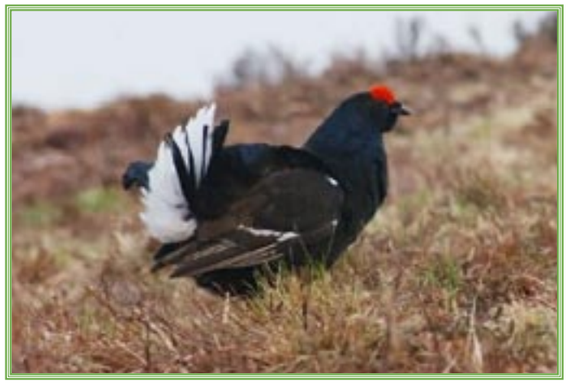
Black Grouse Project Update

Thomas Adamson, the "Biodiversity on the Edge" Black Grouse Project Officer has been in post for almost a year. Good progress has been made, with lek counts being carried out in the spring identifying the current local population. Unfortunately these counts have shown a continued decline of the male population. Management plans have been produced for some of the key landholdings with other management plans to be produced in year two of the project. A well attended management day was held in June 2006 where the main issues affecting the species (habitat and predators) were discussed.



Forestry Commission's Picture Library

The black grouse population in Scotland has been in decline over the past 100 years or so. There was a temporary reprieve during the 1950s-70s when large areas of the uplands were commercially planted with conifers. This provided a temporary increase in habitat for black grouse but once these trees grew and the canopy closed the habitat was lost and the decline continued. Within south-eastern Scotland, black grouse are now largely associated with the edge of moors managed for red grouse shooting.

In recent years, much has been done to try to improve habitat - with new areas of woodland planted, grazing levels reduced to improve heather, forest edges have been "opened-up" creating new feeding areas etc. And yet the decline has continued. So what can be done?

Predation is a major factor and it is likely that the current breeding efforts of the black grouse cannot keep up with the predation by a range of species including foxes, crows, mustelids and raptors. While some of these predator species can be legally controlled, the degree of control varies. We are working to encourage land managers to step-up the level of legal predator control.

In the last 50 years there has been a significant introduction of forestry into many areas of the Southern Uplands, and the forests provide cover and shelter for a number of predators. It is very likely that this is impacting on the black grouse (and on other species). Little predator control is currently carried out in forests and we are working with forest managers to see what can be done here.

Other issues include the impact of fencing in the uplands – black grouse are known to be killed by flying into unmarked fences and we are keen to ensure as many fences are marked as possible.
It is also suspected that the creation of patches of ideal habitat amongst large areas of open hill attract black grouse – and also their predators. When good habitat is scarce – it is possible that small areas actually bring predator and prey into closer proximity – with inevitable results. The answer here is to create more good habitat.

Good habitat management can help protect black grouse from predation by providing areas of cover. But the major event in the black grouse calendar takes place in the spring where the local population gathers on open ground to carry out a flamboyant display. This display (lek) involves the males showing off the striking contrast of their glossy black plumage and the white under-tail coverts while producing a very distinctive bubbling sound that, on a still morning, can be heard from a kilometre away. This process of lekking is intended to attract the attention of females (grey hens) but, on open ground, it inevitably also attracts attention from raptors and other predators. The only thing we can try to do here is to ensure that lek sites are taken into consideration when decisions on land use are made.

This conflict between the need to protect raptors (and badgers) and the need to protect the black grouse is being debated at a high level and it is not clear how it will be resolved. All we can do is try to get better information on what is actually happening in the field so that future decisions can be based on facts rather than anecdote. Part of the current project is to collate as much information on the relationships between these species as possible.

With numbers so low, every bird lost is one step closer to the birds disappearing entirely from the Southern Uplands – and the loss would be a very sad one.

Thomas Adamson, SUP
Black Grouse Conservation Officer.
Tel. 01750 725157
email tom@sup.org.uk

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND VILLAGE ASSOCIATIONS CONFERENCE

Annandale and Eskdale Community Initiatives Group is going to hold a conference in Langholm on Saturday 14 October (one piece of funding is yet to be confirmed at the time of going to press). The group is hosting a visit from a group of people from Finnish Village Associations and has decided to hold a conference to coincide with this visit.

The conference hopes to get people to look at the opportunities and challenges facing these organisations. It should be a good networking opportunity where colleagues can provide mutual support for each other in the work that they do. The group hopes to hold a ceilidh in the evening so people may want to make a weekend of it!

If there are any Community Initiatives or Village Associations from across the South of Scotland that are interested in coming along they can contact Janette Jackson on 013873 80914 or email her on janette@langholinitiative.co.uk for more details.

