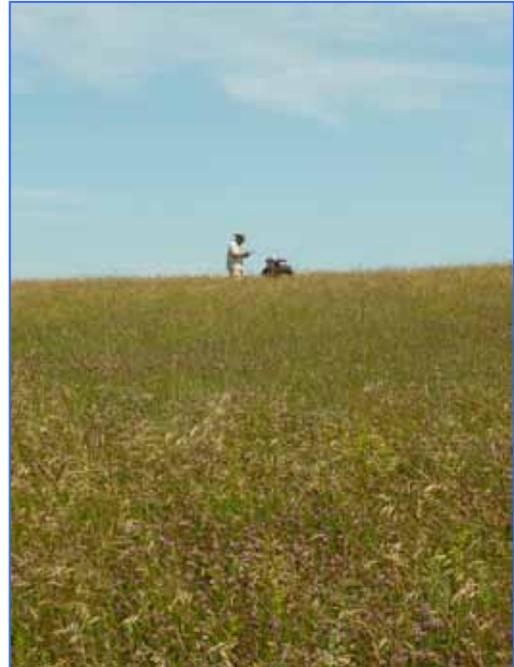# 4. Improving our knowledge

Data, monitoring and evidence

Introduction

A sound knowledge of our local biodiversity resource is essential as a starting point for the effective implementation of conservation objectives. Without baseline data it is difficult to set targets and to measure progress towards them. The existing green infrastructure (GI) suite has provided a valuable framework for BAP delivery at the sub-regional level. Updating this dataset and assessing GI delivery both depend on monitoring biodiversity assets. Good biodiversity data are essential in the following aspects of partners' work:

- NPPF places responsibilities on planning authorities to base decisions on up-to-date ecological information

- Local Development Frameworks & Annual Monitoring Reports

- Green infrastructure

- Reporting to funders and performance indicators

- Biodiversity Duty (Section 40, NERC Act)

- Improving our knowledge of ecosystem services.

Main issues

- We have very little accurate baseline information on our prority habitats and species.

- Most of Northamptonshire's biodiversity data are derived from over 800 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) but many of these have not been surveyed within the 5-year period that is recommended by Defra.

- There are also a further 1000 or more Potential Wildlife Sites (PWS), which have never been surveyed.

- For many of the priority species, monitoring has been identified at the national level as being the top priority if we are to understand how to conserve them.

- Landscape-scale projects and green infrastructure require a field-by-field knowledge of not just existing resources but also the best potential areas for linkage and expansion.

- In order to store, process and disseminate this information it is essential to have a fully functional records centre. The Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre (NBRC) has established a one-stop shop for biological data but its future funding is uncertain and there are existing data that still need to be collated.

- We have little data on our natural resources and the ecosystem services they supply.

Strategy and guidelines

- Achieve funding and resources for the NBRC to become fully functional

- Resurvey LWS on a rolling 5-year programme and identify new LWS

- Identify priority areas for landscape-scale restoration and creation of priority habitats within the GI framework to focus action and guide development proposals

- Pass all biological records and monitoring results to the NBRC

- Support species and habitat monitoring above and beyond the LWS system

- Survey PWS and where necessary designate new LWS

- Focus on the green infrastructure strategy on a field-by-field basis to identify the current resources and highest priorities for habitat linkage

- Collect information on the county's natural capital to improve our knowledge on the ecosystem services it provides and to promote an ecosystem approach

Targets

1. Re-survey 200 Local Wildlife Sites by 2020, write site reports and provide management advice

2. Produce an updated strategic ecological network map for the county by 2020

Actions

A.	Ensure that 35 Local Wildlife Sites are surveyed each year across the county and management advice is provided to landowners	Wildlife Trust NCC
B.	Identify for survey PWS that have no supporting survey data and that are in a strategic location either in terms of development pressure or habitat connectivity	Wildlife Trust
C.	Annual report on Indicator 160 Wildlife Sites in Positive Conservation Management and work to increase the percentage	Wildlife Trust NCC
D.	Ensure there is a priority habitat map for the county that is updated on an annual basis	Wildlife Trust NBRC
E.	Ensure that priority species are the focus of survey efforts (for example through County Recorders) and that all results are reported to NBRC	Wildlife Trust NBRC
F.	Undertake Phase I, ecological network and/or green infrastructure mapping across the county to ensure that any planning decisions are underpinned by sound ecological evidence	Wildlife Trust JPUs NCC NBRC RNRP

G.	Ensure a fully funded and functioning records centre exists to collate and provide species and habitat data across the county	Wildlife Trust JPUs NCC Local authorities

Further information and management advice

►   Local Wildlife Sites

►   CIEEM guidelines for preliminary ecological appraisal

►   Ecological survey calendar

►   RNRPs Environmental Character and Green Infrastructure Suite

►   Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre