

## **HBIC Recorders Forum 2009** – by Lizzy Peat (HBIC Assistant Ecologist)

The 2009 HBIC recorders forum was held on the 14th March, at Testwood Lakes loosely based around a wetland theme. Andy Foy (HBIC) kicked off the proceedings by telling us about a project mapping where important habitats could occur using a computer model, which takes into account the current habitat constraints, leading to the production of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. He then went on to explain how this has been used to define areas for the South East Biodiversity Strategy.

Ali Morse (HWT) told us about the Itchen Navigation Heritage Trail Project, the Navigation route having developed in the 17th Century as a route between Winchester and the Sea. She outlined the current problems with piecemeal repairs, rampaging trees and increased waterlevels and how they were hoping to change things with the 2.4 million pound grant from HLF and the EA- enhancing the area for wildlife and people. They will be monitoring the effects on Wildlife relying on a 2006 survey for the base line data and also running volunteer based wildlife surveys each year until 2012. For more information please contact Polly Whyte at pollyw@HWT.org.uk

Martin de Retuerto (HWT) then outlined the 5 year project on for Winnall Moors, focussing on habitat restoration of the chalk streams and the classic 18th century water meadow system whilst engaging local people (the site is only 10 minutes from Winchester city centre). This is where fly fishing was developed by George Edward Mackenzie Skies 1858-1949. It's a very rich site, never chemically improved and supports a rare endangered snail and the pea mussel *Pisidium tenuilineatu*. They plan to sort out the sluices and carrying out a wildlife monitoring and survey programme. They also want to encourage the lapwings, snipe and redshanks back.

Ben Rushbrook (HWT) informed us about the Chalk Stream Invertebrate project, a project to raise awareness, mainly focussing on white clawed crayfish, trying to re-connect the small currently isolated populations. This project will also benefit Southern damselfly, bull head and the brook lamprey. This project is mainly focussing on education, undertaking surveys (to inform and protect) all working with the local landowners, but not encouraging independent surveys (to reduce the movement of crayfish plague). Please note you need a licence from Natural England to survey for Crayfish.

Nick Smith, of Hampshire and Amphibian and Reptile Group requested records for the new book, which will have 4-5 pages on each of the 12 species. They are in need of more records, at the moment it seems as though there are no frogs or slow worms on the Isle of Wight. The current deadline is 2010, This is now the last year of fieldwork left! Nickanguis@yahoo.co.uk

Phil Budd (the new county recorder for Hoverflies), did a quick call for hoverfly records before we broke for Lunch leaving some time to browse the displays upstairs. These included displays on Sparsholt College,

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Southampton Natural History Society, Butterfly Conservation and a display by Steven Miles on the importance of eroded footpaths in heathlands for the Mottled bee-fly (a BAP Species).

Re-convening, Andrew Hoodless of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust outlined the huge decline in Lapwing, redshank and snipe populations. Lapwings suffered a 40% drop between 1982 – 2002, redshank 21% and Snipe 61%. Numbers tend to fluctuate from year to year – Predation is also a major factor- 40% of lapwing chicks go into grey herons. Each species has different requirements, sward heights is crucial, as is keeping the fields wet (but not too wet.) At the moment, lapwing pairs are raising 0.48 chicks to adulthood, this needs to be 0.8 to maintain the current population. Sluces need work getting them going again, through European stewardship schemes.

Jolyon Chesworth (HWT) kindly stepped in at the last moment and told us about the Solent Seal Tagging Project. Harbour seals (which have a dog shaped head) and the larger grey seals can be found in the Solent. Harbour seal numbers have been affected by the distemper virus, and disturbance. The Solent houses the only population in the English channel and we know very little about them, we have no idea of population numbers, where they breed or feed. More information is needed to be fed into local plans. Regular counts are being made in Chilchester harbour, and a photographic database of individuals made. 5 individuals have been tagged with Sim cards which stores the location and details of dives. Education packs and codes of conduct are being developed as well as numerous talks to educate the public. Any sightings of seals would be gratefully received: <http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/mammal-recording-form.html>

Jolyon Chesworth (HWT) told us all about Seagrass beds (a biodiversity Action Plan Habitat). There are four species of sea grass, and 2 species of eel grass. Seagrass beds need light, soft sediment and shelter, and grow roots with rhizomes. This habitat is important for reducing erosion as well as many species, including spiny seahorses and as nursery grounds for baby fish. Volunteer snorkelers have been mapping the beds by towing gps's on inflatables round the edges and have also set up fixed point photography sites. The beds are under threat from dredging, and damage from anchors and anchor chains.

Dave green (Butterfly Conservation) gave a talk on The Impact of Wet Summers on Butterfly Numbers. . . a misleading title as summer droughts are more of a problem for moths than wet summers as caterpillar food plants are entirely destroyed. 2007 was the worst year for moths for 25 years, 33 species declined by more than 20%. It's very important to remember that moth populations also includes the caterpillars and eggs – not just the flying contingent.

Thanks to the Wildlife Trust for hosting the day, Jolyon Cheesworth for stepping in with a second presentation at the last moment and Andy Foy for Chairing.

Next year's forum will be held on **6th March 2010** at **Littleton Village Hall**.

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