The Southern Uplands Partnership

The Southern Uplands Partnership was established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status in 1999, with the aim of promoting sustainable land-use in the Southern Uplands of Scotland and thereby keeping people living and working here.

Company No 200827 Charity SC029475

The Southern Uplands Partnership
Studio 2, Lindean Mill, Galashiels TD1 3PE Tel: 01750 725154
e-mail: piptabor@sup.org.uk

southern uplands partnership
living land, living community

Biodiversity Special

Newsletter of the Southern Uplands Partnership

No 22 Autumn 2006

When 150 heads of state signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Rio 'Earth Summit' in 1992, it may have seemed unlikely that this would have much impact on the diversity of habitats and species found in different areas of Scotland. But since then, local biodiversity partnerships have been established throughout the country, translating international and national targets into local action, and highlighting the importance of local biodiversity. Most of these partnerships have now produced their own Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs), which include targets that reflect the values of local people and are based on the range of local conditions, thereby catering for local distinctiveness, as well as national and international requirements.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, "Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in your hands" was published by the Scottish Executive in May 2004 in partnership with the Scottish Biodiversity Forum, a broad based working partnership of public, private and voluntary organisations. Local Biodiversity Action Plan process stimulates local action for national priorities by drawing local interests together to work towards common goals.

This December there will be a one day conference on The Future of Biodiversity in the Uplands at Battleby, near Perth, focussing on the processes of change in the uplands. SUP will be represented at the event by Pip Tabor. Conference organiser, Dr Jeremy Milne, explains the importance of Upland biodiversity below. The conference is aimed at people managing, researching or developing policies in the uplands, for more information contact Dr Milne at the Centre for Mountain Studies, (Jeremy.milne@perth.uhi.ac.uk).

Why is upland biodiversity important?

Due to their geological and topographical complexity, uplands exhibit multiple ecological gradients that support a rich diversity of species and habitats. UK uplands are distinctive for their blanket bogs, wet and dry heaths, rich woodland bryophyte communities, distinctive types of alpine and boreal heaths and the teeming array of microbes, fungi and invertebrate and vertebrate fauna that inhabit these and the many other upland habitats. Many of us recognise and appreciate the biological diversity of our upland landscapes, but why is it important? It is important for at least four reasons.

Firstly, we must accept the general principle that life on our planet is interdependent. Our very breathing is facilitated by the plants around us that are busy absorbing carbon dioxide and pumping out the oxygen that we respire. This is an example of an 'ecosystem service' that we take for granted. Without the myriad bacteria, fungi and invertebrates that populate the soil, the cycling of nutrients that is fundamental to life would not happen. The uplands are particularly important for their role in capturing water by either stopping clouds or creating clouds that shed rain. Upland vegetation is then vital to maintaining the integrity of slopes and controlling the run-off of rainwater in a manner that enables us to capture, store and use it. Peat forming vegetation communities are increasingly valued for their capacity to absorb and store CO2 from the atmosphere providing an important mechanism for regulating the build-up of this 'greenhouse gas'. Although we don't fully understand the linkages between biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, the precautionary principle urges us to accept the so-called 'insurance hypothesis' whereby biological richness insures against system failure.

Secondly, upland biodiversity underpins current rural economies. Livestock graze the grasses, herbs and shrubs that form a part of upland biodiversity. Icons of the moor such as red deer and grouse that are at the heart of centuries of rural tradition underpinning the social networks of many upland communities are part of and supported by upland biodiversity. Tourism now forms the largest component of the rural economy in Scotland. The distinctive appeal of Scotland is based in no small part on the contribution that upland biodiversity makes to the Scottish brand. Heather moors and Caledonian pinewoods are woven deeply into the lore of the land that helps define 'Scotland' as a place to visit. Diversification of future rural economies is also likely to be underpinned by the management of upland biodiversity for an increasing number of different objectives ranging from quality foods to biofuels.

Thirdly, upland biodiversity is important for our recreation; that suite

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

SUP Newsletter goes electornic in the Spring / register at www.sup.org.uk

DIRECTORS COMMENT

The SUP continues to grow with new project staff joining the Communities on the Edge project and the Red Squirrels project. A lot else is happening besides (the Local Food, Local Plates project report is now available on the SUP website, we have secured funding from Awards for All for a feasibility study to look into an extension to the South of Scotland Countryside Trails between Moffat and Lockerbie, a feasibility study on sustainable rural offices is underway, the long-awaited Southern Upland Way Development Officer to be based with Dumfries & Galloway Council will start work in October and SUP has received support for an organisational review from Charities Aid Foundation, the list goes on).

Below I would like to highlight a project with which I have been closely involved. I think this illustrates both the benefits of working in partnership with others and also opportunities that can be found by considering our wonderful natural and cultural heritage in new ways. In my view this is what the Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) is all about.

