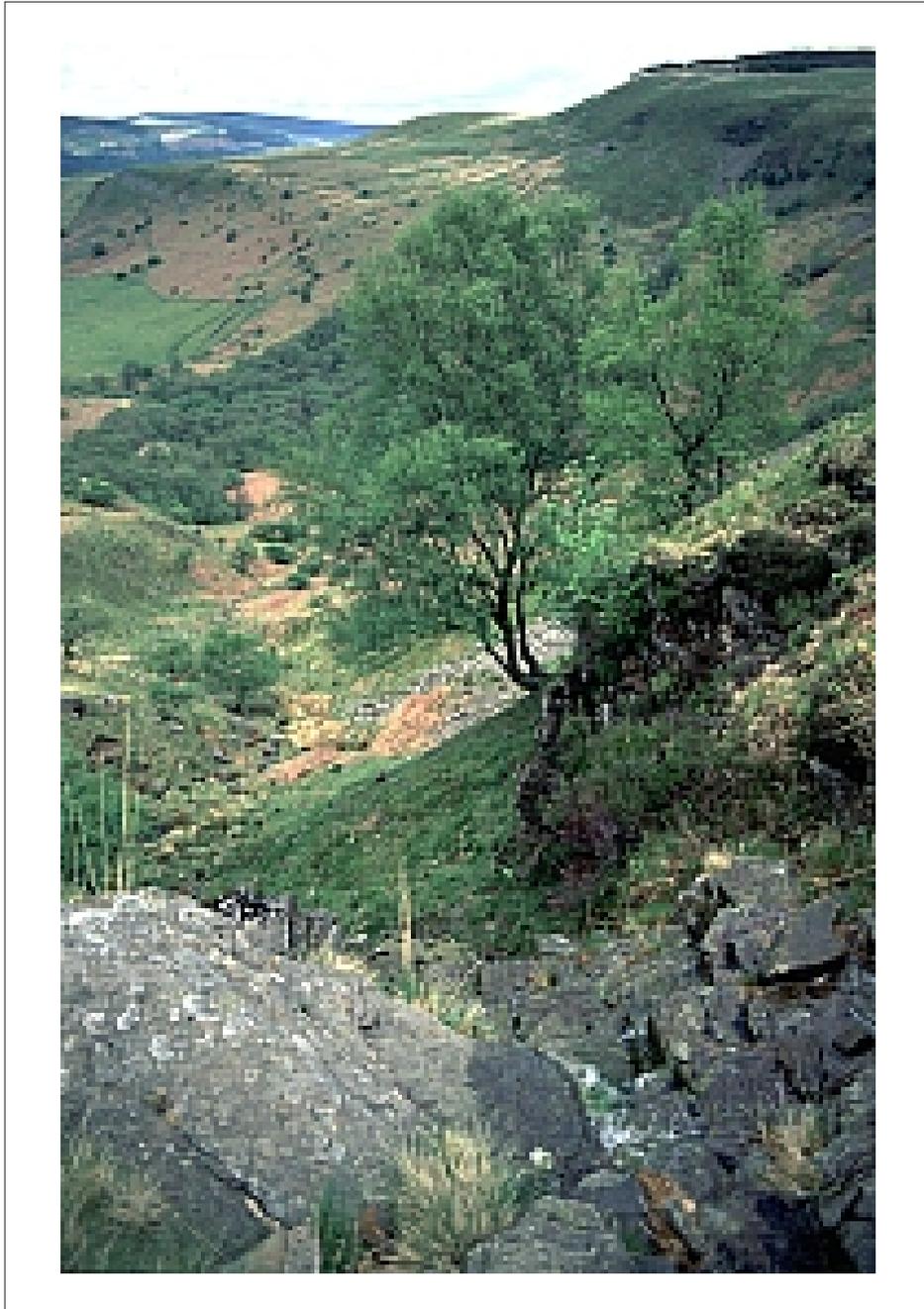


Action for Nature 2008

Part One - The Document



*A Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf
January 2008*

Chapter One: Introduction (17/12/07)

Biodiversity: The Variety of Life

‘Biodiversity is **all living things**, from the tiny garden ant to the giant redwood tree. You will find biodiversity everywhere, in window boxes and wild woods, roadsides and rain forests, snow fields and sea shore’

*UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report 1995**

Action for Nature was launched in October 2000 at the Rhondda Heritage Centre. At that time even the word ‘biodiversity’ and the concept of ‘biodiversity conservation’ were new and awkward. The celebration event at the Heritage Centre, however, marked a momentous stage in the progress of the Local Biodiversity partnership and the document contained hundreds of individual species and habitat actions, wrapped up in four main generic action themes.

Ultimately celebrations are only celebrations. Everyone involved in the drafting of Action for Nature knew that October 2000 was only the start of the process and the worth of that process and its document would be measured in the years to come. Would it all falter and fade? Or could it start to realise real biodiversity action and progress. Would it develop and evolve into something, which could help deliver strategic action? Would it realise opportunities and could it help to integrate biodiversity into the fabric of our everyday life? In short would it be worth the paper it was written on!

After 7 years of Action for Nature, there is now an opportunity to revisit the main priorities and actions of the Plan. To explore where real progress has been made, where impetus is needed and to reflect on what we have learnt. So, here is a new and improved Part 1 of Action for Nature. The LBAP steering group has decided to stick with the format of the original, to leave well alone where the words and sentiments still fit, but to use the experience and confidence of 7 years of process to critically review where action has worked, where it has not and what the next 5 years of biodiversity action should look to deliver.

In 2000 Action for Nature stated that ‘the Valleys are home to a wealth of wildlife. Between the towns and villages, up the mountain and by the river, in parks and gardens, on farms and in forests there are special places; habitats for wild plants and animals. Across Britain and around the world, wildlife is threatened by modern lifestyles; habitats are being lost to new housing and roads, or as farming changes. It is frightening to think that plants and animals that were common in our grandparents’ day could have gone for good within our children’s lifetime’. The global loss of biodiversity has unfortunately not slowed in the last seven years and these sentiments are as true, or perhaps even truer today. In addition the threat of global warming for the future of the planet and its biodiversity, has gained common acceptance. No longer a question of if global warming will happen, but much more a case of how severely and quickly its effects will be felt. The role and need for strategic

biodiversity action at global, national and local levels has never been more important. Indeed as experience grows it becomes more and more clear that bottom-up action; a driver for change starting at the local level, is the perhaps the only way to succeed. For conservation of our ecosystems, our biodiversity and our heritage to be successful it needs local support and understanding. Local people need to be given the chance to appreciate, advise, explore and influence their local environments and their local biodiversity.

Functions of Local Biodiversity Action Plans

- To ensure the national targets for species and habitats, as specified in the UK Action Plan, are translated into effective action at the local level.
- To identify targets for species and habitats appropriate to the local area, and reflecting the values of people locally.
- To develop effective local partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are maintained in the long-term.
- To raise awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation in the local context.
- To ensure the opportunities for conservation and enhancement of the whole biodiversity resource are fully considered.
- To provide a basis for monitoring progress in biodiversity conservation, at both local and national level.

Guidance for Local Biodiversity Action Guidance Note 1 : an introduction

The first Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf was published in 2000, after two years of preparatory work by the Steering Group, reporting to a wider biodiversity partnership. Since that time the partnership has grown and many more people are involved in biodiversity action. The second edition of the Plan has been developed to reflect this. The Steering Group includes representatives of voluntary groups, landowners, government agencies, the Council and interested individuals. The full membership and the terms of reference of the Steering Group are given in Appendix 1.

Landmarks in the biodiversity process

- 1992: Rio Earth Summit.** UK Government signed the Biodiversity Convention.
- 1994: Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan.** Set out the principles for biodiversity conservation in the UK and led to the setting-up of the UK Biodiversity Steering Group.
- 1995: The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report.** The first biodiversity audit for the UK, establishing priority national and international habitats and species and the development of quantifiable conservation targets for 391 species and 45 habitats.
- 1997: Glamorgan Biodiversity Advisory Group (GLAMBAG).*** Established to provide a scientific bridge in Glamorgan (the wildlife recording area called Vice County 41) between the national species and habitat targets and proposed Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The Group consists of eight local authorities, the Countryside Council for Wales, Glamorgan Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Brecon Beacons National Park, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water, Assembly Agriculture Dept., Forestry Commission Wales, DEIN, SWEBreC, and the National Museum of Wales.
- 1998: Guidance for Local Biodiversity Action Plans.** Consists of five self-help Guidance Notes for the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans
- 1999: Secretary of State for Wales** called for Local Biodiversity Action Plans to be prepared throughout Wales by 2000.
- 2000: Action for Nature: The Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf.**
- 2000: Countryside and Rights of Way Act:** Provided for delegation of biodiversity action to Wales and introduced the s.74 list of habitats and species of importance to Wales (see Appendix 2)
- 2003: Local Biodiversity Action Plans Review** Welsh Assembly Government Environment, Planning and Transport Committee report supports the production of LBAPs across Wales.
- 2004: European Union Malahide Declaration:** To halt biodiversity loss across Europe by 2010. Wales Environment Minister has committed the Welsh Assembly Government to achieving this.
- 2004: Better Life: Community Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf :** Over-arching strategy which highlights biodiversity as one of the key environmental and community assets of the County Borough.
- 2006: Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC):** Supersedes much of the CROW Act and in particular includes a duty to conserve biodiversity in that ‘every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, in so far as is consistent with the proper exercising of those, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity’.
- 2006: Wales Environment Strategy:** Welsh Assembly Government strategy recognises the importance of our environment and explains the methodology to tackle the challenges facing the environment, in a sustainable way, over the next 20 years.
- 2007: Wales Biodiversity Framework:** identifies key players and policy for biodiversity action and the mechanisms required to deliver positive action.
- 2007: Publication of the revised priority habitats and species lists for the UK (BRIG) and the revised habitat targets for Wales**

* Appendix 14 lists abbreviations and initials

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group has produced a revised list of UK priority and species (summer 07), this includes 1149 species and 69 habitats. For all these habitats and species actions are proposed and lead organisations identified. The revised UK list is considerably longer than the previous list and a Wales specific list is also now available. The existing UK Plans set out the actions needed to protect particular plants and animals, and the places where they are found. Not all of the UK or Wales priority habitats and species are relevant in Rhondda Cynon Taf. For example we have no coastline and therefore no sand dunes or harbour porpoises. However as experience has time and again proven the County Borough is rich in wildlife, with at least 23 of the habitats and 114 of the species of UK importance found here. So, we have a responsibility to help deliver the actions listed in these UK Action Plans.

The habitats and species identified in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act S74 list for Wales (subsequently revised under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (s.42)) includes nationally important habitats and species relevant to Rhondda Cynon Taf (see Appendix 2)

In Wales, there is a Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group that provides advice and guidance; in Glamorgan the eight local authorities are working together, with government agencies, to share the technical work of translating UK and Wales action to the local level.

UK Biodiversity Steering Group
Wales Biodiversity Partnership and Steering Group
Glamorgan Biodiversity Advisory Group
Rhondda Cynon Taf Local BAP Steering Group

Some Useful Definitions

- A **Habitat** is the natural home or territory of a plant or animal.
- **Species** are animals or plants that are alike and can interbreed.
- An **Ecosystem** is a community of different species, the relationships between them and their environment.

adapted from The Concise Oxford Dictionary and the Penguin Dictionary of Biology

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Action Plan

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan should be more than just a local version of the UK Action Plans; it should reflect locally important habitats and species as well.

The overall aim of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Action Plan is “to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf”.

The following objectives describe what is needed to achieve this:

- translate UK Action Plans to the local level
- identify other locally important habitats and species, through local consultation
- identify key partners
- develop achievable actions
- monitor progress in achieving Local Biodiversity Action Plan actions
- monitor biodiversity in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The process of producing the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Action Plan has influenced the content of the Plan. The County Borough Council set the process in motion in 1998 but agreed, at an early stage, that others should help to draw up the Plan. The Partnership that produced the original Local Biodiversity Action Plan in 2000 has grown. Implementing the actions in the first Plan has involved more local naturalists and encouraged more interested members of the public to help. The number of people working for wildlife in voluntary organisations and government agencies has increased, and new community based organisations are expressing their interest in local wildlife. Some examples of the achievements of the past five years are given below and in Chapter Three.

Appendix 1 sets out the timetable and the various stages of the Plan preparation process.

