

# Wales Mammal Biodiversity Action Forum

## Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting

20 June 2011, CCW Offices, Newtown

### 1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

**Present:** Liz Halliwell (CCW - Minutes), Rob Strachan (EA), Matthew Ellis (CCW), Jean Matthews (CCW - Chair) Chair, Ceri Morris (CCW – MISE), Jenny MacPherson (CCW – MISE), Lizzie Wilberforce (WTSWW), Steve Lucas (BCT), Ian Danby (BASC), Mike Bruford (Cardiff University), Brenda Mayle / Alice Broome (Forest Research – by phone).

**Apologies:** Rob Parry (WTSWW), Iolo Lloyd (FCW), Nida Al-Fulaij (PTES), Sarah Bird (Chester Zoo), Isabel Macho (Carms CC), Kate Williamson (The Mammal Society), Paul Sinnadurai (BBNPA), Adrian Lloyd Jones (NWWT), Henry Schofield (VWT),

Organisational updates:

CCW – work continuing on the development of a single environment body in Wales.

EAW – EAW likely to be separated from rest of EA by end of the year.

Forest Research – reduction in Government funding has resulted in re-evaluation research priorities. Herbivore habitat impacts will no longer be funded from April 2012. Alien species work will focus entirely on grey squirrels. So, the only vertebrate work receiving core funding will be grey squirrels.

BASC – the Greenshoots Officer is now Audrey Watson (Alex Hatton has left BASC).

### 2. BAP Process update

**Species Expert Group** – most recent meeting been postponed to enable consideration of applications in forthcoming Biodiversity Grant Fund.

RSPB are co-ordinating work to develop guidance on identifying priority species whose recovery requires habitat action. Habitat and species matrixes are being developed to assess species habitat requirements.

**Woodland Ecosystem Group** –meets later this week and will consider the woodland species matrix.

**NEF** – announcement from Minister last week that the new Government is continuing to support NEF and will be piloting the approach in local projects. Concern was expressed by members of WMBAF regarding how it would be possible to pilot something when the NEF approach has not been finalised.

### 3. Glastir

The All Wales Element review has been completed and GT staff are now working on implementing changes. As a result, the contract managers training scheduled for the spring/summer has been postponed. Work is continuing on the farmer factsheets and contract managers' guidance.

### 4. Mammals in a Sustainable Environment

CM and JMcP introduced the MISE project ([www.mise.ie](http://www.mise.ie)). Priorities for this year include:

- polecat survey using road kill, particularly to fill in some of the gaps in previous surveys
- hair tube surveys of stoats and weasels
- dormouse nest box schemes (currently 22 NDMP sites in Wales, PTES would like about 40 to enable Wales-level trends)
- otter coastal surveys (esp Ceredigion) and possibly survey of River Dee
- red squirrel survey day at Bryn Arau Duon in mid-Wales
- bat diet – DNA analysis of droppings to determine diet. Data will be used as a baseline to assess changes over time with climate change.
- harvest mice – training up expert volunteers to co-ordinate nest surveys in the autumn

## **5. Genetics and the Conservation of Welsh Mammals**

Mike Bruford of Cardiff University introduced ConGRESS – a community based web portal to provide resources for conservation managers policy makers (Conservation Genetics Resources for Effective Species Survival). <http://www.congressgenetics.eu> – note that the website is currently in development.

ConGRESS undertook a questionnaire to assess extent to which people feel genetics are relevant to their work. The results will be posted on the website.

The ConGRESS project is currently not that active in the UK as the NERC Knowledge Exchange project has been undertaking similar approach (CCW was represented by Barbara Jones).

### **AP1 – LHa/JM to identify who has replaced Barbara in representing CCW on NERC Knowledge Exchange project**

Cardiff University projects:

Otters – identified distinct populations at the UK level using genetics. The Welsh population breaks down into 3 sub-populations – north Wales, SW Wales and Eastern Wales/Welsh Marches.

Polecats – analysis of ‘polecat’ DNA to look at extent of hybridisation between feral ferrets and polecats has shown that there is a large amount of introgression.

There is a lot of data emerging which suggests that species in Wales and Ireland are distinct from the rest of England/Scotland. Genetic richness and diversity of otters is entirely in the west. Haplotypes in the east of the UK are also found throughout Europe.

Discussion of issues:

Genetics has a lot to offer mammal conservation. But more discussion is needed on what is technically possible. For example, MB has found that it is very difficult to identify individual otters genetically if they have been feeding on salmonids.

### **AP2 – LHa/JM to discuss otter DNA analysis with WIT**

It was felt that there was also a need to explore how it would be possible to facilitate low cost high benefit genetics projects.

BM noted that Lisa Signorile is undertaking a PhD study on grey squirrel genetics.

## 6. Project updates

Updates were circulated prior to the meeting from CCW, EAW, WTSWW and BASC. Any additional updates will be sent out with the minutes.

## 7. Priority Mammal Projects

Alice Broome introduced a FR project which has concluded that management of habitat structures and features can provide for multiple woodland priority species ('niches for species'). FR would now like to identify any areas where woodland management is being undertaken and micro-habitat features are being assessed.

