



Wetlands Partnership

Activity Report
2000 - 2003



Foreword

The Severn and Avon Vales Wetlands are an outstanding natural resource. Not only do they support a wide variety of unique habitats and species, they also enhance the natural landscape, provide recreational opportunities and help us understand a little of our heritage.

Until fairly recently, wetland areas (and wildlife species such as waders which they support), have been under serious threat from unsustainable farming practices and poorly co-ordinated resource management. Many organisations have had some interest or involvement in wetland creation and maintenance, but no single body was in a position to co-ordinate these cross-sectoral interests, or to galvanise action. It is encouraging, therefore, to see the progress, highlighted by this report, made by the Severn and Avon Vales Wetlands Partnership since it was set up in 2000.

The Partnership has worked hard to develop a structured and targeted approach to promoting wetland restoration in key zones. The result has been that nearly 330 hectares of wet grassland have been restored. This would have been impossible without the tremendous support from a wide range of organisations named in the report and the co-operation and understanding of the farming community. I would like to take the opportunity, therefore, of thanking all those who have worked together to achieve such a fantastic result to date.

There is more work to be done, however. The Environment Agency remains committed to supporting the work of the Partnership, both financially and technically. We will also work with others to widen the interest in sustainable wetland creation and use, and to help secure external funding for key restoration projects. I wish the Partnership every success as it moves into the next three year phase and I very much look forward to the next activity report.



Jim Haywood
Environment Agency, Area Manager Lower Severn



The Partnership

Background

Established in 2000, the Severn and Avon Vales Wetlands Partnership (SAVWP) draws on the support and resources of statutory and voluntary organisations from the environmental and agricultural sectors. These include: the Environment Agency, English Nature, Wildlife Trusts, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups (FWAG), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), National Farmers Union (NFU), the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), County and Local Councils, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (W&WT) and Severn Trent Water.

The Partnership's vision is:

To achieve the planned recovery and enhancement of the wetland resource of the Severn and Avon Vales by the wise use of land and water, in ways that are economically sound, socially responsive and environmentally sensitive.

To realise this vision the Partnership aims to:

- restore and sustain the mosaic of historic floodplain landscapes and biodiversity, through the promotion of sustainable farming partnerships
- promote wider appreciation of wetland habitats through the interpretation of the wildlife and heritage and the provision of public access.

In developing site specific schemes, the Partnership must work within the constraints of current flood defence, development control and planning policy, most especially in relation to the protection of archaeological resources and local landscape character. The Partnership's goal is to work with a broad network of interested parties to achieve wetland restoration that provides positive environmental and socio-economic benefits for other interests.

Re-creation options for the River Severn/Avon floodplain wetlands (Ecoscope 1999)

The report 'Re-creation options for the River Severn/Avon floodplain wetlands' (Ecoscope 1999), commissioned by English Nature, the Environment Agency and the RSPB, has provided the basis on which the Partnership has developed its priorities and focused resources for wetland restoration.

