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**The Research: An Investigation into How the Outcomes of Specific
Actions for Species and Habitat Plans are Recorded and Reported**

Introduction

In 1992 the then UK Prime Minister signed the Biodiversity Convention at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Later, in 1994, he announced the establishment of the UK Biodiversity Steering Group.

In the same year the UK Government published *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan*. The overall goal of the UK Action Plan is:

To conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK

To contribute to the conservation of global Biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms.

From this came targets, set by the UK Steering Group, for maintaining or increasing the populations or distribution of species and habitats.

In turn action plans for key species and habitats were produced.

For national targets to be implemented, a means was required to translate these into effective action at a local level. Thus Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP) were created and have been in progress since that time.

It is not, however, totally clear how, at a local level the outcomes of actions, determined by definite issues, will be recorded. There is a need to link local action to national reporting.

The aim of this research is to explore the links between LBAP action outcomes in Gwynedd, including the Snowdonia National Park (SNP), and how this information is communicated to the UK level. Two model examples with a known Habitat Action Plan (HAP) and a Species Action Plan (SAP) have been used :

Lowland heaths

The water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*).

The objectives of the research were:

Determine from workers on the ground the outcomes of specific LBAP actions.

Identify where the actions have been/could be recorded.

Determine how the workers would like the information to be recorded in the future and what feedback they would like.

Method of Data Collection

The data collection involved visits to workers specifically involved with either water vole or lowland heath conservation, within the county of Gwynedd.

Two workers involved with lowland heaths and six with water voles were chosen.

The interviews were informal and, apart from one by telephone, were conducted at the interviewee's work base.

Specific previously prepared questions were asked and a LBAP Data Outcome Assessment form was completed by the interviewer.

Examples of reportable LBAP action outcomes and any other relevant information was collected from each worker.

Results

The data was collated and presented in a tabular form, with one table per worker. The data is also summarised in the form of a flow chart. The data may be seen in the Appendix.

Summary of Result

From the information gathered it appears that some of the SAP and HAP data is being passed on to higher levels.

However it is not always certain that the data is ultimately reaching the UK Habitat or Species or the UK Biodiversity Steering Group (UKBSG) level and in some cases data is remaining at county level. Some of the county data is in fact split, eg in one case information on actions is sent to the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), but records of contractors work, or outcomes of actions, remain at the local office.

With water vole data this appears to be reaching the UK Water Vole Steering Group, but it is not certain whether it is reaching the UKBSG or a local record centre (LRC).

A further problem appears to be that too many groups are involved in collecting and retaining the data. Overall this leads to a vagueness as to where data is supposed to go. This is not necessarily the fault of the workers but could be remedied by better communication and guidance cascading down from a UK level.

It is worth remembering that for the implementation of the UKBAP to succeed national strategy should be translated into effective action at the local level. One of the main functions of the LBAP is that “..national targets for species and habitats are attained in a consistent manner throughout the UK..”^{*} Locally this does not seem to be happening with the problems as noted above.

Other aspects of the research included the problems associated with surveying and ultimately collecting the data. These included the problems associated with training volunteers and their lack of attendance or experience in recognising water vole habitat. This is related to the limited funds available for professional ecologists to do the work.

Other potential problems involve contactors who are trained to sympathetically work in water vole habitat

.^{*} From *Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, (1995) volume 1.*

One final problem was voiced by a volunteer water vole surveyor who was interested in receiving detailed feedback from his work, rather than a summary.

How the problem of data flow to a UK level could be solved received positive responses. Most workers agreed that a website for the recording and accessing of information was a good idea.

For recording data a standard format report would be in place. For those without access to the Internet a printed form with the same format would be used.

However it was felt because some of the data could be of a sensitive nature there should be different levels of access. The general public could access data that did not reveal specific sites. Alternatively a professional ecologist could access more detailed data.

GIS maps were also considered important on a website when cross linked with data from the forthcoming RECORDER 2000. This would enable a worker to precisely locate a site of interest, see what SAP or HAP are in place, determine what action was being taken on specific issues and any future or further work from the action.

Recommendations

One of the major problems in transferring data from workers in the field to a UK level is the confusion of too many routes. A standard route needs to be created, implemented and then advertised to all groups from freelance surveyors to large organisations such as the CCW, English Nature or the Environment Agency. People would then need to be educated in its use.