A Better Life: The Community Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf

In spring 2004 the Community Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf was published by the strategic partnership, the Better Life Consortium. The Plan sets out a ten-year vision for the area and includes outcomes, indicators and key actions for the Council and other major partners such as the Police, Health Service, voluntary sector and business. The Local Biodiversity Action Plan is mentioned and a new Environmental Partnership, reporting to the Better Life Consortium, has been set up to take forward the Living Space actions from the Community Plan. The ability to integrate biodiversity objectives and enhancements is key to delivering real, sustainable biodiversity gain.

Biodiversity and Sustainability

The diversity of wildlife is a key indicator of sustainable development. Sustainable development is about meeting the world's needs through economic and social development, both now and in the future, whilst safeguarding the environment on which all development depends. If biodiversity conservation is to be ultimately successful, it must be integrated into every day activities. Small changes can lead to significant biodiversity benefits, pre-planning and dialogue can avoid future conflict and delays, and imagination and understanding can deliver real biodiversity and community benefits. Biodiversity action must be firmly based on sustainable practice and protocol.

Biodiversity and Sustainability

The evolution and sustenance of life on earth has always been and will continue to be dependant on the availability of a varied and integrated selection of life forms, encompassing a wide gene base and capable of adapting to changing conditions. This has created a global ecosystem, the "natural" world, a jigsaw puzzle of incomprehensible magnitude. Mankind has turned over a number of pieces and given them names but has little understanding of the logistics of how they fit together or interact in the "balance of life" that is a feature of biodiversity.

This biodiversity and its complex, symbiotic relationship with the planet has provided the basic necessities for life upon which mankind is equally as dependant as any other species - pure water, clean air, soil with the basic ingredients for nutrition and filtered energy from the sun to deliver that nutrition to plant life.

Warning signs that mankind is damaging the earth's capacity to provide these necessities and also creating global climate change are evident. As well as scientific data and predictions, soil erosion, the early arrival of spring, increasing rainfall and global storms are all symptoms of an over-burdened and depleted ecosystem.

Our already threatened unique Welsh biodiversity may suffer serious losses if we refuse to heed these warning signs, with the possible extinction of some species. This should be regarded as a matter of grave concern for everyone. For just as the silence of the canaries provided an indication of adverse conditions in the mines, the lessening or possible silencing of bird song in our countryside is a signal that all is not healthy.

The remedies for this potentially disastrous scenario are within our capabilities. Biodiversity protection, pollution reduction and increasing recycling of resources are first steps along the path to a healthy sustainable lifestyle for ourselves and future generations. The delivery of these measures is dependant upon the actions of all sections of society. National governments and local authorities have the legislative power and organisational ability to determine and promote wide ranging, eco-friendly policies. Everyone should press for these and enhance their effectiveness by adopting sustainable lifestyles.

Leaving the implementation of sustainability to others is not an option for anyone who is concerned for the future of life on our planet. The reward for positive actions will be a more wholesome, healthier world capable of providing physical and spiritual benefits for all.

Chapter Two: Wildlife in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT)* extends from the uplands of the Brecon Beacons to the edge of the Vale of Glamorgan (see Map 1, p8). The central feature is the coalfield plateau, which is cut by the Rhondda, Cynon and parts of the Taff and Ely river valleys. To the north of the coalfield plateau is the Brecon Beacons National Park, a small part of which is in the County Borough. The National Park Authority has prepared its own Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The coalfield plateau is higher (600m), more remote and exposed in the north, with dramatic crags and extensive areas of forestry. Further south, hill farming predominates. The Cynon and Rhondda valleys are generally steep-sided with narrow and mostly built up valley floors, and bracken covered, farmed or wooded slopes. South of Pontypridd, the Taff Valley is wider but heavily developed. The southern part of the County Borough has a softer, more lowland landscape of farms, woods, commons, towns and villages. This Chapter describes what we know about our wildlife.

A Biodiversity Tour

The south Wales Valleys is a treasure trove of biodiversity. Like all good treasure troves it had been lost and long forgotten and has only now been re-found, and like some giant archaeological dig, one discovery has led to another; one find has spurred on the finding of the next.

Local people have started to see how their valued local patch fits into a bigger context and experts have gradually realised the significance of our biodiversity. The surprise is the greater because from the outside, the Valleys have been viewed as derelict and despoiled, depressed and degraded. This is surely the last place biodiversity would thrive? Wrong! With an open mind and a little knowledge, the secret behind the success of Valleys biodiversity is obvious. Partly as result of nutrient poor but varied soils, partly because of an intense and complex topography, geomorphology and geology, partly down to our wonderful mild wet climate, partly due to traditional small farm management and the Valleys industrial legacy, and partly due to the daily interactions of people with their environment; all of the components for diversity are in place. Blessed with this heady mix of conditions and circumstances, the South Wales Valleys support a range and variety of lowland and upland habitats, which is not bettered anywhere in southern Britain. **Rhondda Cynon Taf lies at the heart of the Valleys and at the heart of this wealth of biodiversity.** This is where landscape and biodiversity come together, where the landscape has substance and depth. This is no shallow and brittle postcard view based on pretence and faded reputation. This is biodiverse landscape, which is breath taking, dynamic, and integral to a unique sense of place and belonging.

To prove a point let us take a quick landscape tour of Rhondda Cynon Taf. But where would you like to start?

Perhaps you want to see first hand the high-hedged rhos pastures of Tonyrefail, Llanharan, Llantrisant, Church Village and the Upper Cynon Valley, with their internationally important communities of purple moor-grass and rush pasture. These rhos pastures flower in summer with devil's-bit scabious, meadow thistle and heath spotted orchid and they host precious colonies of marsh fritillary and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. No planned landscape this, ancient field patterns are marked by even more ancient hedgebanks cut from the wildwood. Dormice find a home in the hedgerows of hazel, oak, ash, hawthorn, willow, blackthorn, rose, dogwood, spindle and holly, and through this network of hedgerows our remnant ancient woodlands stay connected and viable.

The valley sides of the Rhondda, Cynon and Taff also illustrate biodiversity connectivity beautifully. From any bus stop in Pontypridd, or Porth, or Aberdare or Mountain Ash look up at the complex of habitats which forms the valley side ffridd. A mixture of acid grassland, heath, bracken, woodland, scrub and flushes runs along our main valleys for mile on mile. Interconnected in an ever-changing intricate habitat mosaics and home to lizards, slow worms, grayling butterflies and rare upland bumble bees. Bracken slopes with abundant dog violets are important habitat for fritillary butterflies and the Rhondda, in particular, is important for dark green fritillary populations (and even the occasional high brown fritillary). Now look closer and you can see the signs of coal spoil, small drift workings, egg shaped mounds, and, if you are lucky, some of the bigger remnant tips – constructions, which rival the Celtic Hill Forts of Dorset. Sites such as the Gelli Tips, Old Smokey, Wattstown and Dare Valley Tips tell an often hard and tragic story, but now support habitats of enormous biodiversity value. These are landforms of unique value and a living testimony to the sense of place, which is still strong in our post-industrial mining valleys. Coal tips are proving particularly important for their lichen-heath communities in which heathland grows in white, encrusted mats of *cladonia* lichens. Some of the best examples of lichen-heath in Wales occur on old coal spoil tips in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

From a coal tip, created in the 1890s, wander straight into an ancient upland oak wood where stunted welsh oaks cling to the valley side, with a carpeted groundflora of wimberry, heather, ferns, mosses and exposed slabs of pennant sandstone, with their lichen rich bedding planes. These sheep grazed woods are home to a classic Welsh trio of songbirds: redstart, wood warbler and pied flycatcher. In the south of the County Borough, the woodlands are richer with mixtures of oak, ash, sycamore, wych elm with alder and willow on wetter ground. There is a rich understorey of hazel coppice and holly, and on the southern limestone dogwood, spindle, and field maple and even the occasional wayfaring tree. These woods have wonderful ground floras with bluebell, wood anemones, violets, sanicle, wild garlic, primroses, mochatel, twayblades and toothwort.

Stand on a summer's evening in the courtyard of an ancient farm, or barn, or terraced house and count the bats tumbling out of their daytime roosts. On an autumn dawn, shiver by a disused railway tunnel or mine adit and watch for swarming bats (a prelude to hibernation) – perhaps you'll be the one to discover a major bat hibernation site.

Certain habitats can be traced back to the retreat of the last ice sheet 8,000 or more years ago. Much of our peatbog habitat started to form at that time, as glacial lakes

full of melt water gradually succeeded through fens, and swamp, and periods when the climate was very wet, into peat bogs where cranberry, sundews and bog ashpodel flower in the sphagnum and moor-grass and the occasional snipe still breeds. Hirwaun and Tonyrefail are particularly important areas for lowland bogs, with peat and pollen records which chart the changing face of vegetation over 8 millennia. History can be traced beneath six metres of peat, deep down to the remnant water of the lost glacial lake.

On a summer's day pause and cool your feet in a upland stream, or meander along the Cynon, Rhondda, Ely or Taff. Rivers which thirty years ago were dead and lifeless, are now healthy, biodiverse watercourses, home to multitudes of may and stoneflies, dipper, grey wagtail, brown trout and, of course, otter. All our main rivers once had floodplains; places were winter floodwater spilt. While much has been eaten up by residential and industrial development, some important areas of floodplain grassland, woodland and wetland still exist. Pant Marsh at Talbot Green is home to species-rich grasslands and flag iris, just up the road Coedcae Marsh has sedge beds, adder, and marsh cinquefoil. The lagoons and wet pastures of Tirfounder Fields, Aberdare support regionally important numbers of breeding and wintering waterbirds, grass snake and dragonflies. These stunning landscapes hold and gently release storm water, precious wildlife refuges which save our living room carpets from flood.

How about a diversion into a species-rich hay meadows or cattle and horse grazed grassland? Unimproved dry grassland is nationally rare, but in Rhondda Cynon Taf superb grassland communities are still part of our biodiversity fabric. Sites where birds-foot trefoil, black knapweed, ox-eye daisy, rough hawkbit and red clover still flower, in which common blue butterflies, mother shipton moths, grasshoppers and countless bees thrive.

If you fancy the wide uplands and their open vistas, then explore the 'tops' and expanses of bog, mire and acid grassland. This is wilderness, but wilderness close to home and a biodiversity, which is largely un-chartered and unknown. While you are there, make sure to dip into a forestry plantation edge where siskin and crossbill abound, club-mosses shelter, heronries sway in western hemlocks and in the summer dusk nightjars 'churr'.

On a crisp winters day take in our glacial landscapes and the cwms; birthplaces of the glaciers, which gouged and ground out the valleys. Marvel at the majesty of Cwm Parc, Cwm Saerbren and Cwm Dare. These most southerly glacial cwms in the UK are home to peregrine falcons and stranded artic alpine plants – flowers and ferns, which cling to the coolest, shadiest ledges and wait in hope for tundra summers to return. At the head of the Rhondda Fawr stand in the terrace streets of an alpine village called Blaenrhondda and feel the presence of Pen Pych rise above. Travel up the Rhondda Fach to the scree slopes of Cefn Craig Amos and Tarren Maerdy, where from their school desks kids from Maerdy Comp compose words and pictures from the jumble of frost-shattered sandstone on the hillside backdrop to their school.

Where industry has been cleared, experience some 'brownfield' biodiversity. Post-industrial sites often support amazing mosaics of grassland, wetland and woodland habitats all naturally developed on apparently derelict land. These eclectic mixtures

of habitats hold many a biodiversity surprise and a home to newts, frogs, dingy skipper butterflies and red-belted clearwing moths.

On the way home count the ferns in your neighbours front wall – harts-tongue, maidenhair-spleenwort, rustyback and wall rue. Make a note to take more care when you next re-point your wall and try to encourage your own fern garden. At the gate pause and watch a leaf-cutter bees ferrying neatly rolled leaves to nest chambers in the drainage holes of your UVPC double-glazed windows. Look up, and marvel that your swifts in the loft and house martin's under the eaves have come back to you from across the Sahara and a thousand places you'll never see and feel equal pride that your year-round house sparrows can nest and chirrup from your bird friendly soffit boards. Also, with your trusty moth trap you can boast a list of 300 macro-moths in your terrace garden, twenty frogs in the pond and dozens of slow worms in the compost heap. After all, biodiversity does start at home.

