

## **Wildlife Strategy**

### **Wildlife Strategy Map**

The Council has produced a detailed Wildlife Strategy which advocates a comprehensive approach to biodiversity conservation. At one level it seeks to ensure that the Council, in the fulfillment of its normal duties and responsibilities has regard to biodiversity. However the Strategy is only one of a number of measures being developed to provide the Council with a policy framework for benefiting biodiversity and ultimately people in South Ayrshire. In particular, the strategy seeks to ensure the most effective use of resources in terms of "on the ground" action to:

protect and promote the proper management of sites of nature conservation importance, provide for the enhancement and creation of habitats for wildlife, develop and protect a network of "green corridors" through the Council area, raise awareness of, and provide opportunities for involvement in, biodiversity conservation.

The following text represents a precis of the full Wildlife Strategy, highlighting the main aims and guiding principles of that strategy within the specific context of the Local Plan. It also identifies those sites considered to be important in terms of environmental wildlife conservation interests.

### **Designations**

Designation of a site is one of the primary means of safeguarding, and raising awareness of, areas of wildlife value. In addition, however, there is a need to be aware of the wider natural heritage - habitats which whilst not meeting the criteria for designation are important in terms of the overall conservation of biodiversity.

### **Statutory Designations**

The most important sites in terms of wildlife, geology or landform have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). This is a UK-wide designation; sites in Scotland are notified by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). As at 2002 there are 32 SSSIs in South Ayrshire covering a total area of 4076.3ha.

Some SSSI are afforded additional protection by European law and/or International Conventions. In South Ayrshire, Ailsa Craig has been designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the EC Birds Directive (1979), whilst parts of Glen App and the Galloway Moors have been put forward as a potential SPA. Under the EC Habitats Directive (1992), the Lendalfoot Hills Complex and Merrick Kells (partly in Dumfries and Galloway) have been put forward by SNH as candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

The network of SPAs and SACs across the community is known collectively as the Natura 2000 series. Some Natura 2000 sites contain habitats or species which are classed as "priorities" because they are particularly threatened in global terms and the European Community contains a significant proportion of their natural range. Priority habitats and species are defined under Article 1 of the Habitats Directive.

## **Non Statutory Designations**

In addition to statutory designations, South Ayrshire contains a number of sites known as Wildlife Sites or Ornithological Sites. These are designated by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and RSPB respectively and are considered to be of greatest value for wildlife next to the statutory sites.

Wildlife Sites across Scotland are in the process of being resurveyed. As such, all sites awaiting re-survey, which includes most of the South Ayrshire sites, are now referred to as Provisional Wildlife Sites. There are over 100 Provisional sites in South Ayrshire along with 56 Ornithological Sites. Not surprisingly there is a high degree of overlap between the two designations.

## **New Designations**

The Council can recommend sites for designation to the appropriate designating body. In addition, local authorities have powers to acquire, declare and manage Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). The designation can be used to help safeguard sites of local biodiversity importance and which are of value for environmental education, research and/or informal enjoyment of nature.

## **Other Designations**

There are a number of other designations, which whilst not primarily aimed at, can benefit biodiversity conservation. In South Ayrshire such designations include Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). There are 33 TPOs in South Ayrshire as at January 2002.

South Ayrshire also incorporates the Galloway Forest Park. Forest Parks are non-statutory designations which are made by the Forestry Commission. They comprise extensive tracts of multi-purpose forestry, including areas of scenic value.

## **The Wider Natural Heritage**

The suite of designations in place helps ensure the protection of our best wildlife habitats. Natural heritage interest, however, is not restricted solely to designated areas or areas with potential for designation. There is a wider natural heritage resource spread across the whole of South Ayrshire. This manifests itself in terms of the many habitats of wildlife value which are not designated but still important in terms of conserving overall biodiversity. These may, for example, be wetland habitats such as marshy areas in the corner of fields, woodland areas, hedgerows or areas of species rich grassland. Alternatively they may be derelict sites or land awaiting development, which over the years have come to support an interesting flora and fauna. In some instances the wildlife interest of a site may also be seasonal, for example, coastal fields used as roosting and feeding sites by over-wintering wading birds.