Shaikh (1998) has shown that Lead Partners and Agencies, with their steering groups, have a responsibility in ensuring the UK action plan is implemented. He noted there was a clear need for improved communication between national and local levels. Perhaps it should be the responsibility for groups such as the Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, the Wildlife Trusts and the Environment Agency to spearhead these communication routes at a local level by coming together and agreeing on defined routes.

In Wales Shaikh (1998) sees the CCW as providing a national focal point for disseminating information to all LBAP groups.

One possibility is for **local leaders of** Lead Agencies to oversee the implementation of UK plans at the local level .

Local leaders of action could take information from one level to the next via a Local Action Database (LAD).

The LAD would be online as a Website and be fed with information about local action in an L BAP Area such as Gwynedd, which in turn would be passed to a LRC.

The Website should have a standard reporting format.

Local groups need to know the LAD exists and therefore it should be well advertised.

A preliminary survey could determine what information workers on the ground would like to see in a database and what information would be required by the UK Steering Groups.

A LAD could be run by a LA which has many cross departmental communication channels, a means to advertise, capacity for the system and sufficient budget.

Workers on the ground should be motivated to use the system by their employers, where appropriate. Recording action would be part of a 'contractual' obligation on those taking part in LBAPs.

Those not able to feed information into a Website should be provided with standardised reporting forms to complete, with the same reporting format as the Website.

Organisations without the structure to carry out the above could report to an organisation which has a reporting capability eg CCW or LA.

UK Steering Group

WBG*

Sub-group/CCW/Welsh Body/ALGE

LRC*

LAD-Website coordinated by local leaders *

LBAP

SAP & HAPS

Electronically linked*

If the concept of a UK Biodiversity Database is to succeed then the information should flow not only from work on the ground to the UK level but also back to workers. With increasing numbers of people accessing the Internet the creation of a website, combined with a Local Action Database (LAD) and a GIS mapping system for Gwynedd LBAP data, should be seriously considered. This should be constantly up dated.

In some areas of Britain the concept of a local database is reality. Dorset Environmental Record Centre (DERC) in partnership with Butterfly Conservation has created a database to which the local community may add records- and receive information (see NBN Linking LRCs Newsletter May 2000).

One mechanism which may successfully implement this is through the role of partnerships. The UK Biodiversity Group (UKBG) has developed this, in the form of an individual or business community, to promote support for individual species action plans at national, regional and local level. These are termed **Champions**. The aim of this has been to encourage business sponsors to contribute to and provide resources for voluntary groups involved in the BAP process.

It is conceivable that the support of Champions could be directed towards a Local Action Database project which would have benefit for all of Gwynedd.

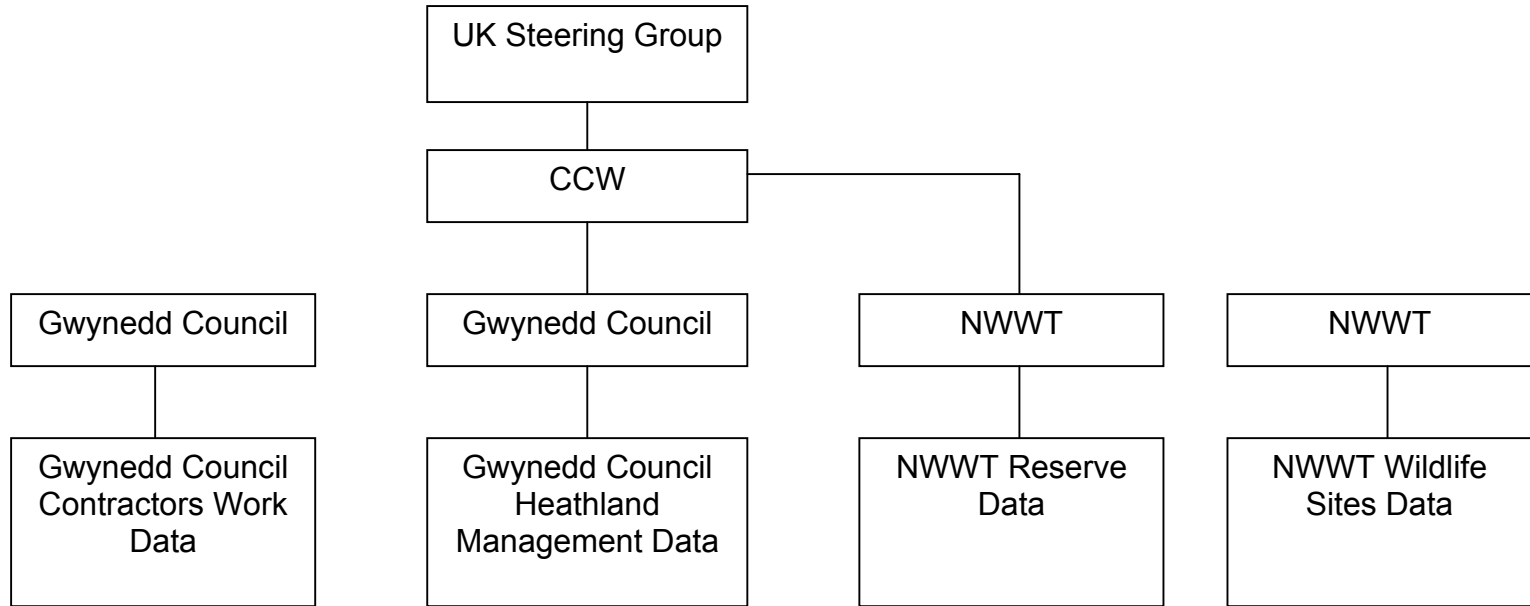
The tradition of county level monitoring and recording gives a degree of 'biological integrity'. For this reason the creation of a website and database would best be implemented at Local Authority level. Additionally Local Authorities would be best suited to involve local groups from the community and gain funding for a project.