**AP3 AB to circulate some specific questions to WMBAF on the types of woodland management projects they are interested in.**

*[See notes in Appendix from discussion of priority projects by JMa, LH and KW following Action 10 from previous meeting as they set the context for the discussion.]*

### Dormouse survey Ceredigion

The need for additional survey in Ceredigion is likely to be met through existing activities such as the MISE project and WTSWW surveys. JMcP is meeting with Ceredigion LBAP officer and also WTSWW to discuss new sites for dormouse monitoring. Dormouse survey options include nut hunts, nest box schemes and nest tubes in hedgerows. WTSWW have used organised dormouse nut hunt blitz days where volunteers undertake dormouse nut hunts as co-ordinated survey on one day. This approach is more targeted and enables collected nuts to be checked immediately. VWT had intended to hold a Wales dormouse day/conference. It was agreed that this would be a valuable event and could perhaps be co-ordinated by MISE.

ID noted that the Cheshire dormouse project in the Wych valley has received landfill tax funding to improve habitat connectivity from the reintroduction site (4 day a week post for 2 years). The project is aiming to create a 17km habitat network from reintroduction site and is using the PTES 'Hedgerows for Dormice' project guidance.

**AP4 LHa agreed to collate information on dormouse work (update distribution map for Wales & check overlaps & gaps) to circulate to partners**

### Water vole

Following Action 5 from the last meeting it has been identified that Interreg funding is unlikely to be a suitable source of funding for mink control as the final application round is focussed on job creation and doesn't have a biodiversity objective. However, it was noted that European Life+ is under subscribed in the UK and could be an option. The last meeting of the UK Red Squirrel Group considered a Life+ application and will be investigating this further. It was suggested that a joint grey squirrel mink INNS project could be developed.

**AP5 Rob Parry to co-ordinate a Task and Finish Group to investigate funding opportunities for mink control. Others to be involved – Jean Matthews, Rob Strachan, Ian Danby**

ID noted that Craig Shuttleworth was looking at a project to analyse data from Anglesey to assess how much effort would be needed to control greys to the benefit of reds. The project idea also involved some genetic analysis. This work may be relevant to mink control projects.

National Water Vole Database and Mapping Project is available from Hampshire WT (Natalie Rogers) – this work was undertaken for National WV Steering Group.

## **AP6 ME to send out link to GB INNS website and portal**

### Rare woodland bats

Action 6 from the last meeting, for JM, SL and HS to meet to discuss ideas for a rare woodland bats, has not yet been completed.

Jean Matthews has a copy of the habitat suitability model for barbastelle bats created by Matt Zeale from Bristol University. However, there are problems with running the model on other computers. The results of the model for Wales suggests that there is little habitat for barbastelles in Wales, but this is based on our current understanding of the type of woodland that barbastelles need.

WTSWW have just identified north Pembrokeshire and Cardigan as a high priority area for a landscape scale project, so there may be opportunities for a bat element to this project.

### Lesser horseshoe bats

Next stage of the Landscapes for Lessers project is to make the habitat suitability model available for other areas to use.

### Harvest mouse

The MISE project will be co-ordinating harvest mouse nest surveys and also trialling bait pot surveys where droppings are analysed genetically to determine species. RS suggested that Chester Zoo be approached to train expert volunteers, probably in and around Chester Zoo. It was noted that the best time of year for nest surveys is October. The MISE POs may also be able to put together a survey pack (survey guidelines etc) which could also be used outside the Interreg area.

### Red squirrel

The MISE survey event at Bryn Arau Duon in mid-Wales will be on 13<sup>th</sup> August. Volunteers will be asked to walk pre-baited transects to look for squirrels. If successful this approach could be rolled out at other sites. Work is also being planned at Clocaenog and the hair tube survey at Cynwyd may be repeated. SNPA are doing hair tube survey work at Aberhirnant and Cwm Mynach.

### Greater horseshoe bat and lesser horseshoe bat interactions

JM to discuss possible project with HS & SL. CCW has some data on the LHB monitoring forms, but would need someone to go through to extract this.

### Hedgerows for dormice

The MISE is intending to do some work with landowners to improve hedgerows for dormice and hence connectivity between woodlands. This work is planned for years 3 and 4.

### Otters on River Dee

Wrexham LBAP would like to undertake a survey of otters on the River Dee using DNA analysis of spraints to identify the number and distribution of individuals. There

may be issues regarding the ability to identify individuals from spraint which need to be clarified as soon as possible. It should be possible to define populations from a partial genotype, but not distinguish individuals and relatives. ME also noted that ideally the project should cover the whole of the Dee catchment, not just the Wrexham area.

#### Other projects

MB asked about polecat. JM noted that the group had previously considered polecat to be a low priority as their status was good in Wales. However, introgression between polecats and ferrets means that true genetically pure polecats are actually much rarer.

**AP7 MB to send data on polecat genetics to JM/LHa and also details on where to send any samples from dead polecats.**

#### Environment Wales Grant funding

ME suggested that the group should be considering a mammal conservation status project at a county level – similar to the herp project.

