

Swere Valley and Upper Stour CTA – the first 6 months, update June 2010

The most typical landscape of this CTA is river valleys with limestone grassland, hay meadows, mixed deciduous woodland and wet woodland. It was chosen as a CTA where no paid partners (except statutory agencies) were working, so necessitated a different approach by our BAP Officer

- BAP Officer organised a meeting of those with an interest in that CTA - CTA Lead, a local botanist and joint author of "Portrait of a River", all of whom are volunteers. They visited some of the best sites this provided invaluable input re wildlife on sites, site management and landowner contacts.
- BAP Officer worked with TVERC (local records centre) to obtain additional information on geology, BAP species and notable species in the CTA.
- Oxfordshire County Council (via County Ecologist) commissioned TVERC to carry out land use and BAP habitat mapping by aerial photography to bring the standard up to the other "activated" CTAs which had been mapped previously.
- BAP Officer had identified that the District Council had set aside funding for FWAG visits in their area. They were happy to use this process to target the visits.
- BAP Officer and Natural England used HAT (Holdings Assessment Toolkit) to identify landowners in the CTA, and whether they were in ELS/CSS/HLS etc.
- NE advisors identified the contribution of existing HLS agreements, and HLS agreements in negotiation, to habitat buffering and linking.
- The BAP Officer co-ordinated a CTA partnership meeting to get input from a range of organisations, such as BBOWT, Environment Agency, FWAG, Natural England, the local District Council and some local individuals.
- FWAG, Natural England and BAP Officer worked together to produce a joint letter to be sent to landowners in the CTA informing them about the CTA and offering free visits to provide wildlife management advice and ideas for options in ELS / HLS that would be most effective in buffering and linking BAP habitats in the CTA
- Natural England sent the letter out with responses coming back to BAP Officer. About 50 landowners were contacted. 8 replied, all positively, with 7 requesting a free visit, and 2 offering their farm for a farm walk. NE said this was a very positive response rate.
- To date six visits covering 645 hectares have been made at a cost of £150 (for half a day). £900 has been released by the direction provided by this process. (It is likely the fund wouldn't have been spent without the CTA process and an LBAP Officer who had the time to identify opportunities and could make it happen).
- LBAP Officer and FWAG worked together to make the visits between December and February. This also helped to give the LBAP Officer experience so that he would be able to make landowner visits in other CTAs where there was no time or money for FWAG or Natural England to be involved.
- FWAG have written reports detailing management that would benefit wildlife and which included highlighting the opportunities for entering ELS or HLS as appropriate. These will be followed up by Natural England.
- A Vision Mapping meeting was held using the BAP Habitat map and agri-environment scheme map to identify key locations for the buffering and linking of habitats and to identify ways forward.
- As part of selling the CTA approach the CTA lead and the BAP Officer organised an evening walk in the CTA for ONCF members (anyone involved or interested in conservation in Oxfordshire). 24 attended.
- The BAP Officer worked with partners to identify further landowners to contact and FWAG are to contact these to offer visits in 2010/2011.
- The number of ELS and HLS agreements as a result of this work will be confirmed at a later date.