In relation to this, reporting timetables should be adhered to and this includes reporting back to the local community. This maintains community involvement and demonstrates what has been achieved by partnership.

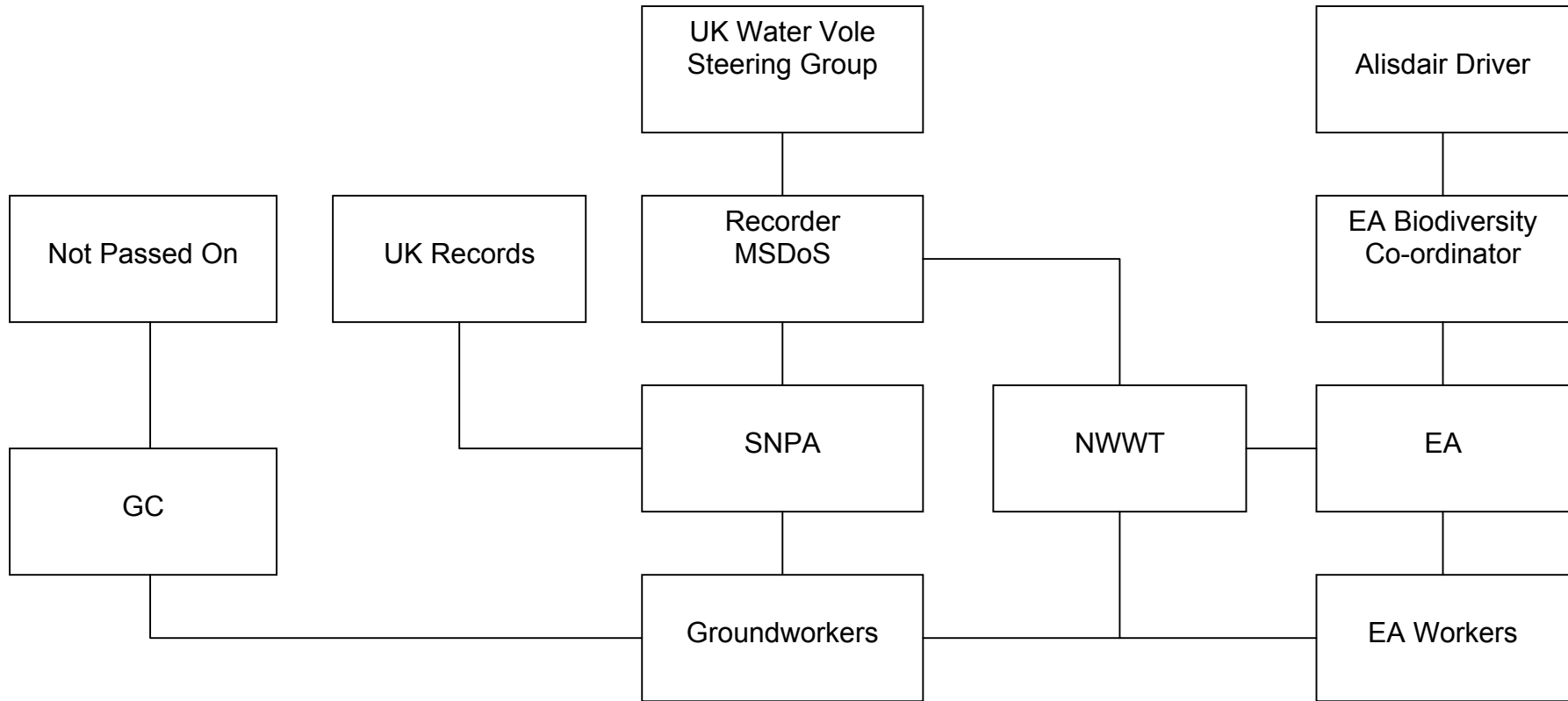
However workers are still coming to terms with new habitat and species lists which has possibly slowed the rate of LBAP implementation at a local level. Given time and encouragement workers will begin to use one recommended route for SAP and HAP data flow.

