

Birmingham & Black Country Nature Improvement Area

Summary of Progress 2012-13

The B&BC NIA is a partnership of over 50 organisations that have come together to deliver significant improvements to the natural environment of Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall & Wolverhampton.

Our vision is an urban landscape permeated by a network of high quality greenspace which is rich in wildlife and enjoyed by the people who live and work here.

1. Woodland – management & enhancement of recently established woodland.

The aim of our Woodland Delivery Theme is to re-establish a network of high quality woodlands across the NIA through the enrichment and diversification of our young plantation and degraded woodlands. This is being achieved through thinning, coppicing, under-planting and the introduction of native field-layer species sourced from our remaining old woodlands.

In Year 1 of the NIA we have undertaken projects at 13 woodlands covering a total of 21.25 hectares. In order to maximise the output for the available budget a Woodland Working Group was formed which has looked at identifying markets for wood products and additional funding sources. Through this mechanism we have worked with contractors to reduce the costs of plantation thinning projects by selling the extracted product into the woodfuel market. Examples of this include two woodlands (Kitchen Lane and Turners Field Plantation) which are in public open space in Wolverhampton, and the Wildlife Trust's own Joy's Wood in Birmingham.

We have also secured grants through the Forestry Commission to contribute to the costs of projects and have worked with partners to contribute additional value to their own projects. This includes sourcing, supplying and introducing native field-layer seed and plants of local provenance through our Growing Local Flora NIA project.

In 2012-13 – 13 sites covering 21.25 hectares were enhanced:

Kitchen Lane Plantation	1.5
Joy's Wood	3.0
Northcote Farm Woodland	1.8
Turners Field Plantation	0.6
Top Hanger	4.2
Park Hall Scrub	0.6
Springhill Wood	0.2
Langley Hill Wood	1.3
Deer's Leap Nature Reserve	1.5
Walsall Country Park	4.5
Hill Hook Wet Woodland	1.3
Warley Woods	0.5
EcoPark	0.25
13 sites	21.25 ha

2. Grassland – restoration & linking of long-established grassland.

The aim of our grassland work is to form a network of species-rich grasslands across Birmingham & the Black Country by creating new meadows and restoring old grassland by re-introducing traditional management. There is a recent history in the Nature Improvement Area of pioneering work to create diverse grassland of native species - techniques which have since been adopted nation-wide – and we are building on this success.

In Year 1 of the NIA we have undertaken projects at 13 grassland sites covering 51.80 hectares. Over this period we have prioritised the restoration of existing grassland whilst identifying sites and donor material of local provenance for a raft of green-hay strewing creation projects in Years 2 and 3. At sites including the Rowley Hills, Dartmouth Meadows and Quinton Meadows we have removed scrub, bramble and rank grass which have colonised and degraded remnant grasslands from our NIA's rural past, and have re-introduced traditional management.

We have also sourced through our Growing Local Flora project local provenance Yellow-rattle seed which has been sown across all but a few hectares of the total area enhanced, and we've begun the ground preparation for the creation of nearly 5 hectares of new grassland at Castle Vale Meadow.

In 2012-13 – 13 sites covering 51.80 hectares were enhanced.

Rowley Hills	20.00
Castle Vale Meadow	4.8
Dartmouth Meadows	5.2
Kings Norton LNR	1.3
Quinton Meadows	0.5
Birmingham Mainline Canal	5.0
Turner's Field	7.8
Joy's Wood	1.8
Park Hall	2.0
Chinn Brook Nature Reserve	0.7
Hill Hook	2.0
Kings Norton Park	0.5
Centre of the Earth	0.2
13 sites	51.80 ha

3. Heathland – restoration & linking of long-established heathland.

Birmingham & the Black Country was once rich in heathland, much of which has been lost or is suffering neglect. The focus of our Heathland Delivery Theme is to restore existing heathland through the clearance of undesirable vegetation and the re-introduction of appropriate management; and to recreate heathland using locally sourced seed on former heathland or other suitable sites.

In Year 1 of the NIA we have undertaken projects at 2 key sites covering 6.5 hectares. Scrub, bramble, bracken and tall herb have been cleared from two heavily degraded areas of heathland at Rubery Hill in Birmingham and Brownhills Common in Walsall. We have also begun experimental turf stripping which will be monitored at individual sites and expanded accordingly.

We have already identified numerous future heathland restoration projects and potential linking creation sites, and are in the process of setting up a working group which will prioritise project identification and the securing of long-term grazing management.