A Brief Landscape History

The landscape has evolved with human settlement. After the last Ice Age (about 10,000 years ago) people probably moved into the area, living mostly on the high ground. Dense wet woodland probably filled the river valleys. Even in Roman times, the valleys were still impenetrable with only the occasional track or fort on the hill tops, compared with the farms and villas of the Vale of Glamorgan. By Medieval times, the woods were being cleared, land drained for farming and towns such as Llantrisant grew up. The Industrial Revolution saw a major change, first with the ironworks, which developed chiefly around Aberdare and Hirwaun in the 1800's, rapidly followed by the expansion of coal mining throughout the region. The population grew rapidly, canals and railways were built, towns expanded and much of the flat land was drained and built on. Farming in the South Wales Valleys has always been based upon smaller farms, and land holdings (often held by miners). Evidence shows that in the 19th Century farming was more mixed than today, with evidence of subsistence arable farming in many areas. Today virtually all farmland in RCT is permanent pasture. As farming has become mechanised, new fertilisers and pesticides became available and output grew, whilst agricultural employment fell. Farm sizes have gradually increased, with ranch style sheep farming in some upland areas. Conversely in other parts of the County Borough increased wealth has led to an increase in smallholdings, with many urban edge pastures bought for horse grazing. Extensive conifer plantations were established in the twentieth Century. In the last 50 years, the car has allowed development to spread more widely into the countryside and more land has been needed for roads and parking as traffic has grown.

Sites of Importance for Wildlife

A number of sites are already recognised for their wildlife value. Appendix 3 and Map 2 (in Part Three) give details of these sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The box on p9 describes the types of important sites and the level of protection that they have.

Recognised sites cover only a small part of the area and wildlife cannot survive on these sites alone. The undeveloped or semi-natural land has been surveyed by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)* and each piece of land, field or wood classified according to the main types of vegetation. This is called the 'Phase I' habitat survey (including the upland survey). This information can be used as a guide

to the wildlife likely to be present and has been invaluable for identifying potential Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

Sites of Importance for Wildlife (see Map 2 in Appendix 3).

- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are notified by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), as part of a European series of important sites. In the part of Rhondda Cynon Taf outside the Brecon Beacons National Park, there are parts of two SAC. BlaenCynon SAC, Hirwaun supports a significant marsh fritillary butterfly colony, important rhos pasture and peat bog. In the far south of the Authority a small part of the Cardiff Beechwoods SAC lies within the County Borough. SAC have extremely strong statutory protection.
- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** are notified by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), as part of a British set of important sites. Most of these sites are in private ownership but management plans are prepared by CCW and owners need consent for some works. Planning policies also protect these sites. There are 12 SSSIs in Rhondda Cynon Taf, some of which are primarily of geological importance.
- **Local Nature Reserves (LNR)** are owned or managed by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council for nature conservation. There is currently one LNR at Glyncomnel, and a second site at Craig yr Hesg (Pontypridd) will be shortly designated.
- **Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales Nature Reserves** are owned or leased by the Trust and managed for nature conservation. At present there are three Trust reserves in Rhondda Cynon Taf; at Nightingales' Bush (Pontypridd), Pwll Waun Cynon (Mountain Ash) and Y Gweira (Llantrisant).
- Local Plans include policies to protect **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)** (see Appendix 7). These are defined by scientific criteria (see Appendix 4) and a provisional list of over 200 sites is currently being assessed. The sites, most of which are privately owned, will require positive management if the habitat is to remain of wildlife value and this is a major concern (see Chapter 3).

** A full list of abbreviations is given in Appendix ??*

More detailed surveys, called 'Phase II' surveys provide further information about the vegetation of individual sites. The Countryside Council for Wales has completed a Phase II grassland survey that identified a number of potential grassland Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Because of policy decisions within CCW and the Welsh Assembly Government, the progress in designating new SSSI in Wales has been slow during the life of Action for Nature. In Rhondda Cynon Taf a significant number of potential grassland and other SSSI would still benefit from designation as SSSI. This is particularly the case when sites are threatened by planning applications or slow degradation from inappropriate management.

There has been no systematic Phase II survey of other habitat types and the development of strategic conservation strategies for ancient woodlands, heathlands and peatlands would greatly benefit from more detailed vegetation survey and assessment information. Also, CCW Phase 1 information for Rhondda Cynon Taf is now over 10 years old, and a review of all habitats would greatly assist strategic action. Since the CCW Phase I was completed the concept of habitat restoration has become a significant conservation issue. When decisions are made at a national level about grassland or peatland restoration, a clear understanding of the potential 'restorable' habitat resource is vital.

CCW published Wales Priority Habitats (Jones et al.) in 2003, which is based mainly upon the audit of the CCW Phase I Habitat Survey. This is an excellent document, which has provided some much needed detail of the extent of priority habitats across Wales and a context against which the importance of habitat types in Rhondda Cynon Taf can be contrasted and compared.

The Phase I information is available from CCW and on paper maps and the Council's computer Geographic Information System (GIS) at the Llwynycastan offices in Pontypridd. Detailed Phase II grassland information is held by CCW. Issues of confidentiality will need to be clarified before this can be made more widely available.

Confidential Information

All public bodies are required to provide public access to environmental information, but they are also required to protect personal information, information given 'in confidence' and must not release information that could lead to environmental damage. These rules mean that wildlife information, in particular information relating to rare or endangered species, is often not made public.

Habitats and Species in Rhondda Cynon Taf

In the late 1990's, UK Action Plans were prepared for the important or 'priority' species and habitats. For the first Rhondda Cynon Taf Plan in 2000, Action Plans were prepared for the UK 'priority' species and habitats present in the County Borough. In addition, plans were prepared for habitats and species that the people of Rhondda Cynon Taf regarded as being of local importance. The lists include familiar habitats, such as oak woods and streams, and well-known species such as otter, song thrush and bluebell. The detailed plans are now interactive and held on the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) at www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk. There is a public search facility and password controlled access to update the plans and add progress reports.

A revised list of UK priority habitats and species was published in 2007 (Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group, June 2007). The list has been greatly expanded and many of our original 'locally important' habitats and species are now included on the UK lists. One moth, the double line is no longer a UK priority and has been moved to the locally important list. Also, since the first Action Plan one species, the Twaite Shad has been removed from the Plan because it has been confirmed that it does not occur in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area. The detailed action plans held on Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) at www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk. will be updated and new plans added as UK plans and guidance become available.

UK Priority Habitats

<p>Rivers and Streams Standing Open Water (including ponds) and Canals Hedgerows and Walls Wood-pasture and Parkland Upland Oakwood Wet Woodland Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland Upland Birchwoods Acid Grassland Calcaerous Grassland Neutral Grassland</p>	<p>Floodplain Grazing Marsh Heathland Upland Flushes, Fen and Swamps Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pasture Lowland Fens Reedbeds Lowland Raised Bog Blanket Bog Inland Rock and Scree Habitats Open mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land</p>
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UK Priority Species

Birds

Skylark
 Tree pipit
 European nightjar
 Lesser redpoll
 Common linnet
 Hawfinch
 Common cuckoo
 Lesser spotted woodpecker
 Yellowhammer
 Reed bunting
 Common grasshopper warbler
 Spotted flycatcher
 Eurasian curlew
 Willow tit
 Marsh tit
 House sparrow
 Grey partridge
 Wood warbler
 Hedge Accentor (dunnock)
 Common bullfinch
 Common starling
 Song thrush
 Ring ouzel
 Northern Lapwing

Fish
 European eel
 Atlantic salmon
 Brown/sea trout

Herpetiles

Slow-worm
 Common toad
 Common lizard
 Grass snake
 Great crested newt
 Adder

Fungi

Dark-purple earthongue (*Geoglossum atropurpureum*)

Mammals

Water vole
 Barbastrelle bat
 Western European hedgehog
 Brown hare

Otter

Harvest mouse

Dormouse

Polecat

Noctule

Soprano pipistrelle

Brown long-eared bat

Lesser horseshoe bat

Red squirrel

Vascular Plants

Deptford pink

Glandular eyebright (*Euphrasia anglica*)

Eyebright (*Euphrasia rostkoviana montana*)

Lesser butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*)

Invertebrates

Further information awaited.

Moths

Acronicta psi (grey dagger)

Acronicta rumicis (knot grass)

Adscita stactes (the forester)

Agrochola helvola (flounced chestnut)

Agrochlora lychnidis (beaded chestnut)

Allophyes oxyacanthae (green-brindled crescent)

Amphipoea oculea (ear moth)

Amphipyra tragopoginis (mouse moth)

Arctia caja (garden tiger moth)

Apamea remissa (dusky brocade)

Blepharita adusta (dark brocade)

Celaena leucostigma (the crescent)

Chiasmia clathrata (latticed heath)

Cossus cossus (goat moth)

Cyclophora pendularia (dingy mocha)

Cyclophora porata (false mocha)

Cymatophorima diluta (oak lutestring)

Diarsia rubi (small square spot)

Diloba caeruleocephala (figure of eight)

Ecliptopera silaceata (small phoenix)

Ennomos erosaria (september thorn)

Ennomos fuscantaria (dusky thorn)

Ennomos quercinaria (august thorn)

Entephria caesiata (grey mountain carpet)

Eulithis mellinata (the spinach)

Euxoa nigricans (garden dart)

Graphiphora augur (double dart)
Heliophobus reticulate (bordered gothic)
Hemaris tityus (narrow-bordered bee hawk)
Hemistola chrysoprasaria (small emerald)
Hepialus humuli (ghost moth)
Hydraecia micacea (rosy rustic)
Lycia hirtaria (brindled beauty)
Malacosoma neustria (the lackey)
Melanchra persicariae (dot moth)
Melanchra psi (broom moth)
Melanthia procellata (pretty chalk carpet)
Mythimna comma (shoulder-striped wainscot)
Orthosia gracilis (powdered quaker)
Pelurga comitata (dark spinach)
Perizoma albulata albulata (grass rivulet)
Rheumaptera hastate (argent and sable)
Spilosoma lubricipeda (white ermine)
Spilosoma luteum (buff ermine)
Tholera cespitis (hedge rustic)
Tholera decimalis (feathered gothic)
Timandra comae (blood-vein)
Trichiura crataegi (pale eggar)

Tyria jacobaeae (cinnabar)
Watsonalla binaria (oak hook-tip)
Xanthia icteritia (the sallow)
Xanthorhoe ferrugata (dark-barred twin-spot carpet)

Butterflies

Argynnis adippe (High brown fritillary)
Boloria selene (Small pearl-bordered fritillary)
Coenonympha pamphilus (Small heath)
Cupido minimus (Small blue)
Erynnis tages (Dingy skipper)
Eurodryas aurinia (Marsh fritillary)
Hipparchia semele (Grayling)
Lasiommata megera (Wall)
Satyrium w-album (White letter hairstreak)

Flies

Asilus crabroniformis (Hornet robberfly)

Crustacean

Austropotamobius pallipes (White-clawed freshwater crayfish)

Locally Important Habitats

Planted coniferous	Road verges
Ffridd/ bracken slopes	Industrial estates
Mineral and Coal spoil	Disused railway lines
Urban	

Locally Important Species

Birds

Heron
 Buzzard
 Peregrine
 Barn owl
 Swift
 Kingfisher
 House martin
 Dipper
 Whinchat
 Stonechat

Vascular Plants

Monk's-hood
 Cornish moneywort
 Ivy-leaved bellflower
 Black knapweed
 Bluebell

Heath spotted-orchid

Green-winged orchid

Generic Lower Plant Plans

Ferns
 Mosses and Liverworts
 Lichens
 Fungi

Invertebrates

Bombus monitcola
 Double-line moth

Generic Species Group Plans

Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies)

Orthoptera (grasshoppers, crickets and allies)

Mammals

all non-priority bats
 Badger

Chapter Three:

Existing Policy and Action for Biodiversity

This Action Plan builds on existing policy and action for biodiversity and on the experience of the last seven years. This chapter sets out the policies already in place to protect wildlife in Rhondda Cynon Taf and highlights some of the practical achievements.

Wildlife Law

Some wildlife is protected by law. Since 2003, the police Wildlife Liaison role has been strengthened with an Officer seconded to CCW in addition to the local Wildlife Liaison Officer based in Pontypridd. The officers promote wildlife protection and specialise in the prosecution of wildlife crime. A list of relevant wildlife law and the contacts for Wildlife Liaison Officers is given in Appendix 6.