The Tweed Rivers Heritage Project which covers the Tweed catchment, comprises many diverse and interesting individual projects. One such is the provision of a salmon-viewing centre at Old Mill Farm on Philiphaugh Estate.

Following the restoration of the water wheel, which formerly powered the sawmill and threshing mill, it was decided to develop the old threshing mill building into a visitor centre. On the ground floor, a large screen was installed to show live pictures from underwater cameras, which had been placed in the River Ettrick. A further camera was placed in an artificial otter holt though, as yet, otters have not taken up residence.

The cameras have presented fascinating images in real time showing salmon, brown trout, salmon parr, minnows, eels, grayling and an otter in their natural environment underwater.

The story of the salmon's migration from the Atlantic Ocean, North Sea to Berwick upon Tweed and up the rivers to spawn in some tiny burn in the headwaters, is told in beautiful pictures. Other panels explain the life cycle of the salmon, the different species of fish found in the river, other migratory species and the work done by Tweed Foundation to improve habitat in the catchment. The 'smolts' corner for children enables them to crawl through a salmon redd and emerge as fry!

The counter and camera placed in the fish pass and managed by Tweed Foundation reads out on a small computer screen giving the numbers of fish passing up the fish ladder.

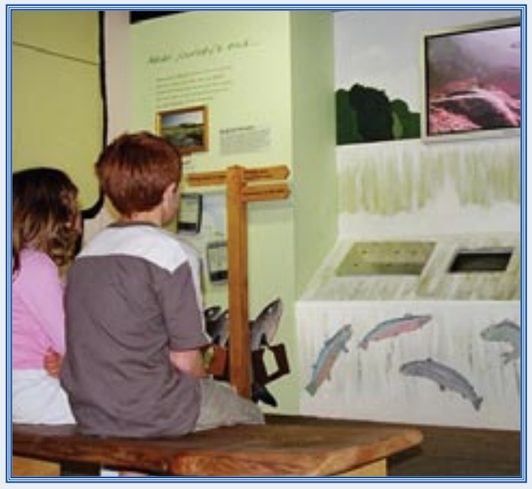
Finally, Philiphaugh Estate has a panel giving a bird's eye view of the Estate and clearly featuring the various marked walks.

The Centre is now benefiting from input of local volunteers, co-ordinated by Diane Bennett who works jointly with Glentress, and Kailzie Gardens where the ospreys can be watched.

None of this would have happened without the drive and enthusiasm of the staff of Tweed Forum and the partnership of funders, including Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, Making Tracks and the Philiphaugh Trust Estate.

Partnership underlies this whole project and the Centre has attracted considerable interest and the growing number of visitors has encouraged the Estate to consider expanding the facilities at Old Mill. Watch this space!

Michael Strang Steel, Convenor.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of activities that rejuvenate our strength and spirit. How much less rejuvenating would our time in the hills be without the opportunity to encounter the golden plover, the eagle or the black-throated diver, the colourful forms of fruiting bodies of ectomycorrhizal fungi popping up above the dwarf willow that supports them, the fascination of insectivorous plants, the beauty of the upland saxifrages. Diversity in nature enlivens our spirit.

Fourthly, biodiversity has intrinsic value. We are increasingly aware of the tragedy that the anthropogenic loss of biological diversity represents. The flora and fauna of the world are beautiful, awe-inspiring, joy-bringing and precious and to destroy them unnecessarily is wrong.

Most people would agree with the last statement. The argument arises over what is necessary and what is not, the answer to which has traditionally depended on which side of the debate you were on. Thankfully the debate over economy and environment has shifted from 'either/or' to 'both/and' and the principle of integration between these areas and therefore the four points outlined above is becoming ever more deeply rooted in Government policy, at least in theory. The challenge for the future is to ensure that good theory becomes good practice.

Jeremy Milne
Centre for Mountain Studies

Red Kite Trail Success

Congratulations to all those involved with the success of the Galloway Kite Trail. A recent study by students from Glasgow University suggests that the trail could be boosting the local economy by more than £750,000 p.a. In addition to having considerable conservation impact the survey concludes that nearly three quarters of trail visitors are from outwith Dumfries & Galloway and nearly 70% of visitors visit at least four of the businesses or Trail points on the route. Another success for cluster working.

Dumfries and Galloway LBAP Review

The Dumfries and Galloway Local Biodiversity Action Plan was published in June 1999. It was the first comprehensive LBAP published in Scotland, won a number of awards, and was used by many other LBAP partnerships as a template for good practice.
Many of the actions listed in the 1999 LBAP have now been successfully completed, as reported in the Progress Reports of 2001 and 2005. Work has included creation of new native woods, restoration of raised bogs, reintroduction of previously extinct species, the integration of biodiversity into planning policies, a more co-ordinated approach to biological recording, and a variety of educational projects.

However, Biodiversity Action Planning at a local, national and international level has developed enormously in the last seven years, biodiversity research has uncovered much new information both locally and nationally, and this has led to new developments in conservation management. As a result, many of the original LBAP actions are no longer applicable or have been superseded. The time is now right for a complete review of the Dumfries & Galloway LBAP.

The 1999 LBAP contained, for the first time in one document, a huge volume of information about the biodiversity of Dumfries & Galloway, much of it collated by local experts, both professional and amateur, working in a wide range of different areas of biodiversity, including farming, forestry, freshwater and marine management, scientific research, and education. The 2006/7 LBAP Review will update this information, building on the experience gained over the last seven years, and again using the local knowledge and expertise of as many people as possible. This will be presented in a new Local Biodiversity Action Plan, to be published in 2007 or 2008.

One of the main objectives of an LBAP is to raise awareness of local biodiversity and its importance. In Dumfries and Galloway, one of the most successful ways of doing this has been through an annual Wildlife Festival, a series of activities run by members of the local Biodiversity Partnership to allow people to experience some of our fantastic wildlife. Begun in 2004, the 2007 Festival will be held from 31st March to 15th April. Around 30 activities have already been confirmed, including opportunities to see Salmon, Badgers, Red Kites, and Red Squirrels; many are aimed at families or those with little previous experience of wildlife watching. A full programme will be available nearer the event, but all activities will be listed on www.wildlifefestival.org.uk as they are confirmed.

For further details about the LBAP Review or Wildlife Festival, contact Peter Norman, Biodiversity Officer, Dumfries & Galloway Council, Tel 01387 260172, peter.norman@dumgal.gov.uk .

Water Vole expert Rob Strachan leads training course for volunteers at Langholm. Becky Johnson

South Lanarkshire Barn Owl Habitat Enhancement Project

They are out there but given the Barn owl's nocturnal habits, combined with a decline in the population both locally and nationally during the 1980's, they are not all that easy to see. South Lanarkshire Biodiversity Partnership hope to reverse this trend and maybe, with £25,000 worth of help from a Scottish Executive Biodiversity Action Grant and the South Lanarkshire Rural Partnership Leader+ Programme, it might just be a little bit easier to see these beautiful birds in Clydesdale in the future.

These funds, with the support of the farming community of upper Clydesdale, have allowed the partnership to enhance, and create new, habitat for Barn owls. Nine farms signed up to the project with 2.5 km of hedgerows created, 200m of new water margin on the River Clyde, 260 trees planted and 12 Barn owl boxes installed in farm buildings. Pupils from Tinto Primary School, Symington and Carmichael Primary School helped to build the Barn owl boxes for the project. Through drawing together a range of organisations, schools and landowners, this project represents an excellent example of what can be achieved through partnership working with regard to delivering on the aims of South Lanarkshire Biodiversity Action Plan

By creating a roadside screen, new planting will help to reduce Barn owl road casualties along the A73 Clyde Valley Tourist Route. More importantly, new hedgerows replace those that have been lost in the past and link existing hedges and woodlands together, forming "wildlife corridors". With associated rough grassland, hedgerows and water margins also provide the perfect habitat for the small mammals that Barn owls hunt. In effect, such corridors allow a number of plants, birds and animals to move around the countryside; they are the wildlife equivalent of the M74. New water margins also help to keep the water in the River Clyde clean and healthy, which is good for wildlife and us.

Richard Bedford

So, the next time you are taking an evening walk or are out fishing on the banks of the River Clyde, keep your eyes open and you may be lucky enough to see this delightful "hoolet". If not, never mind, there is bound to be plenty of other wildlife to see.
Scott Riddell, Biodiversity Officer, South Lanarkshire Biodiversity Partnership. Email: scott riddell@southlanarkshire.gov.uk www.step.gb.com/la21/biodiversity

Shona Munro joins SUP staff.

We are pleased to welcome Shona Munro to the staff of the Southern Uplands Partnership as Red Squirrel Conservation Officer for the Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group (ARSG). Shona will be employed by SUP on behalf of ARSG and started work on delivery of the groups action plan in mid September. The ARSG project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage and South Ayrshire Council and will focus on surveying of Kyle, Galloway and Glen App 'priority' woods and their buffer zones as well as promotion and education activities. Shona has been involved in conservation work since the 1980s and has worked for successive organisations in the Loch Lomond area, most recently the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority. Shona will work from an office base at the Scottish Agricultural College, Auchincruive, Ayr.
Tel 01292 520929.