



The Sutherland Partnership
Main Street, Lairg, Sutherland. IV27 4DB. Tel: 01549 402646

SUTHERLAND PARTNERSHIP BIODIVERSITY GROUP

Minute of the meeting of Thursday 23rd October 2008 at 1400 in the Nip Inn, Lairg.

PRESENT

William Sutherland
Janet Bromham
Kenny Graham
Ian Evans
Paul Castle
Ian Mitchell
Chris Daphne
Steve Robertson
Graeme Findlay
Juliet Robinson
Don O'Driscoll
Andy Summers

REPRESENTING

Sutherland Partnership (Chair)
Highland Council
RSPB
Assynt Field Club
Highland Council Ranger
SNH
West Sutherland Fisheries Trust
North Highland Forest Trust
Forestry Commission
Highland Red Squirrel Project
John Muir Trust
Highland Council Ranger (minutes)

ITEM

1. Welcome and apologies.

Apologies received from Judi Forsyth (SEPA)

2. Approval of Previous Minutes.

Corrections to previous minutes: they should read "The Highland Naturalist" and not a community newsletter under item 5, Village Audit.

Item 11 should read "Heather was questioned if soil..", not "Heather questioned.."

The amended minutes were then accepted.

3. Matters Arising.

Highland Biodiversity Partnership. JB reported that the Moray Firth Marine Project at present were looking over the North East marine habitat action plan and extending it to Duncansby head. Projects may arise out of this in the future.

Scourie and Rogart Village audit. WS has put a note regarding the audits on the Sutherland Partnership website. IE will get Murdo to send WS a soft copy of the full report for the website.
Action – Ian E, William

Elver Study. WS has emailed around the Group the final report of the study.

Lead Partners for Priority Species. JB brought with her a copy of the lead partners and WS will distribute with the minutes.
Action – William

Mink Survey. DO'D reported that all the scats recovered from the study area had been DNA tested and proved not to be mink.

Joint meeting with Caithness Biodiversity Group. WS and IM had concluded that a joint meeting was going to be logistically very difficult. However SR suggested that a small contingent could go to the Caithness meeting and represent the Sutherland Partnership Biodiversity Group. GF, PC and JB also said they maybe able to attend.

Action – Steve, Graeme, Paul, Janet

Slovenian Flower Festival. IM reported that there had been no progress recently regarding a similar environmental festival for Caithness and Sutherland, but that the Slovenian Flower Festival would be at the World Tourism Fair in London in November. IM will circulate a programme for the Spring Festival and give a presentation with Pat Buchanan to this group in the Spring. WS would be seeing Graham Elliott at the North Highland Tourism AGM. *[pmn, WS did not have the chance to talk with Graham then.]* **Action – William, Ian M**

Dornoch Links Trail. Waiting for post meeting detail to be inserted.

Soil Distribution in Sutherland. Heather Jackson had agreed to ascertain if there had been any soil distribution surveys done in Sutherland. Item carried over. **Action – Judi**

Inappropriate Muir burning. WS reported that he had been in discussion with Robbie Rowantree who had declined to have this raised at the Sutherland Partnership Board as it had already been discussed there recently. JB said that Trevor Johnstone from H&I Fire and Rescue Service was due to speak on this subject at the next Biodiversity Partnership meeting.

IE reported that there was a Scottish government consultation out at the minute asking for comments upon changing the dates when muir burning was allowed as many birds were now nesting much earlier. RSPB, SNH and the Assynt Field Club have all responded and it was decided that WS should collate those responses. **Action – Ian E, Ian M, Kenny**

Agenda

4. **Red Squirrels**

Juliet Robinson gave a very interesting talk about the work of the Highland red squirrel group and specifically about their past and present distribution in Sutherland. This is the third year of the project and they have trained over one hundred volunteers to look for signs of red squirrels. It seems we must all keep a look out because there are some and they are easily overlooked. Discussions followed the talk.

5. **West Sutherland Elver study.**

Chris gave a brief summary of the report which reads pretty disastrous. Eel populations across Europe are down to 1% of their 1970 levels. Chris is now following up on the report by doing a survey of eels on the Geisgill river system near Badcall which will involve catching and tagging individuals. The WSFT hope to get schools involved, with help of Highland Council Rangers. Chris agreed to keep WS up to date with this study.

6. **Current Biodiversity projects**

The Aspen project.

SR reported that a consultant, Scott Wilson had been appointed to deliver the project. He was gathering information at present. The survey methodology was being finalised. Then he would be looking in closer detail at key sites. Steve reported that the root gathering was going well and they were growing seven clones but were looking for four more clones.

Marine audit Desk Study.

IE reported that Duncan May hoped to finish the study by December 2008.

7. Future Projects.

a) Funding prospects

WS reported on the progress of the LEADER funding which is designed to energise rural communities in the highlands. £7.7 million will be available from now until 2013. It requires to be match funded by public money.

IM reported that SNH were prepared to organise a small grant scheme for environmental projects in general in Caithness and Sutherland. SNH were prepared to put £20,000 on the table to be spent over the next 2-3 years in Sutherland and this could be matched with LEADER money. Sutherland Partnership would make the application. He proposed that the scheme be for funding for small projects less than £5000, and that this group vet and authorize project applications. Application would have to come from the community and not RSPB, JMT and THC for example. Applications would be very simple and 100% funded although community input in kind would be welcomed. The scheme may be ready for the start of 2009 but IM cautioned everyone not to widely publicise this in advance.

The group welcomed this proposal.

Action – Ian M, William

JB agreed to consult THC to see if they would be in a position to make a contribution to the pot.

Action – Janet

a) Marine survey

DO'D suggested a survey of the seashore in Sutherland - a good project as very little is known about what we have and it would be a good project to get the community and schools involved. There was discussion, and it was agreed that this could be a candidate for the small grant scheme. DO'D was to speak to the Rangers.

Action – Don

JB mentioned the project proposal for the near future to involve the community to survey for the free floating form of knotted wrack, a national BAP species, including workshops in seaweed identification. Plantlife is to be the lead partner in this project.

8. Invasive species.

David Glass had suggested that each biodiversity area compile a list of the invasive species in their area and a database of where the invasive species actually are. WS will put this on the agenda for the next meeting.

Action –William

There will be a meeting in Battleby on 11th November organised by SNH on sharing good practice regarding control of invasive species. PC was to liaise with David about going to the meeting. *[pmn - PC was able to find out that no-one from Caithness Biodiversity Group was going to that meeting.]*

IE reported that BSBI were compiling a Sutherland list of alien trees and shrubs to be ready by the end of December 2008.

9. AOCB

JB reported that WREN (Wester Ross Environmental network) had constituted themselves and now had a bank account and their first AGM.

IE reported that the latest Atlas of Butterflies in Highland and Moray was now available published by Butterfly Conservation Highland branch and HBRG. It is available at £4 plus £1 postage.

10. DONM

Thursday 5th February 2009 at 1400 in the Nip Inn, Lairg *[pmn - room and tea/coffee/biscuits booked.]* DO'D kindly offered to scribe.

It was also agreed that at the next meeting we revisit the LBAP for Sutherland.

Action -All