ID suggested an application could be made for additional mink traps and rafts to be able to extend the L1 n mink control project. It was agreed that this would be considered to be a high priority WMBAF project.

### **8. Minutes and action points from meeting on meeting 17 February 2011.**

No comments on the minutes were received.

#### ***Actions from meeting 17 February 2011***

		By whom	Progress
1	Suggestion that statutory agencies should have NERC visit	LH/JM	Message been sent
2	TL to circulate BAP delivery 'spider diagram'	JM	Jean has received and will send out with the minutes.
3	Agree effective communication route to LBAPs with Sean McHugh and to get minutes and partner agreements onto WBP website.	JM LHa	Underway
4	Identify key LBAP contact who is willing to represent Wales LBAPs at WMBAF meetings	LH/JM	Isabel Macho and Kate Taylor contacted.
5	Look at Interreg opportunities for funding strategic mink control	JM/RS	Interreg no longer available
6	HS/JM/SL to develop ideas for the first stage of a rare woodlands bats project.	ALL LH	Carry over <b>AP8</b>
7	HS to send details of dormouse workshop to LHa	LH	JMcP to investigate running workshop as part of MISE project <b>AP9</b>
8	Write up list of projects, circulate to WMBAF for comment and then forward to SEG.	LH/JM	Ongoing
9	Species Leads to talk to Action Leads and all to look at other actions in targets/actions	All species leads	Ongoing

	spreadsheet to identify other projects that can be ready to go as funding opportunities arise. Actions still need to be delivered. How?		
10	Form Task and Finish Group to identify priority actions for LBAPs. Invite to anyone else to join.	JM, LH and KW	First stage completed.
9	Draft report on 2010/11 work for next meeting.	JM	Carry over <b>AP10</b>

### **9. Any other business**

None

### **10. Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 – targets/actions review

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012

### **Key Messages from meeting**

1. Need to consider whether the information we hold is valid, particularly when you take genetics into account. What are populations?
2. May need to reconsider the conservation status of polecats
3. Priority projects need to continue to be developed, taking advantage of resources, including volunteers, when they become available.

## Appendix

### **WMBAF - Priority Projects for LBAPs**

#### Action Point 10 of 17 Feb Meeting

Dormouse survey of Ceredigion – nut hunts – may need verification of identification of nuts – who can offer that. May also be suitable for other LBAP areas.

Water vole – use map of national & regional key sites to flag up areas where mink control is a priority. LBAPs need to have copy to help them prioritise work, including updating survey or monitoring where required.

Also need to find out where mink control is being done and if there are gaps in coverage of priority areas. Could use long term work experience volunteer to collate information (either sitting within LBAP or WT?).

(Interreg funding stream now is focussed on generating jobs, though haven't checked if that would be appropriate, e.g. through countryside manager/keeper or angling interests – would be useful to have BASC input here. Life+ funding is a possibility and needs to be considered in detail. The UK portion of Life+ is currently undersubscribed).

#### Rare woodland bats

HS/JM/SL haven't met to discuss.

Could identify LBAP/Bat Group areas with highest potential and with keen & some experienced volunteers. Matt Zeale's niche factor analysis could be used to identify potential barbastelle woodlands for local bat groups to survey. Once barbastelles have been located using bat detectors, trapping work could then be undertaken to look for other rare woodland bats such as Bechstein's bat – (barbastelles and Bechstein's bats have similar woodland requirements) and *Myotis alcaothoe*.

A rare woodland bat project would be a good opportunity to involve volunteers which would suit Environment Wales funding. Need to make link to Woodland Ecosystem Group due woodland management issues.

Long term prospects - there is a Defra project to find methodology for rare woodland bat survey & monitoring suitable for volunteers, but won't report for some time (years?)

Lesser horseshoe bats – working with Cofnod to get local bat groups to verify data to update habitat suitability model. Won't be ready for this funding round, but need to develop project on habitat connectivity for when it is.

Harvest mouse – is it part of MISE officers jobs to get survey pack ready & organise training sessions for Sept/Oct? LBAPs can carry out surveys in Oct/Nov (poss Dec if weather suitable). Possible training sites Harlech, Cheshire, Ynys Las – others known in mid, south Wales (Rob P?).

Red squirrel – MISE event in Jul or Aug. If successful then could do something similar in marginal red squirrel areas.

Other potential projects

Greater horseshoe & lesser horseshoe bat interactions. HS noted concern about GHB displacing LHB when they move into summer roosts.

Could get someone to go through lhb summer roost counts & look for data – possible student project.

Hedgerows for dormice – useful to update distribution map for Wales. Needs to link with PTES dormouse database.

Otters – Emma Broad (Wrexham LBAP officer) has been in discussion with Pete Turner & has project proposal suggestion for project on Dee. Ceri has met with Emma and thinks that there is good potential to develop a project. Possible to use as a pilot, but need to find out what sort of information can be generated using the dna analysis – i.e. what can it tell us about otter populations and then decide where it is best to focus.

Possible future projects – hair tubes, hedgehog footplates being trialled.

JM, KW & LH 16 Jun 2011