

2.0 Why Do We Need an Action Plan for Biodiversity in Bromley?

2.1 What is biodiversity?

'Biodiversity' is life in all its various forms and relationships. It encompasses the whole range of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, plants, algae, fungi and more obscure micro-organisms such as bacteria and viruses. It also includes the complex relationships between them and with their physical surroundings. No organism can exist in isolation from other living things, and each contributes to the balance of nature and the very survival of our planet.

2.2 Why does biodiversity matter?

Biodiversity nourishes our quality of life. How? It provides food, clothing, shelter, health, relaxation, inspiration, recreation, tourism, water and flood management, opportunities for regeneration and education and carbon storage to limit global warming. Loss of biodiversity brings with it environmental, economic and spiritual loss. Biodiversity constantly responds to changes in the environment, but human activities are now changing and destroying biodiversity at an ever increasing rate, so leading to extinctions. By sustaining variety of life, and the natural processes that go hand in hand with it, we are cradling the planet on which we live with a life insurance policy. True to basic economics, we place more value on nature as it becomes less diverse, instead of valuing it at its strongest.

2.3 What is the BBAP?

The Bromley Biodiversity Action Plan or BBAP is, at it's simplest, a plan of action for Bromley's wildlife. But its significance truly rests in ensuring we make the content reality. The effort involved in turning the plan into action is huge! Everyone who lives or works in the Borough can play a part in helping wildlife. The heart of the BBAP is formed from the Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans.

The concept of biodiversity action planning was born at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Here, Britain, along with over 150 other countries, recognised the need for action to halt the worldwide loss of animals, plant species and genetic resources and joined in signing a 'Convention on Biological Diversity'. Since that time, national, regional and local action plans have been devised in the UK.

The BBAP is one of many non-statutory local biodiversity action plans in existence across the UK. Positive steps at a local level can contribute to 'keeping the balance' on the world stage. As London's largest Borough, benefiting from a wealth of species and habitats, we have quite a responsibility! The challenges our wildlife faces in Bromley's urban and rural areas are many.

Many organisations and individuals have shaped the focus and direction of the BBAP as part of the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership. Together we aim to conserve, protect and enhance the biodiversity of the London Borough of Bromley.

2.4 What benefits does a BBAP bring?

- It identifies and promotes biodiversity that is important to our area and to local people, whilst also taking account of the international, national and regional scene.
- It outlines detailed action that can be taken to help selected wildlife species and habitats in Bromley between from 2006 to 2009.
- It promotes coordinated action, helping to guide and increase effort to benefit Bromley's wildlife.

2.5 What is the link with Darwin?

The diversity of species around us is mind-boggling! Influenced by a mixing bowl of ingredients of DNA, time, chance and environmental stimulants, 40,000* species of fungi, higher plants and animals live alongside us in the UK.

The biodiversity we appreciate in Bromley was the inspiration for Charles Darwin and his insights of the natural world. He studied the orchids thriving on chalk grasslands and the bees visiting the grounds of his house and how they are adapted to their setting, for instance. In recognition of the need to sustain our local species and habitats for future generations and so ensure that they too can enjoy and learn from them, the BBAP is entitled 'The Future of Darwin's Wildlife in Bromley'.

Darwin's insights have global significance. During the period of the 2006-9 BBAP 3rd Edition, the UK will submit and hear whether it has been successful in securing a World Heritage Site around Darwin's home at Downe. 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of the 'Origin of Species'. For further information, visit www.darwinatdowne.co.uk

* Includes fungi, higher plants, insects and spiders, fish and amphibians, mammals, birds, reptiles; other species such as algae and bacteria are not included in this estimate (Source 'Species UK').