Planning Policy

Planning policies to protect wildlife are included in the current Development Plans, and these policies must be taken into account when the Council decides whether to grant planning permission for new developments or changes of use. The first Local Biodiversity Action Plan was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and will therefore be taken into account in planning decisions. A new Local Development Plan (LDP) is being prepared, and new wildlife policies will be included. This will provide an opportunity to strengthen the protection for Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), including the Action Plan habitats listed in Chapter 2. Planning policies must comply with National Assembly for Wales guidance. They do not apply to activities that don't need planning permission, such as some farming and forestry works.

Existing Planning Policy

- National Assembly for Wales Planning Policy Wales (2002)
- National Assembly for Wales Technical Advice Notes including TAN 5: Nature Conservation and Planning (1996). **DUE TO BE REVISED 2007**
- People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan (2004)
- Strategic Planning Guidance for South East Wales (2000). **DUE TO BE REPLACED BY WSP CAPITAL REGION GUIDANCE AUTUMN 07**
- Mid Glamorgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf) replacement Structure Plan (1999) contains strategic wildlife policies..
- Rhondda Local Plan (1998) contains detailed policies and proposals.
- Taff Ely Local Plan (2000) contains detailed policies and proposals.
- Cynon Local Plan (2000) contains detailed policies and proposals.
- Mid Glamorgan Mineral Plan for Limestone (as affecting Rhondda Cynon Taf)(1997) contains policies and proposals for limestone quarries. **THESE MAY ALL NEED TO BE CHANGED**

see Appendix 7

Planning policies to promote sustainable development can also make a contribution to biodiversity protection, for example by protecting water resources, re-using land, encouraging energy efficiency and reducing the need to travel.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Guidance from the National Assembly has been published on the application of European environmental impact assessment rules to uncultivated land and semi natural areas (Wales Regulations 2002). Guidance has also been produced for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of Plans and Strategies.

Other Policies

Many organisations have Strategies and Actions Plans that are relevant for the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. These are listed in the box below.

Other Relevant Policies and Action Plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Better Life: the Community Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf (2004)• Living Space Strategy (2005?)• Local Agenda 21 Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf (2000)• Countryside Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf (1997)• Going Wild in Wales (s.74 list) <i>Welsh Assembly Government</i> (2003)• Community Strategies and Biodiversity <i>CCW, EA, Wildlife Trust et al.</i> (2004)• Greening the Valleys <i>WDA, CCW, EA, Unitary Authorities, Groundwork, FC et al.</i> (1998)• Sustainable Development Policy <i>Welsh Development Agency</i> (1999) CHECK date• Biodiversity Policy <i>Welsh Development Agency</i> (2003) CHECK date• Local Contribution <i>Environment Agency</i> (2003)• The UK Forestry Standard <i>The Forestry Authority</i> (1998)• Woodlands for Wales National Assembly for Wales (2002) check date• Forest Design Plans <i>Forest Enterprise</i> (various dates)• Action for Wildlife <i>Countryside Council for Wales</i> (1997) CHECK date ANYTHING MORE RECENT??• The Living Environment of Wales <i>Countryside Council for Wales /Forestry Commission</i> (1999) CHECK date• A Working Environment For Wales <i>Environment Agency</i> (1999) CHECK date• EU Water Framework Directive (2000)• Wales Environment Strategy (2005)

(Also See Appendix 8)

In the last seven years, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan has influenced a variety of plans and policies.

Policy achievements
<p>The LBAP partnership made an important contribution to the Community Plan ‘A Better Life’ and to the Living Space Strategy</p> <p>Community groups and organisations are developing biodiversity objectives and actions</p>

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2000

All planning applicants for development sites likely to contain important habitats or species are required to provide appropriate ecological surveys (50-100 per year).

The Cynon Valley River Park Plan aims to integrate biodiversity management with policies for climate change, health and well-being, heritage and tourism and the Cynon Trail.

Three new SSSI have been designated and a new nature reserve created

Wildlife Recording

Finding out about wildlife in the area relies on individual people keeping records of the wildlife they see and passing the information on to national and local recording organisations.

One of the major successes of the first LBAP has been the how local wildlife 'recorders' in Rhondda Cynon Taf have contributed their knowledge and developed their skills. As a result we know much more about both rare and common species than we did eight years ago. But more recorders are still needed and we need to encourage people to have the confidence to find and report whatever species or features they have an interest in. People who can identify different types of insects or toadstools are still very rare and it is only through nurturing interest and giving confidence that we will start to build these types of skills.

Recording highlights

150 people took part in the Garden Wildlife survey in 2000

The Recorders' Newsletter has a circulation of over 300 and rising. Thirteen editions of the Recorders' Newsletter produced to April 2007

A Strategic Assessment of Marsh Fritillary Butterfly Habitat in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been completed and we now know that Tonyrefail is the most important place for the butterfly in south Wales. Narrow bordered bee-hawk moth re-discovered in 2006. Important dark green fritillary and small pearl-bordered fritillary colonies found in Rhondda.

Discovery of lesser horseshoe and Barbastrelle bats. The Valleys Bat Group set up in 2006 and co-ordinated monitoring of important bat roosts started in Rhondda Cynon Taf (including 2 lesser horseshoe bat roosts).

Seven new great crested newt sites have been found

Survey of 50 ponds undertaken in 2003 by a partnership including Rhondda Cynon Taf, Environment Agency and National Museum and Galleries of Wales.

Survey work confirmed that dormouse is well established in woods and hedgerows right around Llanharan, new colonies found near Talbot Green and Ty Rhiw (Taffs Well).

A continuing programme of free training and awareness raising events for volunteers were held between 2000 and 2007

Pest Control officers have undertaken water vole identification training.

Recording Highlights continued

For the Great Spider Hunt in 2001: a 3-day Spider Identification Training Course was held and a major survey identified 61 species, 1 new to Wales, 2 new to Glamorgan. The South Wales Spider Recording Group was set up, a schools spider pack produced and public events held.

Glamorgan Moth Recording Group has surveyed sites across Rhondda Cynon Taf and established a database and mapping for their records.

Fungus forays have been held at several sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf by Glamorgan Fungi Group, and amongst a number of species the national BAP species pink waxcap has been found on two sites.

Nightjar habitat co-ordinated by Glamorgan Bird Club and British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) volunteers in summer 2004

The Wildlife Trust has set up a Rhondda Cynon Taf local group

Dartford warbler colonies found on several 'gorse' sites in the south of the County Borough.

Otter reports increasing year on year. Reports of mother with cubs from Cynon Valley and Otter holts found on tributary of the River Ely in south of County Borough.

Coal Spoil lichen-heath surveying and assessment work has been undertaken.

Important context information is available about habitats from the Countryside Council for Wales 'Phase I' survey (see Chapter 2). Since the initial Plan was prepared, CCW has published their 'Priority Habitats for Wales; a Technical Guide (P.Jones et al. 2003) which confirms the extent of habitats in Rhondda Cynon Taf and their importance in the Wales context.

A Local Record Centre for SE Wales (SEWBreC), was opened in 2005. The role of the Records Centre is to collate and co-ordinate much of the biodiversity recording in south Wales. The table below lists the main wildlife recording organisations (full details and contact addresses are given in Appendix 9).

National and local Wildlife Recording Organisations

Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales	Bat Conservation Trust
RCT Local Wildlife Trust Group	Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
Glamorgan Bird Club	British Trust for Ornithology
Glamorgan Moth Recording Group	Botanical Society of the British Isles
Glamorgan Badger Group	Butterfly Conservation
Valleys Bat Group	British Dragonfly Society
Mammal Society	Vincent Wildlife Trust
Mycological Society	Dipterists
Malacological Society	British Bryological Society
Glamorgan Fungus Group	Countryside Council for Wales

The internet provides a lot of information about biodiversity and recording. www.searchnbn.net is the gateway to the national biodiversity network, which holds information and maps relating to UK BAP and other species distribution across the UK. This provides links to the websites of many of the recording organisations. www.ukbap.org.uk provides a list of habitats and species and the contact details for each local and UK BAP. It also provides information about progress in achieving biodiversity targets from UK wide monitoring. The detailed habitat and species action plans for Rhondda Cynon Taf can be accessed from www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk www.biodiversitywales.org.uk is the home page for the Wales Biodiversity Partnership which provides leadership and support for biodiversity action in Wales. The website provides details of all the LBAPs in Wales plus listing for local events, biodiversity news and key publications.

Management for Wildlife

Practical management work to protect wildlife is also taking place in many places in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The work is being done by landowners and managers, farmers and gardeners, by voluntary groups, agencies, non-governmental bodies and by the Council. Some examples of the kinds of management work being undertaken are given below.

Examples of Practical Management Works of Benefit to Wildlife

- Coed Cymru woodland management plans.
- Removing invasive plants like Japanese knotweed or rhododendron.
- Litter clearance in rivers to prevent dangers to wildlife both here and at sea.
- Leaving un-planted corridors along streams in conifer forests.
- Cattle grazing of rhos pasture and other important grassland.
- Hay-making in species-rich meadows.
- Coppicing of hazel in old coppice woodlands.
- Removing grass cuttings from road verges.
- Sympathetic management of country lanes for spring flowers
- Hedge laying.
- Building garden ponds.
- Wildzones in Parks
- Incorporating bat, owl and swift in new and old buildings.
- Management for shooting and conservation.

Constraints allowing, many landowners including the Council, are happy to consider managing their land to benefit biodiversity and wildlife. During the first seven years of the Plan, significantly more land has been brought into wildlife management within Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Management highlights

85.75 hectares of Council owned woodlands have management plans.

Tir Gofal successes in Rhondda Cynon Taf with 7726.6 hectares (2007) of land entered into Tir Gofal represent just over 18% of RCT total area.

Tonyrefail Rhos Pasture Grazing project developed managed by Butterfly Conservation in a partnership involving CCW, DEIN and the Council. Since 2005 Xha of Rhos pasture and associated habitat have been included in the scheme.

CCW produced management statements for all SSSIs by end of 2006 as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

The management of all 32 key countryside sites has been reviewed and biodiversity work has been undertaken at most sites. Examples include the re-introduction of cattle grazing at Dare Valley Country Park, coppicing for dormice at Ty Rhiw Woods and Coed Caedryys, rhos pasture and wet woodland management at Parc Dowlais, and hay cutting and bracken brusing at Glyncornel Meadows.

The Council's Community Housing Division has developed a policy on bats in regards to any building demolition.

A successful 'Gardening for Wildlife' competition was held in 2002 and in 2004 the Council included a wildlife gardening category in their 'In Bloom' competition.

At least 30 woodland grant schemes have been approved in Rhondda Cynon Taf between 2000 and 2007

School grounds projects have been undertaken at 8 primary schools (Groundwork) and 9 secondary schools (Action for Nature)

A new pond has been dug at Glyncornel and several ponds have been rejuvenated in a joint project between the Council and the Environment Agency.

The Wildlife Trust has introduced grazing to their new reserve at Y Gweira and a partnership between the Council and Llantrisant Town Trust has improved fences and hedges to allow grazing at the Graig.

Cyddoed funding for community woodlands has contributed to biodiversity management. For example, Groundwork projects in primary school grounds at Llanharry and Cwmlai and at Bwllfa Dare (Ton Pentre), Fedw Hir (Llwydcoed) and Maerdy.

Some funding is available for management for wildlife. Existing schemes include the National Assembly for Wales' 'Tir Gofal' and Tir Canol schemes for farmers, CCW's Species Challenge fund, Forestry Commission's better Woodlands for Wales grant scheme, and a pilot grant scheme for small woods managed by Coed Cymru. Advice is also available, for example from Coed Cymru (for woodland management), from the Countryside Council for Wales, the Wales Assembly Government Rural Development Division, from the Council's Countryside Section and from voluntary groups like the Wildlife Trust. Active management is as important for wildlife as avoiding damage. Issues such as litter and fly tipping are also important because they degrade the aesthetic qualities of sites and discourage people's enjoyment of wildlife and local landscapes.

Why is management important?

Grassland, which is important botanically and for insects such as butterflies, needs to be grazed or cut to prevent scrub and trees from growing. Woodland, where trees are all the same age, may need thinning to let young trees grow. Doing nothing or 'letting nature take its course' will often destroy the habitat or species which are particularly valued. People don't always agree about the type of management, which is required, or the types of habitat and species for which land should be managed.