In 2012-13 – 2 sites covering 6.5 hectares were enhanced.

Rubery Hill	1.5
Brownhills Common	5.0
2 sites	6.5 ha

4. Corridors – improving quality, linkage & bridging gaps.

Birmingham & the Black Country comprises a deeply fragmented landscape and therefore our blue (wetland) and green (terrestrial) habitat corridors are often key to species movement, site colonisation and population expansion. The focus of our Corridors Delivery Theme is therefore to improve the quality of our corridors and create links where gaps have been identified.

In Year 1 of the NIA we have undertaken projects at 10 sites covering 19.5 km of watercourses, hedgerows and avenues. For example, we've been working with the Environment Agency and local councils on a number of significant river naturalisation projects including the Platt Brook in Birmingham, where a heavily engineered and polluted channel running through an area of public open space has been de-silted, cleared of refuse, widened and meandered with the help of the local community.

We've also begun to enhance one of the conurbation's ecologically poorer canals through the introduction of planted-up coir roles to the hard bankside, whilst also planting thousands of nectar-rich shrubs and perennial herbs along the towpath edge. With the Canal & River Trust we've started to research using locally sourced and inexpensive coppice products from our Woodland Delivery Theme projects as an alternative to coir roles. Other corridor projects include several hedgerow restoration/creation projects, the restoration of an historic avenue of trees which link two important bat foraging sites, and the installation of bat boxes in a 2.7 km long canal tunnel in the heart of the Black Country.

In 2012-13 – 10 sites covering 19.5 kilometres were enhanced.

Platt Brook	1,300
Dudley River Stour & Brooks	
Kings Norton LNR	200
Moseley Bog	
Merrions Wood	300
Birmingham Mainline Canal	14,000
Quinton Meadows	125
Netherton Tunnel Bat Enhancements	2,700
Dartmouth Meadows	110
Park Hall	795
10 sites	19.5 km

5. Geology – linking geodiversity and biodiversity

Birmingham & the Black Country is world renowned for the diverse rocks which fed both the Industrial Revolution and the early science of geology. The focus of our geological Delivery Theme is to enhance geological sites whilst combining these with gains for wildlife, and to work towards the creation of a network of accessible geological sites which tell the story of Birmingham & the Black Country's millions of years of history.

In Year 1 of the NIA we have undertaken projects at 2 regionally important sites. At Rubery Cutting over 20 years of scrub growth was removed from this roadside cutting which exhibits a unique dip and strike section of the Rubery Formation – the earliest Silurian age deposits within the South Staffordshire Coalfield. At the Rowley Hills we cleared colonising scrub and bramble from the only accessible exposure of the large dolerite intrusion which comprises this landmark set of hills in the middle of the conurbation.

We have also secured funding for the first of a planned network of linked toposcope interpretation points which will interpret the geology, form, history and ecology of the NIA landscape, whilst also highlighting 'satellite' sites of interest which the user will be encouraged to visit.

In 2012-13 – 2 sites covering 0.25 hectares were enhanced.

Rubery Cutting	0.15
Rowley Hills	0.10
2 sites	0.25 ha

6. Community Engagement – involving people.

Birmingham & the Black Country has a population of over 2 million people, and it is key to the success of the Nature Improvement Area that there is widespread public awareness, engagement and involvement in the work of the partnership. The focus of the Community Engagement Delivery Theme is to ensure as many people as possible get involved with and benefit from the NIA, whether that's helping to design a project, volunteering to make it happen, or simply visiting a project with their community group or school class.

In Year 1 of the NIA we have involved hundreds of people with 29 of our projects. Many of the NIA partners are 'friends' groups who have been involved with the identification, design and delivery of projects which meet the priorities of the habitat-focused Delivery Themes. Examples include the Friends of Kings Norton LNR who have delivered a project which meets both Grassland and Corridor priorities; and the Castle Vale Meadow creation project where a local community group are working with the University of Wolverhampton and the Wildlife Trust.

We're also running projects which are explicitly working to target as yet unreached community groups and volunteers (such as the BOSF Community Engagement Programme), and are delivering projects such as Growing Local Flora (which is collecting seed and propagules from local sources for use in our biodiversity projects) with the help of volunteers, schools and community groups.

In 2012-13 – 29 projects involving hundreds of people were delivered.

BOSF Community Engagement Programme	100
Growing Local Flora	50
Walsall Bat Box Scheme	25
Scythes & The Shire	
4 projects	175 people