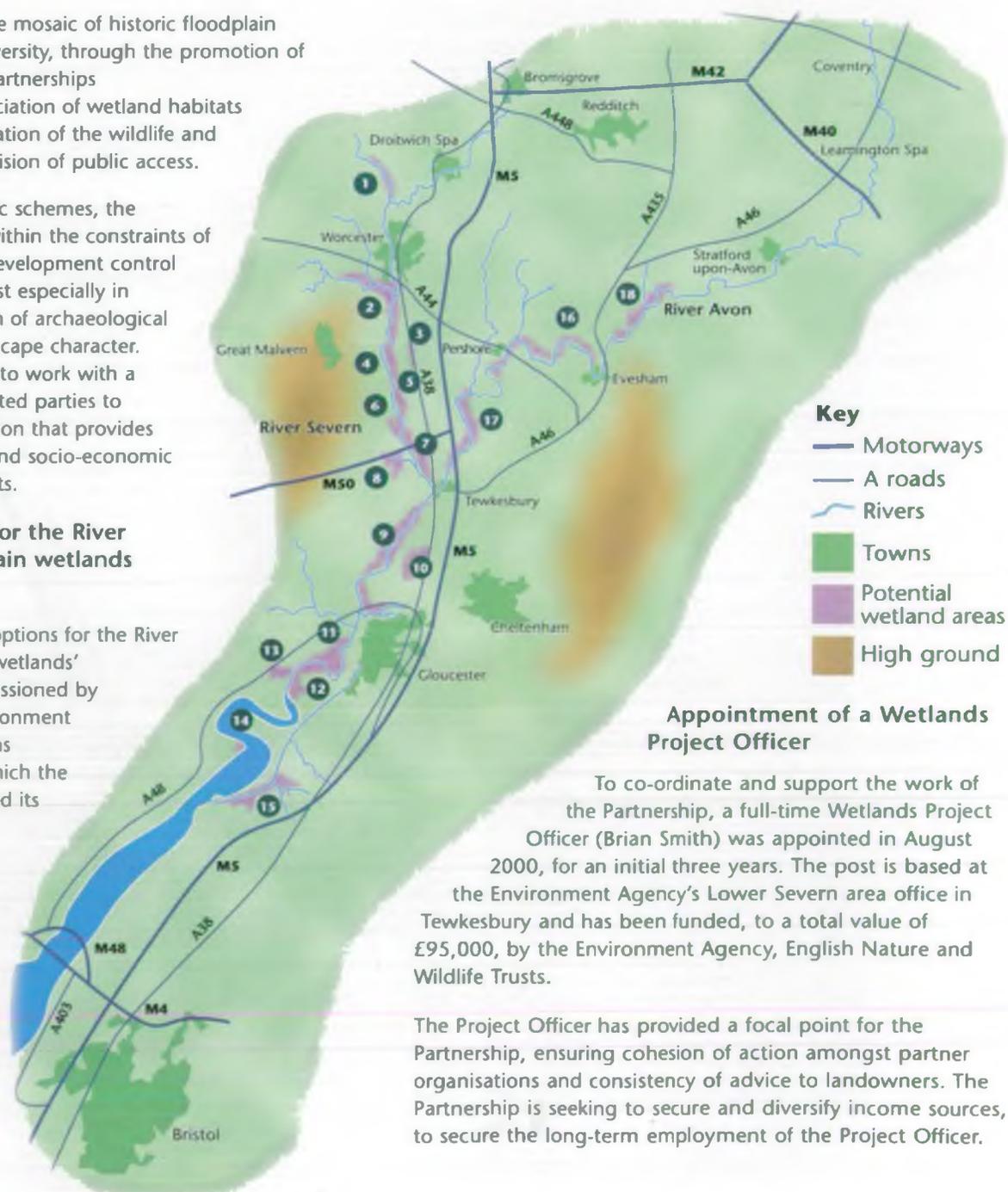
The report identified eighteen potential wetland restoration zones. Each zone was assessed as to the nature and extent of the habitats that could be restored and the existing wildlife value.

The Partnership has prioritised zones for the allocation of resources during the initial three year project (2000 – 03):

Zones

- 1 River Severn - Worcester to Holt
- 2 River Teme/Severn confluence
- 3 River Severn - Kempsey Hams
- 4 River Severn - Clifton to Upton
- 5 Birch Green
- 6 River Severn - Upton on Severn Hams
- 7 River Severn - Uckinghall to Tewkesbury
- 9 Longdon Marsh
- 9 River Severn - Tewkesbury to Longford
- 18 Coombe Hill Meadows
- 11 River Severn - Minsterworth
- 17 River Severn - Elmore Back to Longney
- 18 Walmore Common
- 14 River Severn - Awre
- 15 Wicksters Brook & the Moors - Slimbridge
- 14 River Avon - Evesham to Birlingham
- 17 River Avon - Eckington Bridge to Tewkesbury
- 18 River Avon - Bidford on Avon to Offenham

These zones are shown on the map below.



Key

- Motorways
- A roads
- Rivers
- Towns
- Potential wetland areas
- High ground

Appointment of a Wetlands Project Officer

To co-ordinate and support the work of the Partnership, a full-time Wetlands Project Officer (Brian Smith) was appointed in August 2000, for an initial three years. The post is based at the Environment Agency's Lower Severn area office in Tewkesbury and has been funded, to a total value of £95,000, by the Environment Agency, English Nature and Wildlife Trusts.

The Project Officer has provided a focal point for the Partnership, ensuring cohesion of action amongst partner organisations and consistency of advice to landowners. The Partnership is seeking to secure and diversify income sources, to secure the long-term employment of the Project Officer.