Management of SINC sites

Management for nature conservation depends on the good will of the owner and on traditional management practices. In the future, landowners and farmers may recognise SINC as financially beneficial features of their land, if agricultural funding schemes focus on important sites and management for wildlife. The Tir Gofal scheme and the biodiversity orientated Woodland Grant Scheme present some opportunities for landowners with SINC sites, although more funding would be needed to protect all important sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Farming and Cross Compliance

Cross Compliance requirements set by the European Union lay out standards that farmers have to meet to receive their single farm payments. There are two elements enshrined in the standard these are the 15 Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and 17 Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition standards (GAECs)

The SMR's cover requirements relating to

environment: wildbirds, ground water, sewage sludge, nitrate vulnerable zones, habitats,
public and animal health: animal identification and registration, food and feed law and disease control.

The GAECs legislation involves *soil management and protection*, and

maintenance of habitats and landscape features: environmental impact assessment, SSSI's, Scheduled ancient monuments, rights of way, grazing, heather and grass burning, control of weeds, stone walls, protection of hedgerows and watercourses and tree preservation orders
Failure to meet any of the Cross Compliance standards could result in a financial penalty being imposed on a farmers' Single Farm Payment. In some instances payments could be completely withheld or recovered.

Raising Awareness

Raising awareness of biodiversity has been another major achievement of the first Local Biodiversity Action Plan. There has been a 'sea change' in the importance attached to biodiversity locally. This reflects changes at the European Union level, from UK and Welsh Assembly governments and from business.

Raising Awareness highlights

Summary colour LBAP leaflet produced in English and Welsh

A Media Working Group has been set up together with a wildlife photograph collection that can be used for publicity purposes

Set of 8 Biodiversity Briefing Papers was published and distributed in 2001.

Biodiversity is a regular feature in the events and activities of partner organisations, for example Forestry Commission held a major Biodiversity Fair at Garwnant in August 2004.

A Business Environment Co-ordinator has been appointed in a partnership project supported by Groundwork, the WDA and the Council.

Wildlife Organisations such as Butterfly Conservation, RSPB, BTO and Plantlife have held events in Rhondda Cynon Taf and have increased their local membership. Glamorgan Bird Club membership has doubled since 2000.

Wildlife observations from members of the public are regularly included in reports on planning applications.

A celebration of biodiversity action in Rhondda Cynon Taf was held in 2004

The schools 'Action for Nature' project has involved 9 Comprehensive Schools in surveying and managing their grounds for biodiversity

Community biodiversity audits have been instigated

A BBC Breathing Places event was held at Dare Valley Country Park as part of the BBC's 'Here for You' in Aberdare in 2005.

Wales Biodiversity Week held in mid June each year since 2003

Expanding programme of talks and events to a wide range of groups and organisations.

Biodiversity 'pop-up' panel produced in 2007 as part of a small Countryside exhibition

A number of organisations are actively working to raise awareness of the importance of wildlife and to share their enjoyment of the natural world. Campaigning and lobbying, guided walks, talks, newsletters, training, practical work, events and many other activities do make a difference. Public Rights Of Way are important for peoples' enjoyment of the countryside and of local wildlife.

Some of the Organisations involved in Raising Awareness of the Natural World

Friends of the Earth	SEWBRcC
'Clean Rivers / Affonydd Glan' River Care Groups	Wildlife Trust (RCT Group)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Glyncornel Environmental Centre
Forestry Commission Wales	Schools
Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf	Countryside Council for Wales
Dwr Cymru Environment Centre Cilfynydd	RCT County Borough Council
RSPB	Butterfly Conservation
Plantlife	BTO
Wales Biodiversity Partnership	Bat Conservation Trust

At school, children learn about the science and biology of the natural world and express their feelings through the arts. The Education Schools Improvement and Advisory Service (ESIS) is promoting environmental education to all schools, and Dare Valley Environmental Centre provides an environmental education service to schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf. New requirements for outdoor learning, the new Foundation phase (3-7years) curriculum and the Assembly Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship are leading to an increased consideration of environmental education. The prominence given to Eco-school status in Rhondda Cynon Taf has encouraged many schools to register. Eco-schools includes a strong biodiversity element. An excellent school grounds biodiversity project 'Action for Nature' has been developed by the LBAP Education sub-group and this is available to any school.

Chapter Four: The Action Plan

Introduction

The success of the action plan in achieving the aims of conserving and enhancing the biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf is dependant upon the correct identification of priorities, constraints, and issues. It needs to be flexible enough to recognise and take advantage of opportunities when they arise, and to realise sustained progress the Plan needs to be based upon strong commitment and partnership at every level. To be effective, the actions must be realistic and must be supported by the people who will put them into practice.

Resolving Conflict

The design and application of measures to maintain and increase biodiversity in a particular area will almost certainly involve a conflict between a variety of interests. People are bound to put values not only on wildlife and habitats but also on jobs, economic prosperity and freedom of activity. Reconciling these differing views to produce agreement is likely to be difficult, but is a precondition for any practical and effective plan of action. Extremist attitudes on either side of the argument will serve only to polarise opinions and undermine conservation measures simply because the local community may not fully support them.

The Most Important Issues

The objectives for the Plan are set out in Chapter 1. The discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 shows where we are now and highlights some of the problems for wildlife. In the Rhondda Cynon Taf area, 30 habitats and 141 species have been identified which are of either UK or local importance.

Each habitat and species has its own characteristics, suffers from different threats and will require specific actions to ensure that it survives and thrives. Despite this there are four common themes that affect all, or most, of the habitats and species. These continue to be the most important issues that the Action Plan should address:

- the lack of knowledge about the importance of biodiversity (in all walks of life: councillors, professional people, farmers and gardeners, you and me),
- not knowing what we have and should protect in Rhondda Cynon Taf,
- lack of protection for sites, and
- lack of management of sites.

These issues suggest that four types of actions are the most important:

- raising awareness of biodiversity and its importance,
- identifying and recording the habitats and species in Rhondda Cynon Taf,
- developing better protection for sites, especially those threatened by development, and
- managing more sites to help wildlife, including grasslands, wetlands, hillsides, farms and gardens, forests and woods, schools, road verges, cemeteries and council owned land.

The Key Players

The key players are listed below and their role in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Action Plan is set out in Appendix 11. The first Local Biodiversity Action Plan involved most of these groups of people (see Appendices 1, 5 and 12 **REVISE APPENDICES**). Encouraging people to take part is not always easy and the revised Plan seeks to expand participation even more.

The Key Players	
<p>Government Organisations National Assembly For Wales Countryside Council for Wales Environment Agency Forestry Commission National Museums and Galleries of Wales</p>	<p>Major land owners Farmers and woodland owners Forestry Commission Wales RCT County Borough Council Dwr Cymru Welsh Water</p>
<p>Local Government Organisations Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Community and Town Councils Coed Cymru</p>	<p>Voluntary Organisations wildlife groups volunteering organisations community groups social groups care organisations</p>
<p>Partnership Organisations Better Life Consortium Living Space Partnership Area Regeneration Partnerships (12 covering Rhondda Cynon Taf) Wales Biodiversity Partnership</p>	<p>Education Organisations Local colleges Schools University of Glamorgan University of Wales</p>
<p>Individuals</p>	<p>Developers</p>
<p>Business</p>	<p>Professional advisors</p>

Working in partnership, involving all the key people, is an important part of the Plan. All four different types of action will require help from the key players.

- Raising awareness must involve everyone, but there is an important role for government, local government, partnership organisations, professional advisors, education and voluntary organisations to encourage this.
- Identifying and recording species and habitats is an important task for government and local government but also for voluntary organisations, professional advisors and individuals. Recording on private land requires the owners' consent.
- Protecting sites is primarily the responsibility of CCW and the local authorities, but raising the awareness of landowners, developers, partnership organisations, professional advisors, government and the public generally is an important part of the process.
- Managing sites must involve the landowners and land managers from all sectors including farmers, developers, businesses, individuals and the Council.

Working Together

The development of a conservation strategy will demand an interdisciplinary approach, involving experts in agriculture, ecology, biology, genetics, economics, law, politics and education. It is encouraging that working partnerships are being established between Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC and other stakeholders, including CCW, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission Wales, CLBA, Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union.

To make sure that the actions can be achieved it is important that

- the purpose is clearly set out,
- the details of who will do what, when and where are given,
- we will know when the action is finished, and
- we can tell if it was successful.

Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans

Detailed Action Plans for each of the 30 habitats and 141 species important for wildlife in Rhondda Cynon Taf, have been drawn up. Each Plan follows a common format, similar to the one used for the UK Action Plans. They describe the current state of the habitat or species, the threats and any existing action to protect or enhance the habitat or species in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This is followed by the proposed actions with the lead partners and the time-scale set out. Details of the Plans are available on line at www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk. A summary of the Habitat Action Plans (HAPs) and the Species Action Plans (SAPs) will be published once the new plans have been completed.

Some species only occur in a particular type of habitat; for example salmon in rivers. Other species occur in a number of different habitats, for example bluebells occur mainly in oak woodland but are also found in other types of wood, in hedgerows and in towns. Some other species require a range of different habitats (a mosaic) to survive; for example many of our farmland birds. A table showing the relationship between the species and habitats is included in Part Three.

Actions for Wildlife in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Many of the detailed actions given in the individual Habitat and Species Action Plans apply more generally. The next four sections draw together some of the common actions under four themes:

- Actions to raise awareness of biodiversity and its importance (4.1);
- Actions to identify and record habitats and species in Rhondda Cynon Taf (4.2);
- Actions to protect sites (4.3);
- Actions promoting land management for wildlife (4.4).

For each action:

- the main **purpose** is set out,
- the **details** of the action are given,
- **who will do what** and
- **when** is listed and
- **measures of success** are given

Some of these actions are already included (or partially included) in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Countryside Strategy (see Appendix 8). The Integrated Action Programme (IAP) reference is given in brackets at the end of the action title and 'new' actions are identified.

4.1 Actions to Raise Awareness of Biodiversity and its Importance

Unless people in all walks of life know and care about biodiversity, the way we do things now won't change and our wildlife will continue to decline. Since the launch of Action for Nature, the profile of the south Wales Valleys as an area of outstanding biodiversity, landscape and heritage importance has slowly gained recognition. This recognition needs to be expressed to the local people of Rhondda Cynon Taf and expressed in such a way as to encourage people to talk about what, where and how they value their landscape and their heritage. Most of the Habitat Action Plans and the Species Action Plans include actions relating to raising awareness of the importance of that habitat or species. Some habitats, such as oak woods, are widely recognised as important. Others, like colliery spoil, are not generally considered to be valuable for wildlife. The same is true for species; many people know about otters, very few care about hornet robber-flies!

Raising awareness can be aimed at the general public to encourage everyone to value and protect wildlife. It can also be targeted at a specific group, for example local authority planning officers, architects or gardeners. Specific projects to raise awareness among key target groups can be particularly effective. The actions listed below include both types.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 includes a duty for all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. Awareness raising for all those affected, from hospitals and utilities to Councillors and contractors will be crucial.

title	Popular version of LBAP
purpose	Something to give people which explains what an LBAP is and where to find more information. Needs to enthuse people regardless of their level of knowledge
details	A4 single fold leaflet with: contact information, website address, brief introduction and pictures and 'what you can do' Website to be developed with more information available, including a list of (and links to?) existing leaflets of local relevance. LBAP postcard with a freepost reply card
Who/what	Steering Group: leaflet draft, RCT Countryside to produce and print RCT Countryside to liaise with IT re website
when	Leaflet 2007/8

success	Website 2008/9 Numbers distributed Website hits
title	Campaigning for wildlife
purpose	To raise awareness of specific wildlife issues
details	Individuals and voluntary organisations provide information and express opinions about the importance and value of wildlife and wildlife sites. Their campaigns may not always succeed, but without these campaigns, important issues would not be raised and the opportunity to weigh them in the decision making process would be lost. Campaigns may be targeted at consumers, at government and local authorities, at specific industries, activities or sites. All Council committee reports on planning applications include details of the observations received from the public and from organisations consulted. This is an important and often under utilised opportunity for campaign groups and the wider community to contribute to the planning process.
Who/what	Voluntary organisations and individuals to continue to campaign for wildlife, including joint campaigns. Their targets should consider these campaigns when making decisions.
when	Ongoing
success	Number of mentions in planning committee reports.
title	Existing programmes
purpose	Add value to existing events and activities
details	Review existing public events programmes, schools work, newsletter and leaflet production etc. Add a biodiversity element wherever possible for example: Groundwork countryside volunteers programme KWT training programmes Walks and talks Forest School initiatives/ FEI cluster group Leaflets for Key Countryside Sites Foundation phase in schools Eco-schools One-off events (e.g. IVS field trip) ESD Team Projects – e.g. Where We Live, Secondary School Environmental Reviews, Eco-schools support
Who/what	All partner organisations look at how biodiversity can be integrated into different aspects of their work
when	On going
success	List of activities where a biodiversity element has been introduced.
title	Wildlife mapping
purpose	To provide a visual image of the extent of important wildlife habitats in Rhondda Cynon Taf
details	The Council has a range of maps available on in-house computers but these are not available or easily understandable for the public. A map or maps to illustrate the extent of important habitats would be an important communication tool.

