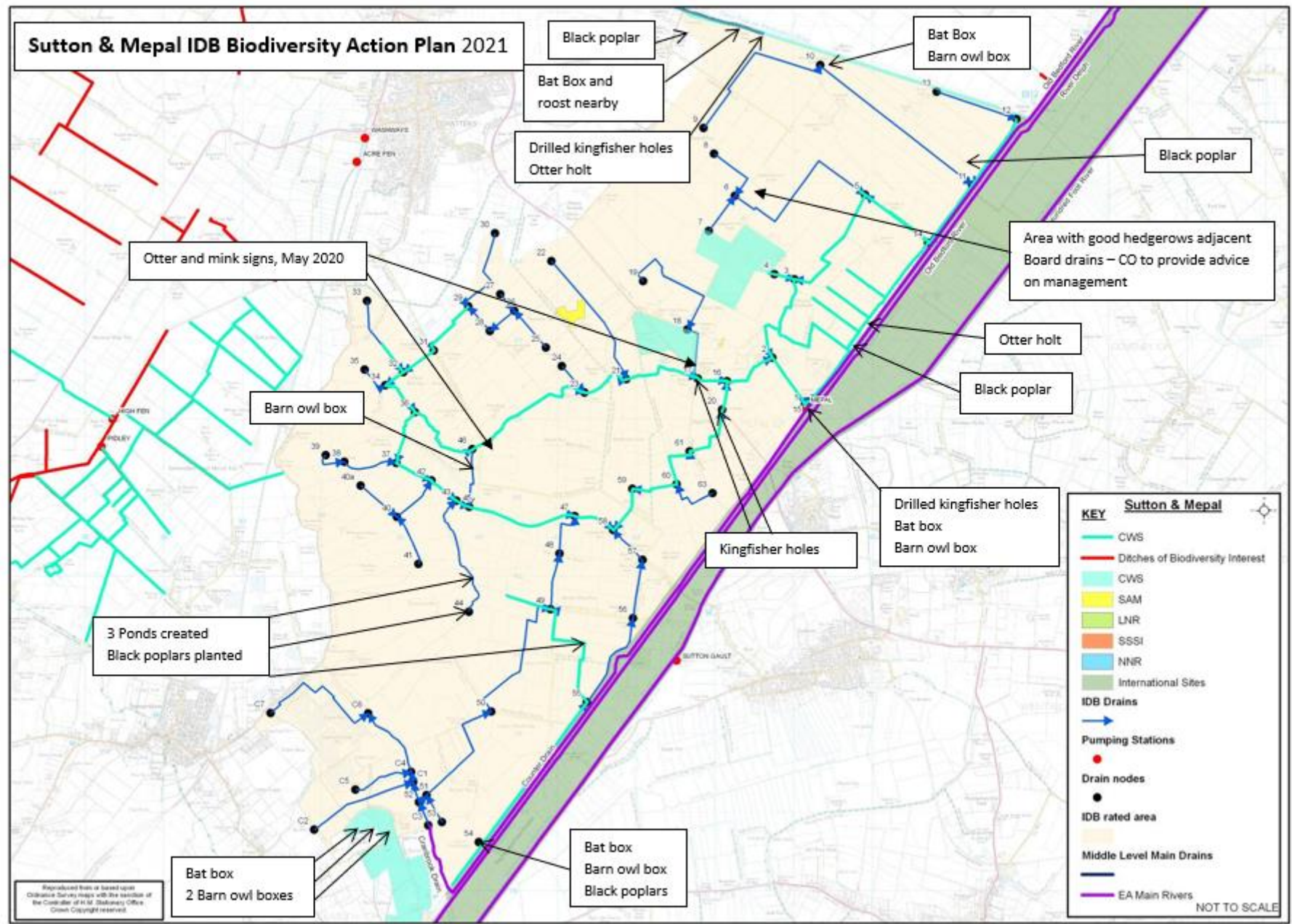
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**Figure 1** Part of drain 8-6, hedgerows are a key landscape feature and of high value to wildlife. This hedge held a small flock of Tree Sparrows in May 2021 suggesting they may be breeding in the vicinity.