2.6 How much biodiversity has Bromley got?

The London Borough of Bromley boasts an impressive range of wildlife, having species and habitats in common with both Kent and London. It contains London's largest area of countryside, which stretches to the crest of the North Downs, and a good proportion of London's semi-natural habitats. We have a good idea of the extent of habitats in Bromley due to the information arising from surveys undertaken since the 1980s. Many hectares of land in Bromley are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) under the Unitary Development Plan. Wildlife is not restricted to the open countryside, but thrives in the urban areas too and in a wide range of situations. These urban habitats make a significant contribution to the biodiversity of Bromley and are residents' first and most frequent points of contact with the natural world.

2.7 How is it that Bromley supports so much biodiversity?

The rich tapestry of habitats we have inherited in Bromley can be largely attributed to the varied geology and human activity through the millennia.

The north and western half of the Borough is capped with London Clay and Blackheath Beds. The Clay produces damp, heavy soils supporting oak dominated woodland (English and sessile) and, where these have been cleared, some of the few examples of species-rich neutral grassland occur. The Blackheath Beds form plateaux with thin, nutrient-poor acid soils; with woodland clearance and subsequent management, heathland developed, of which only a remnant remains. The Ravensbourne and the Cray river valleys which have cut roughly north-south, have exposed Woolwich and Reading Beds and Thanet Sand, while lining valley bottoms with alluvial deposits. Patches of alder woodland have survived in the damper valleys. The southern and eastern half of the Borough is dominated by the chalk and clay-with-flints, which forms part of the North Downs. Originally covered in deciduous

woodland, progressive clearances were made for agriculture, which led to the development of species-rich chalk grassland, ancient hedgerows and remnant ancient woodlands.

2.8 What pressures are there on Bromley's wildlife?

There has always been change in Bromley's countryside. Since the Second World War, however, the pressures on our wildlife have increased dramatically and consequently many species and habitats are in decline - some in rapid decline. Development, agricultural intensification, vandalism, recreational use and lack of understanding, are just some of the pressures local nature faces. The challenge is to influence future change for the benefit of wildlife as well as people - they need not be mutually exclusive. The Borough has a large area of farmland, for example, which offers many opportunities for both the production of food and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. Parks and sports grounds provide a venue for recreation, but can be enhanced to support species able to thrive in a more heavily visited, urban setting.

2.9 What can we do to relieve the pressure?

Appropriate management of habitats can help ensure suitable conditions are present for the majority of species. However, there are some rare and sensitive species, which require specific management regimes.

Habitat creation can boost biodiversity. Species have to be carefully chosen to match communities already found in Bromley. It must be remembered that long-established habitats such as species-rich chalk grassland, old hedgerows and ancient woodland cannot be easily created, if at all. Disturbance of these refuges can tip species over the edge and result in local extinctions.

It is not enough to conserve nature reserves in isolation in the hope that this will be enough to conserve local populations of species. It is vital that this is done in conjunction with positive action for wildlife in the wider countryside and in the urban areas too, so that they are able to cope with change. This not only helps create a network for wildlife now, but for the future as climate change occurs.

2.10 How have the species and habitats in the BBAP been chosen?

In drawing up and reviewing the BBAP, an evaluation of the wildlife in the Borough is made. Priority habitats and indicative species or groups of species have been chosen with the help of special criteria and the views of the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership.

Despite a review of the 2nd Edition BBAP in 2005, there has been no dramatic change in choice of species or habitats for the 3rd Edition BBAP (2006-9), because so much more needs to be done! The list of Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and Species Action Plans (SAPs) is not exclusive, but does aim to show our specific intentions under the BBAP.

Some animals and plants act as 'flagship species' for habitats, such as reptiles. They provide us with clues about the quality and management of the habitat and a number are highlighted within the HAPs. There are many significant species not listed in either the HAPs or SAPs, but opportunities to help different wildlife in Bromley will arise and be pursued. Opportunities to focus on other species in future through SAPs, will be taken.

2.11 What is the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership?

The Bromley Biodiversity Partnership includes anyone who is doing something for wildlife in Bromley and is helping to progress the targets set out under the BBAP! There are lots of ways to get involved.