	The availability of a web-based interactive map is a long term goal, but this will be dependant on major changes to the Council's website as well as specific funding to develop any wildlife mapping component.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to investigate an A4 habitat map for the County perhaps linked to 'where to see' leaflet described below. RCT Countryside to liaise with IT re website maps and potential wildlife content.
when	From 2008/9
success	Leaflet production and distribution Website mapping available
title	Increase membership of wildlife and conservation groups
purpose	To raise awareness and enjoyment of wildlife
details	During the first action plan, membership of national and local voluntary organisations increased significantly, but from a very low base. Increasing membership allows organisations to take on more actions and provide more events and activities in Rhondda Cynon Taf for their members to enjoy.
Who/what	Individual groups to continue membership recruitment Wildlife Trust to seek additional resources to employ community wildlife officers to assist with LBAP implementation. Steering Group to involve, encourage and promote groups
when	ongoing
success	Increasing membership of national and local wildlife and conservation groups.
title	School wildlife areas: development and management
purpose	To support teachers in the new foundation phase and promote 'Inside out, Outside in'.
details	Information on developing and maintaining wildlife areas, grants available, organisations that can offer help. PowerPoint presentation on outdoor activities in school grounds, guidance on organic gardening, permaculture etc. Emphasis on management plan, keep it simple etc. Include an information report form to return. Ask participating schools for copies of teaching materials developed to add to website. Information for schools with no grounds/ unsuitable grounds on suitable local sites. Commitment from teachers to develop teaching materials, possible inset training for schools using specific sites.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to develop information pack, with input from the Environmental Education Service, RCT teachers' group, ESD Team, Welsh Water, Groundwork, Keep Wales Tidy and voluntary organisations. RCT Countryside+ Env. Ed Service to investigate 'shared sites' where there is demand. Teachers to develop, and where appropriate share, teaching materials. RCT Countryside to work with up to 3 primary schools per year on their grounds.
when	Powerpoint etc. From Jan 2008, available on website Jan 09.
success	Look at one 'shared site' per year. (Graig yr hesg/Lanwoods 2007/8) How many schools apply for pack, number returning form, teaching

materials available on the website,
Key Countryside sites/parks with teaching areas: no of visits per year.

title	Quarterly fact sheet on a species or habitat in Rhondda Cynon Taf
purpose	To raise awareness of our important habitats and species
details	Using the monthly media articles/pictures prepared for the previous action plan but never published. Promote to schools, libraries, on the Council website, to the local media. Link to events and activities or particular sites. Link with 'where to see' leaflet and 'Find the missing species' below. Possible associated photograph competition.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to co-ordinate, working with relevant partners and with the support of the Environmental Services Press Officer
when	One fact sheet a quarter from autumn 07
success	Media coverage Feedback, records are sent in, photos submitted etc. as a result
title	Wildlife in your Ward / Area
purpose	Promote biodiversity at a local level
details	A biodiversity overview of the ward, involve community groups, local schools and biodiversity partners to gather local records which will then be presented in an easily accessible format, on website and in A4 one fold paper format 2007 Cwm Aman, Cwm Parc and Rhydyfelin 2008 Tonyrefail, Ynysybwl and Glyncoch 2009 Clydach Vale, Pontypridd and Penrhiwceiber 2010 Llwynypia, Taffs Well and Ferndale
Who/what	RCT Countryside, community groups, schools, biodiversity partners to help prepare Event to publicise/ tie in with an existing local event
when	2 wards or areas each year (plus revamp of earlier ward reviews)
success	Copies distributed, number of people who become involved (send in records, join in events, projects and activities, join mailing list etc.) requests for wards to be involved in this project.
title	Action for Nature
purpose	Teaching pack to encourage the management of comprehensive school grounds for biodiversity
details	Re launch teaching pack, targeted at year 7, similar format as before. Pack available on the website. Supported with a series of site-based teacher training sessions covering basic identification skills for grassland, wetland, woodland/hedges and ponds. School visits dependant on teachers agreeing to take part in 4 training sessions.
Who/what	RCT Countryside, Environmental Education Service, Education Business Partnership, ESD Team, schools and grounds maintenance, biodiversity partners. Possible funding from the Ecological Society, Forest Education Initiative.
when	From 2008
success	The number of schools enrolling for the programme And the number continuing the programme for five years

Number of teachers confident in basic identification skills

Reaching 13-25 year olds

title

purpose To investigate ways of communicating the importance of biodiversity and environmental issues more generally.

details Young people often lose interest in wildlife in their teens, but these are formative years for values, aspirations, lifestyle and career choices. Possible ideas include 'transition tales: news from 2030', website, storytelling, arts projects
School environment clubs: talks and conferences
Student research projects? BSc/MSc including Uni Glamorgan, both science and media studies.

Who/what RCT Countryside to work with Arts Development to develop and identify funding for an arts-based project.
RCT Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development to develop school based activities.
Invite University of Glamorgan to use this as a theme for student projects (both in media studies and environmental management)

when From 2007/08

success No. of young people involved in projects
Materials produced and young people's response to them

Soil biodiversity

title

purpose Awareness raising of soil biodiversity

details Terrestrial biodiversity is dependant on soil, but the extent and importance of organisms that live in and create the soil is not appreciated. Soil loss or damage is major issue, arising from soil erosion, pollution, compaction and built development. Climate change may have implications for soils. For example, heavy rain can cause erosion, drought and fires can destroy soil structure and biodiversity. Conversely soils can store large quantities of carbon and water, helping to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Who/what Gardening for Wildlife Group to promote the importance of soil biodiversity.
RCT Environmental Education to feature soil biodiversity in teaching programmes for all ages.
EA/NFU/FUW/CLBA to encourage farmers and land managers to reduce soil erosion (e.g. Tir Cynnal soil nutrient management plans, river edge protection, Tir Gofal resource management Plan, streamside corridors and grass field margins))

when From 2007/8

success No. of events/ activities relating to soil
No of farms in Tir Cynnal and Tir Gofal

'Where to see.....' leaflets

title

purpose To provide information for the interested members of the public on where to see wildlife in Rhondda Cynon Taf

details There are a number of sites with public access where people can see wildlife. There is potential for site based wildlife leaflets for popular sites such as Dare Valley Country Park

	County wide seasonal leaflets could be produced
	County wide leaflets for particular habitats and their associated species or for groups of species such as butterflies
	Leaflets may also be of interest to visitors / tourists
	Include report form for sightings to encourage recording.
Who/what	Glamorgan Bird Club to produce 'Where to see birds in ' Wildlife Trust to publish 'Reserves in South and West Wales' Valleys Bat group to produce 'Where to see and hear bats' RCT Countryside to liaise with partner organisations to develop a list of leaflets
when	One publication per year from 2007/8
success	Take up of leaflets Records received
title	Walks and talks, events and activities
purpose	To raise awareness of biodiversity
details	Face to face contact is one of the most important ways of raising awareness of biodiversity, of sharing knowledge and enthusiasm, seeing new places and meeting new people.
Who/what	Wildlife Trust RCT group monthly meetings and work parties RCT Countryside occasional walks and talks (approx 6 per year), Attendance at approx. 6 events and activities, including at least one Wales Biodiversity Week event each year. Keep Wales Tidy attendance at events and activities
when	ongoing
success	Number of participants per year Number of participants involved in other activities.
title	NERC Duty Briefing
purpose	To advise the Council and other public bodies of their new biodiversity duty
details	The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 introduced a biodiversity duty for all public bodies. Information is required to ensure the Council and other public bodies are aware of the implications of the duty for their work. This will include advice for land managers, advice in relation to planning applications (for example, where there are potential bat roosts), demolition of buildings or structures, housing repairs and renovations, tree works, land sales etc.
Who/what	RCT Countryside, in consultation with RCT Legal to prepare relevant briefings.
when	Guidance re Bats by 2007/8 Land managers and Demolition by 2008/9
success	Guidance produced, evaluation by recipients.

4.2 Actions to Identify and Record Habitats and Species in Rhondda Cynon Taf

All the Action Plans include objectives and actions for identifying habitats and recording species. Even for habitats as obvious as upland oak woods we don't know how much we have and what state it is in. The distribution of an obscure plant species like Cornish moneywort is very poorly known and most of the mosses, liverworts, fungi and insects on the UK lists have never been recorded in Rhondda Cynon Taf, although no doubt some of them exist here unreported.

Identifying habitats and recording species is essential for protecting sites. If a site has been allocated for building in the Development Plan it is very difficult to protect an important habitat or species that is later found on the site (unless it is a European protected species).

title	Recorders' Network
purpose	To recruit, support and encourage local wildlife recorders
details	Database of recorders, Recorders' Newsletter increase to 3 per year Promote local recording groups and atlases Use data to support awareness initiatives above (where to see etc.) Recording report form, promoting SeWBrec
Who/what	RCT Countryside to maintain database of Recorders and distribute newsletter Steering Group to promote the network Steering Group to promote SeWBrec
when	ongoing
success	Number of local recorders Atlas coverage for RCT Records submitted (to LBAP partnership and to SEWBREC)
title	Missing species
purpose	To identify the presence of priority species in RCT especially among the lesser-recorded groups such as ferns, mosses, liverworts, lichens, fungi and insects.
details	To encourage professional and amateur ecologists to survey and record in Rhondda Cynon Taf To promote events with a recording element (e.g. an annual fungal foray) Identify existing training opportunities and provide additional training in specialist identification Seek relevant information through the planning process Target 2 species per year (one relatively easy such as cuckoo or brimstone, one more difficult such as pink waxcap or mayfly), maybe linked to the quarterly fact sheet in awareness raising. Photo fact sheet and report form. Possibly map results, would require a grid ref or post code, possibly linked to wildlife mapping below.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to identify two species per year, prepare leaflet and promote through the Recorders' Newsletter and recording groups. Site based training event where relevant SEWBREC to support / share data

when	ongoing
success	No. of recorders Species found Habitat survey
title	Skills training
purpose	A series of training sessions, with supporting information, for a lay audience (i.e. not wildlife experts). And Support training for recorders, from entry level (e.g. big garden bird watch) to licensed, peer accredited (e.g. bird ringer)
details	Working for Wildlife: including expert speaker, site visit, information pack, free of charge for volunteers living or volunteering in RCT. Promote via Communities First as well as through voluntary sector. Boundaries planned autumn 2007, Stream wildlife (riverfly, dipper territories etc.) spring 2008. Communities First training, link to Science Shops Uni Glam Providing and encouraging a range of introductory activities: evening walks, site based activities, involvement of local recording and community groups, linking to awareness raising. Recording groups to identify opportunities for specific training to recruit new and upskill members. Promote accredited courses
Who/what	RCT Countryside/KWT/BTCV/Groundwork/GBC provide 2 working for wildlife events per year CF / Science Shops support community based biodiversity audits; CwmAman 2007 GBC/BTO provide training for bird atlas surveyors Valleys Bat group to provide bat survey etc. training Bat Conservation Trust to provide National Bat Monitoring Programme Training to volunteers RCT Countryside to support dormouse training (Bridgend CBC co-ordinating)
when	ongoing
success	Attendance at sessions, evaluation by participants Work on the ground Number of trained or accredited surveyors
title	South east Wales Biodiversity Record Centre
purpose	To support the work of the Centre in collecting and disseminating biodiversity information.
details	The Council supports the work of the Centre, although it is currently not possible to provide financial assistance. Recorders and Recording Groups are encouraged to send in their records, developers are advised to use the Centre and to submit their consultants surveys to the Centre.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to support the work of the Centre by encouraging developers to seek their advice, consultants to submit their surveys and recorders their records. Recording groups to submit records
when	ongoing
success	Data held by the Centre