## **Wildlife Corridors and Stepping Stones**

The erosion of the wider natural heritage, whether it be through development or other land use changes, can contribute to the isolation or fragmentation of designated sites and other valuable habitats. Research has shown that isolated sites tend to support fewer species than those which are connected to other areas of similar habitat, a scenario thought to be caused by a combination of a poor rate of species immigration and species decline within isolated habitats through natural processes.

Wildlife corridors and stepping stones play a vital role in terms of linking similar habitat types and facilitating the movement of species from one area to another. Examples include rivers with their banks, traditional field boundary systems, ponds and small woodlands. Wildlife corridors, particularly in urban areas, can also be of aesthetic and social value. For this reason wildlife corridors are also commonly referred to as green corridors or networks. A large number of animal and plant species are protected by law. Many of those protected occur outwith designated sites where they are vulnerable to destruction or disturbance from development and other works.

### **Planning Permissions**

The presence of a protected species is a material consideration when the planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if implemented, could result in significant harm to the species or its habitat. Some of the protected species known to be present in South Ayrshire include:

most wild birds, red squirrel, otter, pine marten, badger, all bats, all reptiles, bluebell and, greater yellow rattle.

### **Habitat Enhancement and Creation**

In many cases wildlife benefits can be accrued simply by changing the management regime of existing open spaces and public parks. Examples of such management include using native rather than non native species in landscaping schemes, managing grassland and introducing wildflower meadows, establishing new hedgerows or retaining and creating new water features. The Council will seek to improve biodiversity in this way on land in its own ownership or control. Other benefits may be secured by influencing land outwith its direct control through planning conditions and obligations associated with planning consent.

### **Guiding Principles**

As part of its commitment to protect and enhance South Ayrshire's environment and more particularly in its assessment of development proposals the Council will refer to the relevant policies of this Local Plan and, where appropriate, to the following guiding principles to ensure that matters relating to nature conservation and biodiversity are fully addressed.

The following points represent the Council's principles towards development and associated wildlife interests.

### **Overall Biodiversity Conservation**

#### **GP 1**

The Council will continue to support the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) process.

#### **GP2**

The Council will endeavour to maintain an up-to-date information base on habitats and species within South Ayrshire.

## **Habitat Protection**

### GP3

The Council will seek to protect sites of nature conservation importance (including sites where protected or LBAP priority species are present) from harmful development.

### GP 4

The Council will seek to ensure that compensatory habitats are provided in instances where habitat loss is unavoidable.

### GP5

The Council will encourage the appropriate management of sites of biodiversity value and consider the preparation of management plans, particularly where other issues may threaten the site's ecological integrity.

### GP 6

The Council will pursue the declaration of Local Nature Reserves in consultation with local communities and other interested parties.

## **Habitat Enhancement and Creation**

### GP 7

The Council will endeavour to take advantage of opportunities to enhance existing habitats, particularly on its land.

### GP 8

The Council will seek to create new habitats for wildlife on its land.

### GP 9

The Council will encourage the enhancement and creation of habitats through the local planning process.

## **Green Networks**

### GP 10

The Council will seek to identify, protect and enhance a network of green corridors through South Ayrshire, taking into account links with adjoining Council areas.

### GP 11

The Council will investigate the potential for integrating recreational footpaths in green corridor networks.

## Raising Awareness and Involvement

### GP 12

The Council will seek to incorporate biodiversity principles in its everyday work activities, where appropriate.

### GP 13

The Council will encourage the development of theoretical and practical biodiversity conservation in schools and other educational establishments.

### GP 14

The Council will seek to address the implications of its activities and policies on issues of wider biodiversity concern.

### GP 15

The Council will seek to maintain close links with Scottish Natural Heritage, the RSPB and Scottish Wildlife Trust, and have regard to their specialist advice and information.

### GP 16

The Council will take measures to raise community awareness of, and involvement in, biodiversity conservation.

### GP 17

The Council will endeavour to work with other sectors of the community, including industry, developers, farmers and foresters, in order to benefit biodiversity.