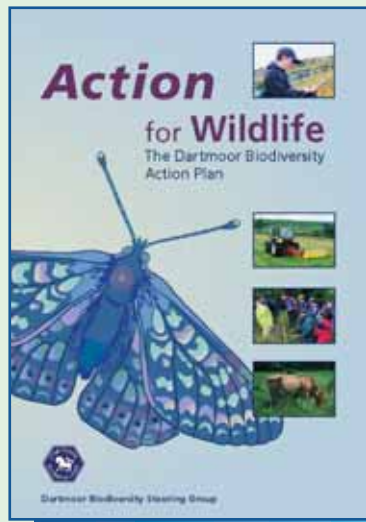


# Dartmoor Biodiversity Newsletter

Dartmoor Biodiversity Partnership 2006/2007



Welcome to the fifth Dartmoor Biodiversity Newsletter, an annual update on the wide range of initiatives and activities carried out by individuals and organisations to protect and enhance Dartmoor's wildlife.

Six years have passed since *Action for Wildlife: The Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan* was launched and we continue to make excellent progress with 96% (467 out of 484) of the identified actions now completed or in progress.

2006 has seen a 5 year interim review of the plan. 66.5% of our targets have been achieved or exceeded whilst progress has been made with a further 18.6%. These targets have now been updated to reflect the advances we have made in the last six years, organisational and agri-environment scheme changes, the recent UK BAP Review, the Moorland Vision and climate change issues.

This newsletter highlights some of the wide range of achievements made over the past year and demonstrates the continuing commitment of farmers, landowners, local businesses, communities and conservation organisations to secure Dartmoor's wildlife for the enjoyment of future generations.



## Dartmoor Bird Survey 2006

Helen Booker, RSPB

In 2006, the RSPB was contracted by the Ministry of Defence to carry out a breeding bird survey of the Dartmoor Training Area (DTA). The objective was to determine populations, trends and habitat associations of birds breeding on the DTA and to make comparisons with the surrounding open moorland.

The survey has shown that the DTA continues to hold the majority of southern England's red grouse, golden plover, dunlin, and ring ouzel populations. While dunlin and red grouse populations appear stable, ring ouzels and golden plovers have declined over the last 25 years.

The land used by the military generally holds fewer bird species than the surrounding moorland. However, this can be explained by the height, exposure and the habitats present. The bird diversity increases in lower lying areas around the edge of the moor, where most of the scrub, gorse and valley mires occur. Notable populations found here include snipe, grasshopper warbler, whinchat and stonechat, all of which are increasing. The rocky areas are nationally important for wheatear, however this population is declining.

The full survey report will be available on the Dartmoor Training Area's web site [www.dartmoor-ranges.co.uk](http://www.dartmoor-ranges.co.uk)

Wheatear © Sue Tranter, rspb-images.com



Rhododendron control © DNPA

## Restoring Ancient Woodland

Richard Knott,  
Dartmoor National Park Authority

The Restoring Ancient Woodlands project was launched on Dartmoor in October 2005. Since then the project has provided advice for woodland owners, and prepared detailed management plans for over 275 ha of ancient woodland. We are now turning these plans into action.

One such remote and steep site in the Dart catchment is threatened by invading beech and sycamore. As conventional tree felling and extraction techniques are not appropriate on this site, contractors are using a cordless drill and carefully controlled volumes of herbicide to kill beech and sycamore in-situ. The dead trees will provide gaps in the canopy, giving space for adjacent oaks to develop.

The technique will contribute valuable standing and fallen deadwood which will in turn encourage invertebrates, hole-nesting birds and roosting bats and help to create a structurally diverse woodland. We await the results of this new technique with interest.



# Action for Wildlife Project 2006 update

Frances Cooper, Action for Wildlife Project Officer

## Action for Wildlife The Dartmoor Biodiversity Project

The main focus during 2006 has been on our first Dartmoor Natural Networks project, an approach which enlists local communities in undertaking landscape-scale biodiversity work. Our initial landscape focus area is the Walkham Valley, and this year has seen the establishment of the project with a range of public events to raise local awareness. Following consultation with local people, the dormouse has been chosen as our primary biodiversity target. There are few records of dormice in the area so survey work is our initial focus. A workshop in the autumn demonstrated considerable interest, and in December we found our first evidence of dormice. With better information about their presence in the area, opportunities for habitat enhancement will be looked for at a future stage.

