

Environmental Officer's Report – November 2009 to April 2010

The Middle Level IDB Biodiversity Action Plan

The production of an IDB BAP as required by the IDB Review process in conjunction with The Wildlife Trust, Cambridgeshire was the major feature of the period. The full BAP comprised a main document and provided individual plans for the 35 IDBs and DDCs in the Middle Level BAP Partnership plus one for the MLC main channels. The document was launched at an event on 24th March which included presentations on BAP features including bats, barn owls and black poplars. The main plan document is on the Middle Level web site and the individual board plans can be viewed on their respective IDB pages. The plan has been entered in the ADA BAP competition.

Habitat & Species Management

The ML Water Vole Support Project

The Middle Level Mink Control Scheme element of this project, funded by Biffaward, EA and Biodiversity Partnership, continued with three evening meetings organised to promote the scheme at Whittlesey, Upwell and Ramsey. 36 scheme members are currently operating 130 mink traps and regular successful controls are reported throughout the system.

Three new locations for the installation of pre-planted coir roll revetments are planned for this spring. A claim for repayment of costs from Biffaward for £6,623.38 was submitted. A further £20,000 remains to be spent on the aims of this project.

Sedge Plug Planting

A method of establishing a natural protective fringe at water margins where erosion is



occurring was trialled at three sites on the Forty Foot River between Childs Bridge and Puddock Bridge and one site on Well Creek near Marmont Priory Lock. The method aims to replicate channel margins where sedge has established itself naturally and provides a non-invasive protective curtain at the waters edge from the plants leaves and

stability to the soil at the toe via its root structure. A small 50cm ledge is formed with a hydraulic digger just above the summer water level and sedge plugs are planted in a staggered pattern at five per metre. Two different species of sedge are being tried, Greater

Pond Sedge, *Carex riparia* and Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis* to evaluate their effectiveness. A small number of native plants - Yellow Flag Iris, *Iris pseudacorus*, and Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria* plugs, are being interspersed among the sedge for insect habitat, diversity and colour at the water margin later in the season. The trial is funded partly by Water Vole Recovery Project and partly from the MLC banks maintenance budget. The aim is to add a further environmentally friendly management technique to the Operations Engineering options that provides a low cost 'stitch in time' method of ensuring that self-healing occurs at erosion points before more costly hard revetment methods are required. The method will be tried at other sites on the Middle Level system.

The ML Otter Recovery Project

To date 35 otter holts have been constructed on Middle Level waterways as part of this SITA, Environment Agency, Natural England and Biodiversity Partnership funded project. Of these, 23 have been built underground, five above ground, four are mini-holts, (half size) and three are combined holts and kingfisher sites.

The survey of 68 bridges over Middle Level rivers for otter spraint signs during November 2009 produced positive signs at 39 sites, giving a high 57% of bridges visited by otters.

A claim for £19,649.63 that recovered materials, travel and labour costs was submitted to SITA. A further £24,000 remains to be spent on the aims of this project.

Elver Pass at St Germans PS

The planned elver pass will be installed at the new Pumping Station after MLC have taken control of the site. The Environment Agency have supplied, (free of charge), sufficient substrate bristle boards for 35 metres of elver pass for installation at the station, valued at £3,500. A decision on the material for the trough that they will fit in will be taken when a similar EA pass is installed and viewable at Denver Sluice. Eels are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species.

Badger Management

Badger activity identified on the south bank of the Old Ham will probably require them to be excluded, (under NE licence after 15th July), to allow reinstatement of the bank.

Well Creek Water Margins Project

Regular cutting of the water margin on the west side of Well Creek has commenced for this project. Plans are in place to install pre-planted coir roll revetment and sedge plugs on the west side on a trial basis.

Publicity, Displays & Presentations

A display on the environmental work that MLC is carrying out was taken to Wicken Fen World Wetland Day event in February.

A presentation on 'Fund raising for Biodiversity Projects' was given to an IDB BAPs workshop at York in November. A presentation on 'Biodiversity and Water Management in the Middle Level, a Marriage made in Heaven?' was made jointly with Bill Ransom to

the Robson Meeting at St Ives in March and was well received. Talks on 'Management for Biodiversity on Middle Level Waterways' were given to Sutton Conservation Society in November, The Well Creek Trust in February and to the Cambridgeshire Local History Group during April.

The launch event for the Middle Level IDB BAP was covered by the Cambridgeshire Times and good publicity was generated.

Survey & Advisory

The original St Germans Pumping Station was assessed for measures to prevent birds nesting prior to demolition and netting and disturbance strategies were devised.



Machine operations were monitored to ensure compliance with environmental legislation Best Practise. Advice on a range of wildlife issues and legislation was given to IDB board members when requested.

Liaison and Communication

A third issue of 'The Natural Level' newsletter was produced and circulated during December 2009. It was also circulated by email to a range of organisations and contacts. MLC interests at meetings with a range of organisations including the Fenland Environmental Partnership, (Fenland District Council), Wetland Vision Group, (Natural England), Water for Wildlife Group, Eastern Region Mink Control Group, Ouse Washes Strategy Group, Cambs & P'bro Biodiversity Partnership and Cambridgeshire Mammal Group in addition to attendance at ML Users and Conservation Committee meetings.

Training

A conference on Fish and Eel Passes around channel structures was attended in Oxford in March. A Canadian canoe training morning at Mepal Outdoor Centre was arranged for volunteers taking part in the Ransonmoor and Curf Fen Water Vole Survey during April.

Cliff Carson
Environmental Officer