Achievements to date

Developing the strategic approach

Wetland restoration on the scale envisaged by the Partnership, has to be developed within the context of clear strategic frameworks both at the local and catchment scale. The Partnership targets are derived from the SAVWP Action Framework (May 2001) and the study 'Re-creation options for the River Severn/Avon floodplain wetlands' (Ecoscope 1999).

Influencing future policy

The major flood events in 1998 and 2000 have stimulated political and public interest in the future of flood defence and provided a forum for the promotion of sustainable floodplain management, in which habitat restoration and agriculture are key factors. The Partnership works closely with the Environment Agency's Catchment Flood Management Plan team to contribute to the development of fluvial and tidal flood management strategies and other strategic planning processes for the River Severn.

■ Minsterworth Ham land use and habitat study

The Environment Agency's Gloucester Flood Alleviation Study identified potential flood alleviation benefits that could be achieved through modifications to the embankments that surround the 400ha of Minsterworth Ham. English Nature, in partnership with the Agency, has funded a study to assess the changes in agricultural land use and the semi-natural habitats that could result from the various options. The study will contribute towards the development of the Environment Agency's Gloucester Flood Alleviation Study, providing a case study into the options and implications of floodplain restoration and supporting long term habitat management objectives for Minsterworth Ham.

■ HM Treasury visit

In May 2002, the Environment Agency invited the Partnership to make a presentation to senior Treasury officials during their visit to the Agency's Midlands Region. The presentation provided a valuable opportunity to highlight the Partnership's achievements within the context of integrating socio-economic, flood defence and environmental objectives into the on-going review of agri-environment and flood defence policies.

■ Defra national flood defence team visit

In November 2002, English Nature hosted a visit to key SAVWP sites by senior Defra Flood Defence Managers. The visit enabled Defra, English Nature and Environment Agency managers to informally discuss issues relating to sustainable floodplain management and the integration of ecological and flood defence objectives in the context of actual wetland restoration zones.

National and County Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs)

BAPs provide a series of clear targets for habitat restoration, against which the Partnership can evaluate its own success. The table which follows shows that farm partnerships, funded through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS), achieved 327ha of wet grassland habitat restoration in 2000 & 2001 (data is not yet available for 2002). This is more than 50% of the total restoration target for Gloucestershire and Worcestershire for 2010.

| Habitat | Current status | | BAP habitat creation targets | | Achievements 2000-02 | |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------|------------------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|
| | Glos. | Worcs. | Glos. | Worcs. | Glos. | Worcs. |
| Lowland wet grassland | n.a | 49ha | 550ha | 50ha | 181 | 146. |
| Reedbeds | 20-25ha | 26ha | 30ha | 60ha | 0 | 0 |
| Wet woodland | n.a | 224ha | | 50ha | 0 | 0 |
| Saltmarsh | 350ha | n/a | 50ha | n/a | 0 | n/a |
| n.a = data not available | | | n/a = habitat not applicable | | | |

Ashleworth Ham Water level Management Plan

The 9Km² of floodplain from Lower Lode to Ashleworth includes two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) nature reserve of exceptional importance for wintering wildfowl. The majority of the floodplain is in mixed agricultural use, improving the habitats for wildlife therefore depends on the support of the farming community.

In 2001, Gloucestershire FWAG promoted the Countryside Stewardship Scheme to local farmers and, with funding from English Nature, prepared Whole Farm Plans for those farmers interested in supporting wildlife enhancement. In May 2002, 18 CSS applications, covering approximately 700ha, were submitted to Defra - 15 on the Hasfield/Ashleworth Ham and 3 in Chaceley/Tirley parishes.

In October 2002, GWT, an existing CSS agreement holder on Ashleworth Ham, was awarded a special project grant by Defra to commission a hydrological, ecological and landuse management plan for the floodplain. The report, which is being prepared by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, will be published in July 2003 and will guide Defra's water level management prescriptions for individual CSS agreements.

Breeding wader survey 2002

A comprehensive understanding of the status and distribution of breeding waders within the Severn and Avon Vales is essential in enabling the Partnership to monitor its long-term success. In 2001, the Partnership commissioned the British Trust for Ornithology to carry out a survey covering the eighteen wetland restoration zones and other floodplain sites. The Foot and Mouth crisis forced a postponement from 2001 to 2002, the report was published in March 2003.