**Figure 2** Moorhen's nest at Sutton and Mepal Pumping Station!



## 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. It will be updated and added to as further information becomes available.</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 opportunities to carry out this action were identified 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 identified in the management plan map.</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>Pond creation enquiry ongoing.</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>No invasive non-native plants recorded</i>
5	Plant black poplars to increase existing population	5.1	Identify suitable sites and plant at least 2 young black poplars	Conservation Officer	2015	Number of trees planted	<i>12 black poplars were planted previously – see map.</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 new areas of reedbed over 0.5ha present.</i>
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>Informal advice provided when needed</i>
		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 formal approaches were received during the period. Informal advice given as required.</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 <sup>th</sup> April – 15 <sup>th</sup> 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 Conservation Officer.	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust, RSPB	Ongoing	Reeds not cut during bird nesting season	<i>Reeds or other vegetation were not cut during bird nesting season. Alternate side mowing of banks was carried out where possible.</i>

## Grazing Marsh Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
1	Identify, assess and	1.1	Pass details of any known	Wildlife Trust, RSPB,	2013	Review of	<i>No new areas</i>

	map areas of existing floodplain grazing marsh		areas to Conservation Officer	WWT, Natural England, Environment Agency		potential grazing marsh area carried out	<i>of potential grazing marsh identified.</i>
2	Support landowners in creating or restoring grazing marsh / wet grassland	2.1	Manage District adopted 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>None in this period</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) informal responses to inquiries given as required.</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>Many examples of sensitive management in the District.</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 was publicised via the Environmental Officers newsletter issue 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) Following work in 2015 no further opportunities to carry out this action were identified during the period. (b) See above.</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 during the period.</i>
3-8	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 presence/absence surveys were carried out by the CO and will be re-visited each year. It is an important district for this species.</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 on.</i>
4	Control mink as necessary	4.2	Carry out mink control as part of the Middle Level programme and <u>report all sightings</u> to the Conservation Officer	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	(a) Number of trapping days (b) Number of mink caught	<i>See summary. Rafts available.</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 identified on the Biodiversity Action Plan map.</i>
		1.3	Provide at least one artificial otter holt	Conservation Officer	2015	Number of holts provided	<i>One holt provided previously in 2011.</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>None reported.</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>Otters being drowned in illegal eel nets remain a concern. Members are requested to be watchful for suspicious activity and report it to the Conservation Officer on 07765 597775 immediately.</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 2 bat boxes at appropriate sites, e.g. pumping stations	Bat Conservation Trust	2015	Number of bat boxes sited	<i>Four bat boxes previously installed.</i>

		1.2	Pollard suitable trees to provide bat roosts		Ongoing	Number of trees pollarded	<i>Any key trees identified on the Management Plan map.</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>'natural' hibernacula found in use on private site, CO to monitor</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>Two boxes used by bats previously (Fairey Holt and Horseway)</i>
		2.2	Pass bat box information to CPBRC and NBIS	Environmental Officer, CPBRC, NBIS	2015 onwards	Data via Environmental Officer annually	<i>Data passed on.</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 one potential nest hole in sheet pilings	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Number of nest sites provided	<i>Three sites provided – see map.</i>
		1.2	Leave kingfisher fishing perches where possible (e.g. occasional branch)	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Number of perch sites left	<i>Many drains have suitable natural perches for kingfishers.</i>
2	Collect records of kingfisher breeding between March and July	2.1	Note sightings of potential breeding kingfisher and pass information to CPERC via the Conservation Officer	Conservation Officer, CPERC	Ongoing	Data sent via Conservation Officer annually	<i>Occasional sightings, likely to be a good District for the species. Signs suggest one of the provisioned holes may be in use.</i>

## 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 2 barn owl nest boxes in suitable locations	Wildlife Conservation Partnership	2015	Number of nest boxes provided	<i>Six nest boxes provided.</i>
		1.2	Pollard suitable trees to provide natural nest sites	Conservation Officer	Ongoing	Number of trees pollarded	<i>Any suitable trees will be identified on the management plan map.</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. (b) Number of nest boxes used	<i>Boxes checked when possible, limited opportunities in 2020.</i>
		2.2	Pass barn owl box information to CPBRC and NBIS	Conservation Officer, Wildlife Conservation Partnership, CPBRC	2015	Data sent via Conservation Officer annually	<i>Data sent.</i>

## Procedural Action Plan

Target Reference	Target	Action Reference	IDB Actions	Partners	Date	Indicators	Report
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>No events took place due to coronavirus. Board will be updated when new events are planned.</i>
		1.2	Establish suitable training for contractors' staff	Conservation Officer, Contractors	2013	Contractors attended training course	<i>Training course run 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>None.</i>
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