Our work on the Greater Horseshoe Bat Project has continued and early in the year a hedgerow tree planting day resulted in around 130 trees being planted on five landholdings within the known foraging area. Two substantial practical projects have kept up our work to benefit Atlantic salmon, with about 1 km of river being protected from soil erosion.



Dartmoor Natural Networks: Bat and moth night © DNPA



Walkham Valley © DNPA



Marsh Fritillary © Jim Asher, Butterfly Conservation



### Fritillaries fly high!

Anja Borsje, Butterfly Conservation

The Two Moors Threatened Butterfly Project, now running for two years, aims to conserve and enhance the populations of the marsh fritillary and high brown fritillary on Dartmoor. To date, the advice given to many farmers and landowners has resulted in positive management being carried out on more than 350 ha of fritillary habitat.

A recent success has been securing a Wildlife Enhancement Scheme Agreement at an important site for the high brown fritillary on Dartmoor. With help from the project and Natural England, land manager Peter Daw will clear scrub over the next five years. At 12 other fritillary colonies, scrub is to be cleared this winter and suitable grazing regimes will be re-introduced to nine sites once they are fenced in the spring.



### Operation

Chris Gregory, D

The 2006 breeding season for dunlin pairs were up but lapwing and curlew remain. Managers has provided the

Comprehensive monitoring of lapwing young from around of lapwing clutches result

On a more positive note, MoD detected 11-16 dunlin. been stable for at least th



## Meldon Valley Revealed...

Jeremy Sabel, Dartmoor National Park Authority

The Meldon area is one of the best studied geological locations in the UK, whilst ecologically, the area includes blanket bog and upland oak woodland of European importance. Combined with the rich local industrial archaeology, the Meldon area is an ideal place for informative days out, field visits and further research.

In recognition of this, DNPA and Devon County Council have created a series of educational resources to help visitors explore the Meldon area. Three in-depth case studies into the geology, ecology and industrial archaeology for A-level and undergraduate students are now available on [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)

From April, a new guide *Exploring a Dartmoor Valley: The Meldon Beneath our Feet* will be available for purchase from DNPA Visitor Centres or accessed on the DNPA web site. Interpretive panels on the Meldon Viaduct and at Meldon Reservoir will offer new insights into the geological heritage of this area. A series of launch events to promote these new resources will take place in May.



Meldon Aplite Quarry © DNPA

Meldon Valley © DNPA



Lapwing © Ron Champion



## Natural England enters the scene

Pete Stevens, Natural England

A new champion for biodiversity conservation - Natural England has been formed by bringing together English Nature (EN), the Countryside Agency (CA) and the Rural Development Service (RDS). It will work for people, places and nature, to enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife; promoting access, recreation and public well-being, and contributing to the way natural resources are managed so that they can be enjoyed now and in the future.

On Dartmoor, Natural England expects to build on relationships built up over the years by officers of its constituent bodies. Key to any work will be individual farmers, the Dartmoor Commoners' Council and the Commons Associations, Dartmoor National Park Authority and bodies such as the Duchy of Cornwall and the MoD.

Management agreements administered by the RDS and EN will continue to be serviced by Natural England. However, over the next few years it is expected that the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme (HLS) and by 2010 the new Upland Entry Level Scheme will take their position as the main tools for supporting the farming community on Dartmoor, as we move closer to sustainable and integrated farming and ecological systems.

## Wader 2006

Duchy of Cornwall

... brought mixed fortunes: numbers of curlew, snipe and fewer pairs of lapwings attempted to breed. The number of ... in perilously few but the good work of the breeding site land ... the birds with nesting habitats that are in excellent condition.

... of the breeding season recorded potentially 2 fledged ... and 12 pairs and 1 curlew chick from 4 pairs. High losses ... ted from predation, most probably by carrion crows.

... the RSPB's survey of the military training area for the ... in territories and suggests that the population has ... e past 27 years.

## 2006 News in brief

Moorland  
Habitat  
Action  
Plan

## Moorland Vegetation Survey 2005-2006

Lt Col Tony Clark, Commandant Dartmoor  
Training Area

Monitoring of the **Southern damselfly** colonies on Dartmoor revealed greater numbers than ever previously recorded at all three sites, with peak count numbers on transects of 188, 205 and 361 adults! Whilst the good summer undoubtedly boosted numbers, it is thought that the ongoing management work for these internationally threatened insects is now producing the desired results.



