



**Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Northamptonshire**

Water for Wildlife in Bedfordshire

Progress Report for March 2014 – February 2015



This report covers the Water for Wildlife work that has been carried out in Bedfordshire between March 2014 and February 2015. It explains how projects have progressed and been developed during the last year, as well as how it is hoped that the work will be taken forward. Current funding for Water for Wildlife covers a post for two days per week.

The Water for Wildlife work has been carried out by Penelope Chaney, Gwen Hitchcock and Katharine Banham (Conservation Officers) as well as Laura Downton (Local Sites Officer) and John Comont (Conservation Manager).

**Penelope Chaney & Gwen Hitchcock
The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire,
Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire**

Himalayan Balsam and Other Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) on the River Flit

Actions in the last year

Himalayan Balsam

Funding was obtained from both Natural England and the Environment Agency for Himalayan balsam work this summer enabling work not only on Flitwick Moor SSSI and the County Wildlife Sites but also on more connecting farmland than in previous years. Through local contacts several new landowners have been identified who have all allowed us access to survey their land and for contractors to work on there. The surveys showed significantly less Himalayan balsam at all sites previously worked on, although a lot of balsam came up late meaning extra work was needed later in the season. Practical work focused on Flitwick Moor SSSI, upstream to the highest known balsam patch at Kingshoe Wood and immediately downstream at Flitton Moor CWS. Work at several Wildlife Trust and Greensand Trust nature reserves further down the Flit were carried out by respective members of staff.

Much of the main part of Flitwick Moor, Flitton Moor and Flitwick Manor Park now has too little Himalayan balsam to support a volunteer task day. In an effort to make the project more self-supporting a group of Balsam Wardens was created. These volunteers mostly comprise of locals who will visit Flitwick Moor over the summer anyway and who are willing to report and/or remove any balsam plants they see on their visits. Strict guidelines over lone-working and safety near water were provided and most volunteer opted to work in pairs rather than alone, those who did prefer to work along already visited or worked in the area by themselves. The scheme proved highly successful with positive feedback from the volunteers involved who all signed to continue next year.



Water for Wildlife Officers Gwen and Penelope removing Himalayan balsam from Flitwick Moor using a new boat.

A meeting of the Local Action Group (LAG) took place in November to discuss results from the invasive species surveys and removal work carried out in 2014 and to plan work for 2015. A full report of the Himalayan balsam work conducted over 2014 was written and circulated together with estimated costs of desired work for 2015.

Over winter an area of bramble and reed has been cleared at Flitwick Moor SSSI to allow easier access for removing the Himalayan balsam over the summer.

Other INNS

A significant effort was spent by Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers to remove the three patches of small balsam at Flitwick Moor in an attempt to prevent them spreading further through the SSSI. A patch of Japanese knotweed immediately downstream of Flitwick Moor SSSI was sprayed off. *Crassula* was sprayed at Flitton Moor but many leaves were submerged making this not as effective as hoped. Plans were made to include Check, Clean, Dry signs at entrances to the pond field to prevent its spread. Questions were raised over the recommendations for *Crassula* control where great crested newts are present. Currently control at Maulden Church Meadow is limited to late summer when the pond dries out. Still no floating pennywort recorded in Bedfordshire. Several farmers are

keen to trap mink if a control programme is reinstated, some locals control mink independently e.g. local pheasant shoot.

Planned Actions for the Future

Additional funding is being sought to continue the INNS work in 2015 focusing on keeping the Himalayan balsam at Flitwick Moor SSSI under control and clearing Himalayan balsam upstream of the SSSI. This will include resurveying the river, SSSI and Country Wildlife Sites to determine the extent of Himalayan balsam this year as well as practical work removing as much of the balsam as possible. Small balsam at Flitwick Moor SSSI will receive additional focus to reduce its dominance and prevent its spread into more sensitive areas of the reserve. Work plans are designed to be flexible to take account of what funding is or is not available.

Control of Japanese knotweed, New Zealand pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) and water soldier will be continued at various nature reserves in the Flit vale by other LAG members including Friends of Flitton Moor and the Greensand Trust.

Contributions to Catchment Partnerships in Bedfordshire

Actions in the last year

Workshops have been attended for the River Ouzel and the Bedford and Upper Ouse Catchments to ensure wildlife issues are being included into the Catchment Plans and that they are being costed correctly and to find out what is being planned in this area. The draft Bedford and Upper Ouse Catchment Management Plan is currently available for comments.

The catchment wide project with Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and the Greensand Trust to control invasive non-native species, focusing on Himalayan balsam, is still in the planning stages due to a delay in the availability of funding for such a project. A meeting in February will put more detail into the plan.