Number of developer enquiries for the RCT area
 Number of consultant surveys for the RCT area submitted

title	Research projects
purpose	To obtain more information and support action for specific habitats or species.
details	coal spoil: continue co-ordination of the coalfield wide research project to raise the profile of the importance of coal spoil as a biodiversity habitat and its appropriate management peatland: continue the joint project with FCW, CCW and neighbouring LAs to identify the important upland peatland habitat, largely on FCW land, to identify priorities for restoration and appropriate management. marsh fritillary: building on the habitat audit (R.Smith et al 2005) and the successful pilot grazing projects, develop site protection, management and awareness raising and monitoring of Marsh Fritillary in RCT feeding birds: contribute to a Glamorgan wide project with Glamorgan Bird Club to create seed crops for farmland birds lesser horseshoe bats: identify where the Llanharan population hibernates and forages
Who/what	RCT Countryside/ CCW/ GLAMBAG: coal spoil RCT Countryside/ CCW/ FCW/ Cranfield University/ GLAMBAG: peatland RCT Countryside/ CCW/ Butterfly Conservation: marsh fritillary GLAMBAG/ GBC/ RCT Countryside: feeding birds Valleys Bat Group/ BCT: lesser horseshoe
when	Ongoing From 2007/8
success	Area of land in positive management Coal spoil phase one survey methodology Area of peatland restoration Increase in the marsh fritillary population No of bird feeding sites established No. of bat feeding and hibernation sites identified.
title	LBAP Habitat and Species mapping / ecological connectivity
purpose	To develop maps of habitat distribution to support awareness raising, site protection and management.
details	Use the Phase One mapping, more recent Phase Two and species surveys, and the SINC review to map the distribution of LBAP habitats in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Habitat mapping is an essential requirement for tracking habitat lost and gained.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to investigate how to generate habitat maps and pilot this for rhos pasture. RCT Countryside, SeWBrec, GLAMBAG and CCW contribute to the SE Wales pilot study of ecological connectivity covering part of RCT. Possible GLAMBAG species pilot project (Dormouse?) to target surveys
when	Ecological connectivity SE Wales pilot study from 2007 Rhos Pasture Map 2008/9 Additional habitat maps from 2009/10

success Dormouse project from 2007
Habitat Maps prepared
Pilot projects completed.

4.3 Actions to Protect Sites

Protecting sites once they have been identified is another common theme in the Habitat and Species Action Plans. No site can be completely protected but there are three main ways to provide a degree of protection for important wildlife sites:

- purchase, lease, gift or declaration as a nature reserve (including National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves and private or voluntary sector reserves),
- notification as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and
- designation as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

Planning policy provides a degree of protection for SSSI and a lesser protection for SINC. As set out in Chapter 2, SINC designation is only relevant where development requires planning permission, whereas SSSI declaration also provides some control of the management as well. The protection and management of SSSI's has been strengthened by the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 includes a duty for all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity in the exercise of their functions.

title	Seek SSSI notification for important sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf
purpose	To provide a greater degree of protection for the most important sites.
details	There are still very few biological SSSIs in the County Borough, although there have been three notifications since the initial LBAP was prepared. The information now available has revealed a significant number of sites that satisfy the criteria for SSSI notification. Some of these sites have been lost since the initial LBAP was prepared and others are under threat. CCW has re-commenced the notification of SSSI and further sites in Rhondda Cynon Taf are likely to be notified over the LBAP period.
Who/what	CCW to seek sufficient resources for the SSSI notification programme. Steering Group to lobby CCW, National Assembly etc. for notification of important sites.
when	ongoing
success	SSSI designation of sites
title	Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
purpose	To provide up to date information for the Local Development Plan process.
details	The criteria for designating the original SINC sites have been reviewed to ensure that they conform with South Wales (soon to be all Wales) guidelines published in 2003 Joint criteria for Merthyr, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf finalised in 2007. Existing SINC and pSINC designations being reviewed against the revised criteria. The revised SINC's will be published in conjunction with the Local Development Plan Funding is required to establish a programme to offer advice and grant

aid to landowners, assist with Tir Gofal applications etc. (see Save Our Sincs below)

Who/what RCT Countryside to finalise criteria for SINC designation in conjunction with Merthyr and Caerphilly.
RCT Countryside to complete the SINC review
RCT Forward Planning or Countryside to publish the proposed SINC as part of the LDP

when Criteria by autumn 2007
Sinc review by March 2008
Deposit draft LDP by March 2008?

success Completion of the review
Adoption of the SINC

title **Develop wildlife policies for the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan**

purpose details To provide a clear planning framework for decisions affecting wildlife
Update existing development plan policies to reflect new Assembly planning policy and guidance, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and GLAMBAG model policies.
The LDP is subject to sustainability appraisal and all the policies should seek to integrate environmental concerns with social and economic issues.
The LDP will be subject to public consultation at the deposit stage and will be tested for 'soundness' by a planning inspector before eventual adoption.

Who/what RCT Countryside to input to wildlife policies for the LDP
GLAMBAG to finalise model policies for LDPs
LBAP partners to comment on the deposit draft of the plan

when GLAMBAG model policies by autumn 2007
Deposit LDP draft by March 2008?
Adopted LDP by 2009?

success Adopted LDP with robust and effective policies.

title **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

purpose details To provide guidance to support Local Development Plan policy
Model policies advocate the use of Supplementary Planning Guidance to support specific policies. Depending on the policies agreed for the Local Development Plan SPG may required for LBAP habitats and species, SINC, survey requirements etc.

Who/what RCT Countryside to develop supplementary planning guidance to support the Local Development Plan

when To fit with LDP timetable. est March 2008

success Adopted supplementary planning guidance.

title **Consider all planning applications affecting species or habitats contained in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan**

purpose details To protect and enhance habitats and species of importance in Rhondda Cynon Taf
All planning applications are notified to the Countryside Section and comments are made on applications affecting known or suspected

wildlife sites

Assessment of wildlife value will be required from developers where appropriate. Where proposals affect sites of wildlife value, and in particular pSINC, development will be resisted. Mitigation will be sought where development is approved.

Explore how to identify habitat lost/gained in planning observations and whether Development Control could record habitat lost/gained following decision.

Who/what	RCT Countryside section to make comments on planning applications Biodiversity partners to comment on specific applications relevant to their interests
when	On going
success	Halting biodiversity loss by 2010 % or hectares of sites protected, lost or damaged % of sites with adequate mitigation
title	Local Nature Reserve Designation
purpose	To protect and enhance specific sites in Council ownership or management
details	Glyncornel LNR declared in 1998/9 Craig yr Hesg likely to be declared 2007/8 Additional sites in the Cynon Valley Floodplain, Tonyrefail and Llantwit Fardre under consideration.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to prepare management plans with partners, consult and declare LNRs CCW to provide support.
when	Craig Yr Hesg 2007/8
success	LNR declaration Management plan preparation and implementation
title	New voluntary sector reserves
purpose	To protect and enhance specific sites.
details	Unfortunately two voluntary sector reserves have been lost since the first LBAP was prepared (Aberdare Canal is still a Key Countryside Site, Nant Myddlin woods is a SINC site) The Wildlife Trust has acquired a new site, adjacent to Llantrisant Common and part of the SSSI. A further site is likely as a result of a S106 agreement for housing development. A further site, close to an existing Wildlife Trust Reserve, may be subject to a s.106 agreement in the next few years.
Who/what	Wildlife Trust to progress negotiations with developers, where appropriate. Partners to investigate potential reserves when opportunities arise.
when	Ongoing
success	New nature reserves declared.
title	Emergency Response information
purpose	To provide information for the public about who to contact in a wildlife emergency.
details	Members of the public have requested specific information about who to

contact, in particular out of office hours, about wildlife issues. This would include local police contacts, CCW, National Assembly, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission Wales (including Forest Watch), Bat Conservation Trust, Animal Health Divisional Office, Health Protection Agency and Council services relating to wildlife, environmental protection, planning, pollution etc.

A leaflet or poster and website information is proposed.

Who/what RCT Countryside to liaise with Sgt Ian Guildford CCW and other agencies and Council divisions to collate the information and draft a leaflet/poster.

when Steering group and partners to assist with distribution.

success By 2009

Completed and distributed information.

4.4 Actions to encourage land management for wildlife

The final theme running through the Habitat and Species Action Plans is managing land for wildlife. As discussed in Chapter 3, protecting sites is not sufficient to protect the habitat and species in the long term. Management that favours the continued survival of the habitat, and associated species, is crucial. Small-scale management initiatives can be important. For example, planning permissions for barns converted to residential or commercial use can provide opportunities to include barn owl nest boxes. Gardens are a potential wildlife haven, and can provide interest and pleasure for local residents.

Managing farmland for wildlife is a particular challenge. Farming in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been less affected by ‘modern’ methods than many other parts of the country and this has helped a wealth of wildlife habitat to survive. But farmers are suffering severe financial difficulties at present and few can afford the labour-intensive management methods of old. Finding ways for farmers to make a living out of biodiversity is a major challenge. Shooting sports, for example, can provide a practical management incentive for farmers to manage their land for nature conservation. Tir Gofal is the National Assembly for Wales grant scheme for farmers. The scheme is not applicable to small holdings but aims to encourage farmers to manage their land for wildlife, access and landscape as well as food and timber production. A significant area of Rhondda Cynon Taf is currently in Tir Gofal management (just over 18% of the land area in 2007). Tir Canol is the new entry level agricultural scheme, it requires cross compliance (see p20) and promotes good agricultural practice.

Managing land to create new habitats or extend existing habitats is also proposed in some Action Plans (e.g. oak woods or reedbeds). Planning permissions for development can be used to create new habitats, for example in the landscaped areas of industrial estates, or on land reclamation schemes.

title **Management statements for SSSI**

purpose To ensure all SSSI are managed to maintain their wildlife interest

details CCW has identified the status of all SSSI and is now preparing management statements. The Wales Environment Strategy has set a

target for 95% of Wales SSSIs to be in favourable condition by 2015. Council-owned SSSI include Glyncornel woodlands, parts of Cwmparc crags, and part of Bryn-y gaer (Blaencynon SAC). Management works have also been undertaken adjacent to roads at Blaenrhondda Road cutting and the Craig yr Llyn SSSI and at Shonis pond adjacent to Coed Gellidraws SSSI

Who/what	CCW to prepare management statements, in consultation with owners and managers. CCW to advise RCT of any management changes required to achieve favourable condition of Council-owned SSSI. RCT Council to ensure that council-owned or managed SSSI are in favourable condition It may not be possible to achieve favourable condition in some cases where climate change or diffuse pollution is causing deterioration.
when	All Council owned SSSI in favourable condition by 2010 All SSSI in favourable condition by 2015
success	Managements statements prepared Area in positive management Area with favourable conservation status
title	Save Our Sincs
purpose	To provide additional funding for management of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
details	A joint bid with neighbouring local authorities was developed for European funding but was unsuccessful. The need remains for additional funding to support the biodiversity management of SINC. Potential sources of funding include the Heads of the Valleys Programme, Greening the Valleys, Lottery, waste and aggregates levies (e.g. Biffa Award), private grant funds etc. If all SINC are to be in favourable conservation status by 2026, as required by the Wales Environment Strategy, and biodiversity loss is to be halted by 2010, additional funding is essential.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to work with neighbouring LAs and voluntary organisations to seek funding and develop a successful bid. Assembly/CCW to consider targeting Tir Gofal funding to SINC
when	2008/9
success	Successful grant application Area of SINC with favourable conservation status
title	Managing Council owned Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
purpose	To ensure that all Council owned land of wildlife importance is managed appropriately
details	Council landholdings are available as a layer on the internal computer Geographic Information System (GIS). Ward maps of Council owned SINC have been produced. As part of the SINC review (above) Council landownership will be identified. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 biodiversity duty will require the Council (as well as all other public bodies) to have regard to biodiversity in the management of all their land. Most of the larger blocks of Council-