Because of limited time (four weeks) this research has only looked at a small sample of data. A recommendation would be the injection of funding into a long term project to thoroughly investigate the problems of communication routes between LBAP work at ground level and the data required at a UK level. This would go some way in fulfilling the LBAP obligations of each region to the UK and Europe.

Lowland heath Action data Routes in Gwynedd



Water Vole Action Plan Data Routes for Gwynedd



| | |
|---|---|
| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet-Water Voles | |
| Contact Name | Jill Jackson, Countryside Officer, Gwynedd Council. |
| Date | 18th May 2000. |
| Lead partner/agency | North Wales Water Vole Group - EA, CCW, SNP, Ynys Mon, Conwy Borough Council, NWWT, Gwynedd Council. |
| Work programme | <u>Method</u> : one person samples a 1 km stretch of waterway for signs of water vole. Four stretches per worker. There is a training day for volunteers. |
| Location of work | Gwynedd outside of the SNP. Several hundred selected 1 km waterways. |
| Action taken * + | 1999: 20-30% of the proposed sites were surveyed. The work was started too late in the year (August). A new survey will start in June 2000. |
| Issues/problems | Lack of trained staff due to lack of finance. Volunteer work needs verification. Late start for 1999. |
| Where have actions been recorded? | Gwynedd Council. |
| Outcome of actions | None. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | NA |
| Timescale: action to outcome | NA |
| Did they know the data should be passed on and where? | The data has not been passed on. Two possible suggested routes: Environment Agency or Tir Gofal officers. There should be feedback to the landowner. However having landowner details on a database could be a legal problem. |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Yes, but sensitive species information is an issue. It should be available to the public in a limited form. There should be different levels of access depending upon the user. A GIS distribution map would be useful. |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level. | Guidance for routes of information would be useful. The information should flow both ways. |

* See Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 2. Action Plans; water vole point 5.5 current research and monitoring.

+An Anglesey mink survey has given 30% positive results. The cost of professional mink surveyors is a problem.

| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet-Water Voles | |
|--|--|
| Contact Name | Rhys Davies, Biodiversity Officer, Snowdonia National Park(SNP). |
| Date | Monday 22nd May 2000 |
| Lead partner/agency | North Wales Water Vole group also Alisdair Driver, UK WV Steering Group. |
| Work programme | 40 local volunteer, trained at Plas Tan y Bwlch and 6 NP wardens. |
| Location of work | 172 areas in SNP. |
| Action taken * | 30% of the sites were positive. Consultation with companies and land owners where the sites were found. They have been informed of appropriate management. See separate SNPA Vole Project (1999-2000) report. |
| Issues/problems | Lack of finance. Land owners (but only 5% are a problem). Volunteers - some do not carry out the work. |
| Where have actions been recorded? | MSDOS Recorder and GIS digitised. Upland sites have not been recorded. |
| Outcome of actions | Conservation measures at key sites: land owners fence off areas (landowners are given payment for this). Contractors trained. Tir Gofal farmers are having water vole requirements incorporated into their agreements. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | MSDOS Recorder and GIS cross referenced. |
| Timescale: action to outcome | Management work Immediate from survey results. |
| Did they know the data should be passed on and where? | Yes, data is passed to UK level, if required. Information pertaining to SAP fulfilment is usually sufficient. Also all Recorders throughout Britain are contacted. |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Ongoing at SNP with a possibility of Objective 1 money. The ultimate aim would be to have a PC in every library and public area of visitor centres, thus giving limited access to data by the public but strengthening public awareness. Sensitive data, such as specific site locations would not be available to the public. |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level. | Recorder 2000 will improve the data capture and ease of use by the operator. Different access levels. Information should be sent to Tir Gofal coordinators. |