Planned Actions for the Future

As a team we need to read and comment on the local Catchment Management Plan. We will continue to feed into each of the Plans which are being developed in Bedfordshire, attending meetings and providing advice as required. This is important to ensure that Water for Wildlife projects are incorporated into the plans and they are used to build on and enhance current action.

Water Vole Surveys and Habitat Management

Actions in the last year

The IDB has recently carried out some work on the Potton Brook at the Henry Smith Playing Field including removal of a number of small trees on side of the brook. We visited with the site with a member of the local conservation group to reassess what work needs to be carried out to the local area. We are in the process of updating the management plan which Potton Town Council has now begun to implement.

Planned Actions for the Future

It is hoped that a number of work tasks will be carried out this winter to try and convert some large areas of nettles on the bank to a long grass habitat. Surveying for Water voles will continue at this site and the results will be fed back to the Council.

Gwen is planning to get some training in surveying for water voles to increase the amount of work we can do in this area. This includes resurveying Reynolds Brook following urban developments.

Biodiversity Action Plans

Actions in the Last Year & Planned Actions for the Future

The majority of action plans have been updated. For wetland habitats and species the following plans have been updated and/or are awaiting final comments:

- Depressed River Mussel
- Great-Crested Newt
- Water Vole
- Reedbeds
- Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- Ponds
- Wet Woodland

Once completed the plans will be put to the Local Nature Partnership for approval and then will be placed on the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre's website.

Water Soldier at Felmersham

Actions in the last year

The Natural England Conservation and Enhancement Scheme project on the Water Soldier (*Stratiotes alodites*) at Felmersham Gravel Pits has been very active. During the summer we undertook further macrophyte surveys along with targeted macro invertebrate surveys. This will enable us to continue to assess the potential impact of removing the Water soldier in the Pits.

A contractor with a specialised boat has spent three days removing the first section of Water Soldier. Approximately 20% of the area covered by dense Water Soldier was cleared in this time. This has continued to make a big difference to the Site of Special Scientific Interest and the response from volunteers and visitors to the reserve has been positive.



The contractor removing water soldier from Felmersham gravel pits using specialist equipment.

Over the winter the reports from last season on macrophytes, invertebrates and water soldier are currently being produced and will soon be submitted to Natural England. The project was featured in the latest edition of the Wildlife Trust's magazine Local Wildlife for the positive affect the water soldier

removal work is having on the locally rare population of Bladderwort. Since the water soldier was removed from an area of the gravel pit in autumn 2013, the bladderwort was seen flowering in 2014, in good numbers, in the open water created as a result of the removal work in the previous year.

Planned Actions for the Future

The survey and monitoring work, followed by more Water Soldier removal work at Felmersham Gravel Pits is already being planned for this summer and autumn. Like last year, some local water beetle experts are keen to assist with the monitoring, which will provide a valuable source of expertise.

Providing Advice and other survey work

Actions in the last year

Advice on wetland issues has been given in a range of situations over the last five months. These have included commenting on planning applications, scoping studies and Local Plan documents that include land with important wetland habitats.

The new ponds at Flitwick Moor were surveyed by local experts and by the general public during the annual Invertebrate day held by the Flit Vale Local Group.

Laura Downton, County Wildlife Site Officer, has visited one wetland site in the last six months which is associated with the River Ouse. This is Bromham Park (adjacent to the River Ouse): This site is a County Wildlife Site for its marshy grassland. Its condition was assessed to be good at present although it will need to be cut soon to prevent the quality of the grassland degrading. Advice on the best way to manage the site for wildlife was given and plans are in progress to get part of the site fenced to enable cattle grazing.

Following tree removal work around one pond at Cooper's Hill both the newly opened and untouched shaded pond were surveyed. A greater diversity of aquatic invertebrates was found in the opened pond.

Planned Actions for the Future

Most of the opportunities to provide advice come unexpectedly, however we will continue to screen planning applications and strategic planning documents, providing comments where necessary.

Continuing the monitoring the colonisation of the new ponds at Flitwick Moor and collaborating with local experts to write up the findings for wider publication. In weather conditions allow, the trees around the second pond at Cooper's Hill will be cleared and monitoring continued.



Volunteers surveying the open pond at Cooper's Hill
Insert: *Colymbetes fuscus* diving beetle

Other water for wildlife work

In January 2015 Penelope attended a symposium for Local Action Groups organised by the Non Native Species Secretariat along with around 50 other delegates from across the UK. The two day event included talks, posters and many discussions about the issues facing the UK from non native species, many of which are aquatic species. Information from this, particularly concerning local threats and biosecurity will be fed back to other Wildlife Trust, help shape policies and will also be communicated with Wildlife Trust members and the wider public.



Representatives of LAGs from across the UK.