The survey data highlights the plight of breeding waders in the region:

- A total of 196 pairs of waders were recorded at these sites
- Lapwing were the most numerous species with 109 pairs noted, followed by redshank (45 pairs), oystercatcher (7), curlew (34) and snipe (1 pair)
- Four sites on the lower reaches of the Severn Plain accounted for 71% of all pairs of waders located
- More than half (20 out of 39) of the sites held no breeding waders during 2002
- All species showed a marked decline: lapwing numbers have fallen markedly, by 43% between 1982 and 2002 and 22% from 1995 to 2002.

Creating wetlands

Partnership organisations have worked alone and collectively, to achieve substantial improvements in the quality, extent and distribution of wet grassland habitats. The following examples highlight the diversity of sites, habitats and approaches that have contributed to the Partnership's initial success. It is not a comprehensive review of Partnership activity and many valuable schemes, such as the 'Water for Wildlife' initiative, have not been detailed.



Coombe Hill Meadows Nature Reserve, Gloucester

Farming partnerships

Wetland habitat restoration on farmland is primarily achieved through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

The county Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups (FWAGs) have been key partners in promoting awareness of the scheme and in preparing CSS applications for farmers.

The promotion of Countryside Stewardship to farmers in the key wetland restoration zones has achieved significant gains in wet grassland re-creation:

Countryside Stewardship provides significant economic benefits for farm enterprises that are achieving environmental and habitat benefits, and can provide a basis for developing further diversification initiatives such as tourism and quality food products. The following table outlines the income to farm businesses from CSS agreements promoted by the Partnership:

| Farm income from CSS agreements 2000 - 01 | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Year | No. agreements | Income to farming economy | | Total income (over ten years) (£k) |
| | | Management grants (£k/yr.) | Capital works grants (£k) | |
| 2000 | 7 | 66 | 36 | 696 |
| 2001 | 12 | 86 | 72 | 932 |
| Total | 19 | 152 | 108 | 1,628 |

Coombe Hill Meadows, Gloucestershire

In 2000, the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust purchased 56ha of farmland, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and other partners. Following detailed hydrological and topographical studies, work began in 2001 to restore the ditch network and create new wetland habitats.

The GWT reserve has formed the nucleus, around which the Partnership has developed a series of CSS agreements with adjoining landowners, covering some 120ha. CSS applications submitted in 2002 will add a further 25ha.

Longdon Marsh, Worcestershire

In 2001, a £723,500 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabled the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to purchase 130ha of farmland on the Longdon Marsh. The reserve will be developed to create a mosaic of wetland and farmland habitats and to protect the veteran trees, which form a prominent feature of the landscape.



Snipe (RSPB)

| Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements 2000 - 01 | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Year | No. agreements | Total farm area (ha) | Arable reversion to grassland (ha) | Historic water meadows (ha) | Pasture (ha) | Total CSS area (ha) | Raised waterlevel (ha) |
| 2000 | 7 | 264 | 45 | 19 | 12 | 75 | 55 |
| 2001 | 12 | 865 | 216 | | 37 | 252 | 189 |
| Total | 19 | 1129 | 261 | 19 | 49 | 327 | 244 |
| In 2002, 35 CSS applications involving wetland habitat restoration have been developed and submitted to Defra. If approved they will create: | | | | | | | |
| | | | 277 | | 738 | | 527 |
| Plus 38,600m of field margins along watercourses and the restoration of 896 willow pollards. | | | | | | | |

The Trust reserve at Hill Court Farm has stimulated interest from adjoining landowners:

- in 2001, two farms entered 54ha of former arable land into CSS wetland restoration
- in 2002, three applications were prepared for 125ha of pasture and arable farmland in the heart of the marsh and 86ha of arable farmland on the edge of the marsh.

Together, a complex of habitats covering more than 300ha has been created.

Church Farm Hams, Gloucester

In 2002, in partnership with private landowners, the Severnside Project (Gloucester City Council) began the restoration of 22ha of arable and pasture to wetland - including the excavation of a 1ha scrape.

Situated on the edge of Gloucester, the meadows will provide an accessible site for the interpretation and promotion of wetland habitats. The meadows will be grazed by traditional livestock from the Gloucester City Farm.

A neighbouring farm, of approximately 40ha, is entering Countryside Stewardship in 2002, creating wetland habitats over a total of 60ha.

Craycombe Turn, Pershore, Worcestershire

In 2000, the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and the landowners (Dawes Trust), undertook the restoration of a 30ha historic water meadow system on the banks of the River Avon. Works included restoring 1500m of ditch, and installing a series of timber sluices.