	owned SINC are already managed as Key Countryside Sites. New management arrangements may be required for other sites as identified. The Assembly's Environment Strategy has a target for all sites to be in a favourable condition by 2026
Who/what	RCT Countryside to identify Council owned SINC and investigate management options RCT property service to ensure the wildlife value of sites is taken into account as required by the NERC duty.
when	Ongoing All sites in favourable conservation status by 2026
success	Area of land in positive biodiversity management Area with favourable conservation status
title	Management of Local Nature Reserves and Key Countryside Sites
purpose	To implement the management plans for Local Nature Reserves and incorporate biodiversity management into the management plans for all Key Countryside Sites.
details	Management statements and Management Plans of varying detail have been prepared for all Key Countryside Sites, including those that are also Local Nature Reserves. Management Plans and statements address biodiversity, as well as access, landscape, recreation and environmental education where appropriate. Management works are undertaken in line with the Plans and Statements, which are updated as required.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to produce, update and implement management plans for all Key Countryside Sites in consultation with local communities.
when	ongoing
success	Area of land in biodiversity management
title	Management of other Council owned land for wildlife
purpose	The management of all Council owned land and buildings should have regard to biodiversity, including housing, parks, verges, cemeteries, offices etc..
details	The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act duty provides a focus for this action. In addition, the requirement for 'accessible natural green space' within 300 metres will support a change in management of some Council land. Training for land and building managers. New procedures to identify biodiversity impacts of proposed Council works Different land management equipment, and appropriate training, will be required.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to establish a training programme for land and building managers RCT land and building managers to develop relevant procedures RCT land managers to plan for new equipment and training requirements RCT Forward Plans and Countryside to identify areas where management change would increase the population within 300m of accessible natural greenspace.
when	From 2007/8

success	Number of people and areas of council responsibility trained Area of land/ number of buildings managed for biodiversity
title	Gardening for Wildlife
purpose	To promote local biodiversity conservation using eco-friendly, sustainable horticultural methods
details	A Gardening for Wildlife Group has been running since 2000 and has undertaken a number of projects including surveys, competitions, exhibitions and events. There are a number of active gardening projects in Rhondda Cynon Taf that support the Gardening group. Suggested future actions include: Developing links with the allotments forum Encouraging schools to take up gardening via Garden Organic Promoting garden wildlife surveys by local and national organisations Support for members to give talks to groups about gardening for wildlife
Who/what	Gardening Group to develop a programme of work RCT Countryside and Parks to investigate the potential for a demonstration garden in Ynysangharad Park RCT Countryside to include organic gardening information in schools grounds and outdoor learning information (see above) Steering Group to promote garden wildlife surveys such as the Big Garden Birdwatch, 'first sightings', garden moths etc. Groundwork to promote gardening for wildlife through the Greencare programme RCT waste services to promote home composting
when	ongoing
success	Increase in wildlife recording in gardens Increase in home composting
title	Cynon Valley River Park
purpose	To develop a landscape-scale biodiversity project linked to actions for climate change, health and well-being, the Cynon Trail and heritage and tourism.
details	The Heads of the Valleys Programme funded a draft Cynon Valley River Park Plan in 2006/7. Various biodiversity projects are included in the action plan, which is focused on a series of linked green spaces on the Cynon Valley floodplain. Additional funding from various sources, including the Heads of the Valleys Programme is being sought.
Who/what	RCT Countryside to investigate floodplain land acquisition for Local Nature Reserve. Wildlife Trust to consider extension to their Pwll Waun Cynon Reserve Tir Gofal and Tir Cynnal funding to support biodiversity management of the floodplain RCT Countryside to investigate ecological connectivity using the Cynon Valley as an example. RCT Forward Plans to include appropriate policies in the LDP
when	From 2007/8
success	Area of land in biodiversity management Area of land in favourable conservation status

title	Invasive weeds
purpose	Invasive weeds can be a threat to local biodiversity. Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam are a particular problem.
details	A short guide for landowners about Japanese knotweed has been produced and is available on the Council's website. The Council also undertakes some knotweed treatment on its own land in the autumn each year. Training courses on invasive weeds have also been provided.
Who/what	The Heads of the Valleys programme and Keep Wales Tidy to survey and control invasive species. RCT Countryside to provide advice to landowners re Japanese knotweed RCT Countryside to manage the Council's programme for knotweed control Tir Gofal funds available for invasive species control
when	ongoing
success	No. / area of sites treated per year.
title	Farming and biodiversity
purpose	To encourage and support farmers who practise wildlife friendly farming.
details	Tir Gofal, the Assembly's agricultural support scheme now covers 18% of the RCT area, providing funding for wildlife friendly farming. More farmers are likely to be eligible for funding because of the wildlife value of their land. The new Tir Cynnal entry-level scheme requires a basic level of good environmental practice which will also benefit wildlife.
Who/what	Assembly and farming unions to support and promote the Tir Cynnal and Tir Gofal agri-environment schemes. RCT Countryside to prepare a Farmers' Newsletter or wildlife articles for existing local farming publications FWAG to work with farmers in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area <i>See also Save Our Sincs above</i>
when	Ongoing
success	Area in Tir Gofal, km of restored/newly planted hedgerow No of FWAG visits in the RCT area Area in favourable condition
title	Grazing animals projects
purpose	Grazing, especially by cattle, is very important for maintaining the biodiversity value of grassland.
details	There is concern that the decline in cattle grazing in some areas is leading to a loss of biodiversity and an increased risk of fires. Some small-scale grazing projects have been set up since the first LBAP was prepared and there is potential for many more.
Who/what	CCW and Butterfly Conservation to continue to support and develop the marsh fritillary grazing project. RCT Countryside to explore opportunities to introduce grazing on Key Countryside Sites and other Council-owned land. Llantrisant Town Trust to reintroduce grazing on the Graig Common PONT to provide advice, a register of graziers and small grants to support grazing for biodiversity. RCT Countryside to encourage the Fire Service and Communities First areas to consider grazing to manage fire risk.

	Steering Group to promote conservation premiums for local produce, in particular beef.
when	Ongoing
success	Number of grazing projects set up Area in biodiversity management via grazing projects Reduction in the area affected by grassland fires Conservation grade beef premium
title	Woodland Grant schemes
purpose	To bring all Action Plan woods into management.
details	The Coed Cymru officer covering Rhondda Cynon Taff is actively involved in developing management plans and submitting grant applications for woodland owners. The demand for this service is high with over 27 new management plans or grant schemes prepared in the year 2005-2006, and a growing commitment to monitor approved plans.
Who/what	Continued financial support for Coed Cymru from the Council, CCW, FC and other partners. Funding of the new Better Woodlands For Wales grant scheme (BWW) and First Step scheme by FCW. (Potential for continuation of First Steps scheme in 2007) Coed Cymru officer to prepare and monitor woodland management plans and BWW schemes.
when	ongoing
success	At least one management plan/ BWW scheme per year for an action plan wood. Area of Action Plan woods under management.
title	Landscape contractors and biodiversity
purpose	Land around industrial estates, shopping centres, hospitals and hotels, is typically managed by landscape contractors. There is potential to improve the biodiversity value of this land if landscape contractors are aware of the opportunities and have suitable equipment.
details	Skills training and equipment advice for small-scale landscape contractors and for intermediate labour market organisations in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Possible 'machinery ring' for hire of specialist equipment Glamorgan-wide initiative targeted at the larger landscaping firms, linked to protected species, the NERC duty for public bodies, water management to reduce flood risk and water demand, halting biodiversity loss by 2010 etc..
Who/what	Groundwork to provide biodiversity skills training, including use of appropriate cut and collect equipment, for small scale landscape contractors and intermediate labour market organisations. Investigate the establishment of a machinery ring. GLAMBAG / DEIN / Groundwork to initiate a campaign to target larger landscape contractors in south Wales.
when	From 2008
success	Number of landscape contractors trained Area of land with biodiversity management

title	Schools Grounds Officer
purpose details	<p>To encourage the management of school grounds for wildlife Duty in Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.</p> <p>Managing school grounds for biodiversity is valuable for its own sake but can also enrich the teaching and learning experience.</p> <p>The Foundation phase curriculum, with its emphasis on outdoor learning for young children, is leading to a huge increase in demand for wildlife areas, gardens, outdoor classrooms, Forest School activities, teacher support etc. The Council's Environmental Education Service, the Countryside section, ESIS, Keep Wales Tidy, Eco schools, Groundwork Greencare, Learning through Landscapes, the Green Valley team and the Forest Education Initiative are all providing some input but lack the resources to provide a comprehensive service.</p> <p>There is need for a dedicated person to advise schools on biodiversity management of school grounds, the relevant curriculum links, teacher training, pupil involvement, finance and assistance to implement projects and maintain the grounds thereafter. Potential funding sources include, the Local Authority Education Service, Heads of the Valleys Programme, Greening the Valleys, Education Business Partnership, grant funds.</p>
Who/what	<p>Steering Group to seek funding for a school grounds advisory post.</p> <p>RCT ESDGC Beacon group to provide guidance and best practice to schools on the use of school grounds for outdoor learning.</p> <p>RCT Countryside to provide input re NERC duty</p> <p>Groundwork to support schools undertaking practical works</p> <p>See also Action for Nature and School wildlife areas teaching pack above.</p>
when	<p>Seek funding for a post 2008, person in post 2009</p> <p>Beacon group guidance by March 2008?</p>
success	<p>Officer appointed</p> <p>Number of schools participating</p> <p>Area of school grounds managed for biodiversity</p>

Chapter Five

Monitoring and Review

A successful Local Biodiversity Action Plan won't sit on the shelf but will be used by the partners to make things happen. Keeping track of how the actions are progressing is an important part of the process. But we also need to check whether the actions are having the desired effect; are they helping to protect and enhance the biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf?

Monitoring the Actions

Monitoring the actions the first Plan was undertaken in two ways. The actions that were included in previous Part One were monitored through the Countryside Strategy process and a summary is presented in Appendix X of progress between 2000 and 2007. This process will continue.

The detailed Habitat and Species Action Plans (see Part Two) contain hundreds of actions, each with a lead partner and a time-scale identified. For these actions a separate annual monitoring mechanism was proposed. A monitoring exercise was carried out in 2001, with each partner, identified in the Habitat and Species Action Plans, completing a monitoring form. This information was entered into a database. Since 2001, English Nature has been developing a monitoring database for LBAPs and UKBAPS across the whole of the UK. The Rhondda Cynon Taf LBAP has been involved in this project from the outset and our original database has been abandoned, with the data transferred to the EN pilot database. The database, called the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) was launched in autumn 2004. The internet based system allows all partners to enter their monitoring data online via a password protected link. Members of the public are able to view the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and see general information about progress. A list of the partners is given in Appendix 13 in Part Three, most have access to the internet, but a paper based consultation system will be retained for those organisations that do not. Each of these organisations has been involved in developing the actions included in the revised Plan.

Monitoring Biodiversity

The first Action Plan has been successful in encouraging recording and much more information about habitats and species in Rhondda Cynon Taf is now available. The publication by CCW of 'Priority Habitats of Wales a Technical Guide' has provided habitat information, which has been added to BARS. A number of specific surveys have also improved knowledge of habitats. Most of the original Species Action Plans contained at least one action relating to survey, although there has been significant progress, populations of some key species are still not known. BARS provides a mechanism for recording species data and the Local Record Centre will provide a single point of contact for information for Southeast Wales. The data that is collected in Rhondda Cynon Taf will also contribute to the monitoring of Action Plans prepared for Glamorgan, Wales and the UK. The involvement of landowners will be crucial to the success of the monitoring work.

Because wildlife records are sparse in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area, it is important to record two different kinds of information. One type is the new record for a habitat or species, which may well have been there, unreported, for many years. The second type relates to changes in the extent of a habitat or the population of a species that has been recorded previously. Only the second type can tell us anything about the success of our actions, and even then the changes may be due to other, unrelated, factors. The Monarch reports (DEFRA) have demonstrated that climate change is a factor that will dramatically affect wildlife in the UK. Wildlife and phenology (timing of events) recording are very important for understanding trends and impacts.

As anticipated, monitoring biodiversity has revealed further species of UK importance that occur in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area, and new Species Action Plans have been prepared to ensure that these species survive and thrive.

The Countryside Council for Wales has a general duty to monitor wildlife in Wales and employs specialist advisors. Their work is concentrated on National Nature Reserves but they may be able to provide assistance more generally for the Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans of Wales-wide importance.

Reviewing the Local Biodiversity Action Plan

This is the first review of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and further reviews will be required. Monitoring will show whether the actions are being achieved, within the target time-scale. Monitoring biodiversity may give some clues as to whether the actions are achieving their purpose.

The UK Action Plans have been reviewed by the UK Steering Group, most recently in 2007/8. It is proposed that the next formal review of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Action Plan, by the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, should be in 2012. By that time the loss of biodiversity across the UK, including Rhondda Cynon Taf should have ceased!