Heath spotted orchid © Andrew Pope

To manage its interests on Dartmoor, the MoD needs current and comparable evidence of vegetation structure and its condition. As a contribution to understanding Dartmoor and its key habitats, the MoD decided to undertake the enormous task of surveying 10,000 hectares of land using the National Vegetation Classification (NVC).

An unexpected discovery of a 1.75ha, species rich **hay meadow**, has increased the Dartmoor stock of remaining top quality hay meadows by almost 10%. The inappropriately named 'common' twayblade and other spectacular orchids can all be enjoyed with a cream tea, in the grounds of Beechwood B&B near Postbridge. Alternatively, four new DNPA guided walks in June/July 2007 will take you there too - for more information look in the *Dartmoor National Park Visitor Guide* or visit [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)



Barbastelle bat © Pat Morris

The survey has taken two years, using four specialist contractors, and provides us with definitive knowledge of the extent and condition of all habitats, especially blanket bog and heather dominated vegetation.

A new breeding colony of the **rare barbastelle bat**, only the second on Dartmoor, has been discovered at Hembury Woods during a bat survey commissioned by DNPA, Natural England, the Woodland Trust and the National Trust in summer 2006. A new study is planned to shed more light on these elusive animals and to enable their effective conservation on Dartmoor in the future.

Specialists will be able to use the data to highlight important locations for rare invertebrates or combinations of features which are suitable for certain bird species. The well respected and clearly documented NVC methodology will also allow further survey to be conducted to provide comparative data to give an understanding of the effects of global warming and land use.

The annual meeting of the **Dartmoor Biodiversity Research Group (DBRG)** was held at the University of Plymouth in November 2006. MSc students presented the results of their research and survey work, which continues to inform management decisions for species including Vigur's eyebright and flax-leaved St John's-wort. Other talks ranged from patterns of tree regeneration at Wistman's Wood to the foraging behaviour of the bilberry bumblebee.



Cranberry © DNPA

An exciting find was made in the summer of a previously undiscovered colony of **cranberry** - one of Dartmoor's rarest plants. Whilst this tiny, straggling relative of the much more common whortleberry is very difficult to locate throughout most of the year, the bright red berries in July make spotting that much easier.



Discussing moorland management © Tony Clark

Perhaps more importantly, the NVC survey provides other Dartmoor stakeholders with better information from which to inform and hence plan for the future to help protect Dartmoor's unique character.



# Climate Change: I can Change the Future

Miriam Glendell, Dartmoor National Park Authority



View from Great Mis Tor. Are snowy scenes like these a thing of the past? © DNPA

Climate has always changed, as the fossil remains of hippopotamus and straight-tusked elephant from Buckfastleigh caves testify. However, the rate at which the Earth's climate is changing at present is unprecedented and is proven to be caused by human activities.

Unless greenhouse gas emissions are reduced dramatically, mean summer temperatures on Dartmoor may rise by 4 degrees by 2080. Winters will become wetter and stormier whilst summers will become drier. Higher concentrations of CO<sup>2</sup> will make rain more acidic.

If blanket bogs and valley mires dry out they may release further CO<sup>2</sup> into the atmosphere, thus exacerbating the problem. Dartmoor rivers may at times be reduced to a trickle, threatening water supplies and salmon migration. Acid rain will kill invertebrates in rivers – the key food for iconic birds such as the dipper and species on the extreme southern edge of their distribution such as dunlin and golden plover may become extinct.

A PhD study based at Plymouth University is assessing whether appropriate management of Dartmoor's moorlands can help to reduce the emissions of CO<sup>2</sup> from soils and contribute to carbon storage in the ground. Further action to enable species to adapt to the changing climate is planned as part of the current review of the *Action for Wildlife: The Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*.

Everyone's actions count - for more information visit the *Climate Change: I can change the future* exhibition at the High Moorland Visitor Centre between 13 July and 10 October 2007 or the DNPA online exhibitions at web site [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)

**TOMORROW'S CLIMATE**  
*Today's Challenge*<sup>™</sup>

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## Dartmoor Biodiversity Partnership

Co-ordinated by the Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group, the Dartmoor Biodiversity Partnership embraces all those people and organisations who are working positively to protect and enhance Dartmoor's wildlife.

## Dartmoor Biodiversity Steering Group members

Dartmoor Commoners' Council

Dartmoor National Park Authority

Devon Birdwatching & Preservation Society

Devon County Council

Devon Wildlife Trust

Duchy of Cornwall

Environment Agency

Forestry Commission

National Farmers' Union

National Trust

Natural England

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Defence Training Estates

Cover image: Stonechat © Mike Hammett

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