Reversion of the arable fields to traditional floodplain meadows is funded through a Countryside Stewardship agreement.



Lower Moor Water Meadows, Wyre Piddle, Worcestershire

Three landowners, in partnership with Worcestershire County Council, Defra, FWAG, and the Wetlands Project Officer developed plans for the restoration of 28ha of historic water meadows on the River Avon in 2000.



Works during 2001 included restoration of 600m of ditch and installation of the main sluice.

In 2003, SAVWP in partnership with Severn Trent Water, Allens Caravans and W&WT, is planning to construct a reedbed to improve water quality in the Lench Ditch.

Linton Farm, Highnam, Gloucestershire

In 2001, 74ha of former arable farmland reverted to grazing marsh alongside the River Severn near Gloucester. Works have included the excavation of a series of shallow scrapes and the installation of soil bunds to retain spring water levels.

Linton Farm shows how wet grasslands can form a key element in a viable farm business: restoration and management is supported by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, the pastures are grazed by Hereford cattle, which are slaughtered locally and the meat sold through the farm shop.

New Grounds, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire

In 2002, to improve the value of floodplains for wintering and breeding waders at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's (W&WT) Slimbridge nature reserve, W&WT and the Environment Agency created a network of scrapes and water-level control bunds within the Hundred Acre Meadows.

The work was carried out by the Agency's flood defence work force and funded through the flood defence maintenance budget.



Funding

The Partnership has used a wide diversity of funding sources other than the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) to support wetland recreation schemes, the breeding wader survey and the hydro-ecological studies at Ashleworth and Minsterworth. The following table outlines the scale of funding achieved by the Partnership and the breadth of support for the Partnership's aims.

| Examples of Partnership funding initiatives 2000 - 02 | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Project site | Project | Value | Funding partners |
| Hill Court Farm, Longdon Marsh | Purchase and management | 1,000,000 | WWT, HLF, EN, WCC, EA |
| Coombe Hill Meadows | Purchase & management | 281,500 | GWT, HLF, EN, EA, Grundon Waste |
| | Habitat creation | 25,000 | |
| Ashleworth Ham | Hydrological study | 41,000 | Defra (CSS), GWT, EA |
| Church Farm Ham, Gloucester | Hydrological study | 1,500 | EA, Severnside Project Defra (CSS) |
| | Wetland restoration | 1,500 | |
| Minsterworth Ham | Land use/habitat modelling | 10,000 | EN |
| Lower Moor, River Avon | Water meadow restoration | 7,000 | EA |
| Beauchampe Court | Sluice construction | 4,000 | EA, WCC, WWT |
| Carrant & Squitter Brook | Stream habitat restoration | 4,500 | EA, Kemerton Conservation Trust |
| W&WT Slimbridge | Scrape creation | 5,000 | EA |
| BTO Breeding Waders Survey | Breeding Waders Survey | 12,000 | EA / EN |
| Whole Farm Plans | Whole Farm Plans | 18,000 | EN, FWAG |
| SAVWP promotional leaflet | Promotional leaflet | 3,500 | EA, EN, WCC |
| TOTAL | | 1,414,500 | |

Publicity

The Partnership has gained considerable national coverage for its work including:

- BBC Countryfile, 26 January 2003
- World Wetlands Day, 4 February 2003

The Partnership has produced a leaflet, promoting its aims and actions to local communities. The Project Officer has appeared on both local radio and BBC Countryfile. Developing the Partnership's profile will be a high priority over the next three years.



Lower Moor Water Meadow, Wyre Piddle

The future development of the Wetlands Partnership

The Wetlands Partnership has achieved significant gains in its first three years of activity and has demonstrated the benefits of co-ordinating and supporting individual actions through a full-time Project Officer. To ensure the long-term viability of wetland restoration in the Severn and Avon Vales, the Partnership is committed to a series of key actions:

- Establishing SAVWP as 'an unincorporated association', effective from the 4 March 2003
- Establishing an 'Executive Committee' comprising wider representation from partnership organisations, to direct and manage the Partnership's resources and actions
- Enabling the Partnership to attract and manage funding from a wide variety of sources, in addition to existing contributors, to support core and project costs
- Reviewing the Partnership's objectives (2000 - 03), as set out in the Action Framework (May 2000) and presenting revised objectives to a SAVWP Forum in winter 2003
- Developing the Partnership's profile through increased publicity, both locally and nationally.

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Wetlands Partnership

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