A core partnership of Bromley Council, Kent Wildlife Trust, London Wildlife Trust, English Nature and the Orpington Field Club was established in 1998 to produce a BBAP. Following wider consultation including workshops, the first BBAP was published in March 1999. Since then, the Partnership has greatly expanded.

A Steering Group, involving local organisations, members of public and other key players, meets regularly to ensure that the BBAP remains relevant and focussed, the best approaches are taken and the effects of action are monitored.

Action Groups meet to push forward BBAP targets set out for particular species or habitats.

Action is being taken constantly, including more high-profile activities arranged by local organisations as well as quiet on-going effort made by individual residents. To promote the BBAP widely and to attract greater involvement, a celebration of actions is made once a year through a wider BBAP Forum. In 2005, a 'Taste of the Wild' Action Weekend was organised to introduce new people to practical action for wildlife. There is potential to use a whole range of methods for the Forum in future years.

2.12 How do we hope to achieve action for biodiversity?

By:

- auditing biodiversity and its importance to local people.
- implementing and influencing, where possible, the National, London and Kent targets for habitats and species found in the London Borough of Bromley.
- raising awareness of biodiversity issues and improving availability of information to all residents of the Borough.
- encouraging local people to be involved in the BBAP in a direct and practical way.
- ensuring a long-term strategy for conserving, protecting and enhancing biodiversity exists and that it is regularly reviewed.

A number of themes form a common foundation for the BBAP. These relate to: policy; land and species management; advice, publicity and education; monitoring and research. The approaches to be taken under these themes are detailed in a list of generic actions.

2.13 How does the BBAP fit in with London-wide plans?

Much of the action accomplished through the BBAP contributes to action for Greater London's biodiversity, and vice versa. A great advantage of a regional approach is that it enables issues of a London-wide basis to have a louder voice and so receive greater attention.

An audit of London's habitats and species, the programme of delivery of generic actions, detailed habitat and species action plans and statements for London are included within the London Biodiversity Action Plan. The London Biodiversity Action Plan is an effective attempt to promote a common agenda amongst organisations and authorities working in the Capital with interest or influence on its wildlife, in order to make progress in a strategic way. Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL) aims to

collate and manage all data for London's greenspaces, for example. The London Biodiversity Partnership brings together public, private and voluntary organisations working together for wildlife and people. Since its inception, various partners of the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership influence and contribute to the work of the London Biodiversity Partnership, through the efforts of its working groups and London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum (LBBF), for example.

The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy 'Connecting with London's Nature' (July 2002) sets out policies, proposals and the Mayor's vision for London's wildlife habitats and rare species. The strategy is particularly significant for the region as it has political and legislative backing as a result of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. It goes towards "establishing a London wide framework for maintaining London's diversity of wildlife, as part of an integrated set of strategies to achieve sustainable economic growth and raise the quality of life for London's more than seven million residents."

2.14 How does the BBAP fit in with England and UK plans?

The London Borough of Bromley, the chair of the Bromley Biodiversity Partnership, has contributed to the England Biodiversity Forum.

Elements of the BBAP have regional and national significance. The stag beetle is in decline internationally; LBB forms part of the National Stag Beetle Focus Group. The conservation of chalk downland helps to meet national targets; the 'Chalking Up London's Downs' Project has been used as an example of good practice in the UK.

The outcomes of the SUN Project will benefit biodiversity action planning and implementation in the UK and Europe. The coordinated approach taken to manage the Darwin at Downe proposed World Heritage Site and any subsequent inscription will secure the conservation of a worldwide asset. These initiatives and the BBAP itself have been discussed and promoted at regional and national conferences and exchange fairs.

National grant schemes, which aim to integrate nature conservation with farming and forestry practices, have been promoted and adopted at the local level, so helping to meet Government targets.

Many local people are members of national organisations, which work towards the conservation of species and habitats across the country, and worldwide.