*Mink are considered to be **the** biggest killer of water voles. 108 sites have been identified. A proposal for a project officer has been put forward to cover Gwynedd, Anglesey, and SNP. The work would include mink trapping and organising a volunteer service. This will hopefully lessen amateur trapping, eg by anglers who also trap juvenile otters accidentally.

| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet-Water Voles | |
|--|---|
| Contact Name | Alan Morley- volunteer for water vole survey work. |
| Date | Tuesday 23rd May 2000 |
| Lead partner/agency | Snowdonia National Park and Gwynedd Council. |
| Work programme | Initial training. Then work on eg Lleyrn : Pwllheli and Abersoch. |
| Location of work | Sites within SNP and in Gwynedd. All lower upland sites |
| Action taken | Upland farm action. Advice given to farmers. |
| Issues/problems | No farmer problems because he knows the land and communicates in Welsh. Cattle. Some rivers too deep eg Afon Sorch. |

Editor's Note: Please note that some data from this table had been corrupted during the transfer from WordPerfect to Word, and unfortunately was irretrievable.

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| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet-Water Voles | |
|--|---|
| Contact Name | Carrie Lane - Biodiversity Officer, The Environment Agency |
| Date | 23rd May 2000 |
| Lead partner/agency | The Environment Agency (EA). |
| Work programme | Surveys for water voles are conducted prior to flood defence work. Also where there are planning applications. |
| Location of work | Several hundred sites where flooding occurs and where planning applications have been put through |
| Action taken | Advise flood defence workers on maintenance of a site. Fencing and habitat improvement. |
| Issues/problems | Patchiness of the information due to the reason for the <u>initial</u> work ie flood defence. Some conflict with flood defence officers. Coordinating peoples efforts. Too many groups to send data to. |
| Where have actions been recorded? | North Wales Wildlife Trust. Flood defence officers. EA conservation officers. Also Biodiversity coordinator in Bristol who then sends results to the UK level. Operation Performance Measures(OPM) - a chain of reporting to ?DETR and NA. EA do not have a database. |
| Outcome of actions | Conservation officers conduct an audit on the work and pas on the results. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | The same groups as <u>actions</u> . |
| Timescale:action to outcome | Annual check. |
| Did they know the data should be passed on and where? | Yes - NWWT locally and EA nationally. |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Yes, to view data on GIS. |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level | Links exist, but money for a local database would be welcome |

| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet -Water Voles | |
|--|---|
| Contact Name | Ioan Fazey- Freelance water vole surveyor. |
| Date | Thursday 25th May 2000. |
| Lead partner/agency | North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT). |
| Work programme | 40 NWWT volunteers 1 day training programme. 4 sites per volunteer. Training with action would be better. |
| Location of work | Gwynedd and Snowdonia National Park. |
| Action taken | 1999- late surveying in Gwynedd/SNP. Along the A55 replacement of habitat. |
| Issues/problems | Volunteers- quantity and quality. Lack of integrated work. Grazing / fencing with farmers. Due to this the banks will be overgrown with vegetation within 5 years |
| Where have actions been recorded? | NWWT and some information has been retained. |
| Outcome of actions | A proposed paper in a Civil Engineering Journal to increase awareness. Collate information with NWWT. Distribution of information There is a proposed mink trapping trial. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | NWWT. |
| Timescale: action to outcome | This is decided by the statutory bodies. Goals should be set, not time scales. |
| Did they know the data should be passed on and where? | Yes, to NWWT. |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Yes, but not enough money is available for this. Different levels of access. Needs careful planning. |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level | Lack of collation of data at ground level. Summary of data would be useful. |

| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet -Water Voles | |
|--|--|
| Contact Name | Chris Wynne- NWWT |
| Date | Friday 26th May 2000 |
| Lead partner/agency | The wildlife Trusts at a national level. |
| Work programme | Volunteers trained. One person surveys 1 km lengths of water, 4km per volunteer. |
| Location of work | Several hundred sites. |
| Action taken | Survey late in 1999 season. Discuss next step with Water Vole Group. Also, mink survey |
| Issues/problems | Resources. Mink predation. Complex interaction between water voles mink and otters. |
| Where have actions been recorded? | Survey data and minutes of meetings are with NWWT. Recorder MSDOS |
| Outcome of actions | Sites recorded on maps. A need has been seen for a project officer. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | Recorder MSDOS. |
| Timescale: action to outcome | 6 to 9 months for surveying. |
| Did they know the data should be passed on and where? | |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Yes if backed by LRC. Needs constant updating and funding . |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level | Links are not clear, it is all a new learning process |

| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet - Lowland Heath | |
|--|---|
| Contact Name | Guto Jones- Countryside Officer for Gwynedd Council, Lleyn. |
| Date | Wednesday 24th May 2000 |
| Lead partner/agency | CCW |
| Work programme | Local contractors do work. Horses used from local stables to graze sites. Attempting to involve Local Community Council, schools and volunteer wardens. |
| Location of work | <u>Lleyn Peninsula</u> : Work is in progress at Rhos Botwnng and Mynydd Tir y Cwmwd . Proposed sites are: Penychain/Abererch, Mynytho Commons, Allt Fawr, Ynys Enlli, Cilan, Anelog, Pen y Cil and Bychestyn. These sites are monitored. |
| Action taken | Horse grazing. Rhos Botwnng surface scraped to remove dumped material. Soil sampling before scrape. Willow removal. |
| Issues/problems | Finance and manpower are limited. Burning and tipping. Off road bikes. The sites cannot be fenced off. |
| Where have actions been recorded? | CCW and on file in Pwllheli office. Data goes to CCW for grant approval. Work is discussed with CCW before this approved. Nerys Lewis writes management programme, Guto Jones implements the work |
| Outcome of actions | There is continuous assessment of the sites. Contractors work is looked at once per year. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | Record of contractors work stays at the Pwllheli office. |
| Timescale: action to outcome | No time scale, this is flexible: ?5 years ? 10 years. |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Yes, but time is not available to update the data and there is limited manpower and funding for this. |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level | A newsletter to show what has been done on each site would be welcome. Information on other sites in other areas is difficult to obtain. More money in the future may help improve the situation. |

| LBAP Data Outcome Sheet - Lowland Heath | |
|--|---|
| Contact Name | Chris Wynne- NWWT |
| Date | 26th May 2000 |
| Lead partner/agency | English Nature |
| Work programme | <u>2 sections</u> : 1. Ten reserves. 2. Wildlife Sites. |
| Location of work | 4 statutory sites eg Gwaith Pwdr, 147 potential wildlife sites. |
| Action taken | Habitat management and recreation at the 2 main sites eg Gwaith Pwdr. Identification of potential heathland sites with the heathland survey. |
| Issues/problems | Gwaith Pwdr is NWWT owned and has own specific issues as a former gunpowder works. Problems with heath land recreation on rubble. Winter burning by landowners is now too late as many plants and animals have emerged. |
| Where have actions been recorded? | Reserve information is in NWWT files. Annual report sent to CCW on management. This is also fed to the UKBAP. Also to funding sources eg Gwaith Pwdr is funded by LIFE. Wildlife Sites , GCC and NWWT retain information. |
| Outcome of actions | Specific example of Gwaith Pwdr. Boundaries are secured, but still some sheep trespass. Grazing is an issue. Monitoring of recreation of habitat. |
| Where has this information been recorded? | Feeds through to Gwynedd Council and then UKBAP Steering Group. |
| Timescale: action to outcome | Ongoing management. Recreation to heathland to heathland management. |
| Did they know the data should be passed on and where? | CCW and Wild Trust habitat report. |
| Would a local website be helpful to collate data? | Yes if backed by LRC, but needs constant updating. Needs funding. |
| Comments on proposed links to UK level | Links are not clear. It is all a new learning process - workers are still learning the new species and habitat groups. ?Involvement of Wales Heathland Forum. |

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