

**Middle Level Commissioners Meeting 30/04/15**

**Environmental Officer's Report - October 2014 to April 2015**

**IDB Biodiversity Action Plan Support and Implementation**

Progress with the Biodiversity Action Plan targets continued. Current situation - Barn owl boxes installed 91 (target 90), bat boxes erected 84 (target 80), black poplars planted 87 (target 84), kingfisher holes drilled 97 at 53 sites (target 91 sites). Further black poplar planting and kingfisher hole drilling is required to complete targets in specific districts.



*A kingfisher hole drilled on the Old River Nene near Ransmoor Pumping Station.*



*Black poplar planted at Bluntisham IDB.*



*A bat box being checked by licenced bat expert Maurice Webber.*

**Water Vole Conservation & Mitigation/ Coir roll bank protection**

A water vole mitigation plan was devised and agreed with Natural England for a piled moorings improvement scheme on the Highlode at Ramsey. The mitigation work, which involved the installation of 200 meters of pre-planted coir rolls on the opposite bank to the proposed moorings, was carried out under contract during March.

Sixty meters of coir rolls were also installed on the Old River Nene near Engine Farm Pumping Station.

Advice and guidance on water vole mitigation measures was given to board members on a displacement to accommodate ditch modifications in Warboys, Pidley & Somersham District.



*Coir roll installed as improved water vole habitat at Ramsey Highlode.*



*A new ditch with shelves designed to develop into replacement water vole habitat at Colne Fen.*

### **Mink Control Scheme**

The Middle Level Mink Control Scheme continues to operate with traps being made available for loan and small numbers are caught at sites throughout the catchment.

### **Otter Project**

Daytime sightings of otters have been reported at several locations during the period including Well Creek, the Twenty Foot and the Middle Level Main Drain. Signs of use are also frequently recorded at constructed holts and bridge sites. Three otter road casualty otters were collected and passed on for post mortem.

An otter holt was installed on the Counterdrain beside the Nene Washes in conjunction with the Environment Agency during March, the 79<sup>th</sup> holt constructed as part of the Middle Level Otter Project.

### **Badger management**

Badger exclusions were carried out under licence at three sites in the catchment and the holes collapsed during November 2014. Badger activity has recently been noted alongside the Black Ham west of Herbert's Bridge and on Monks Lode east and west of Conington Bridge. Displacement licences will be utilised at the sites as necessary after the July commencement date.

### **Eel and elver passage**

The elver and eel passage at St Germans Pumping Station ended during December 2014 with a total of 91,500 recorded weighing 118 kilograms.

The elver passage did not start as early at St Germans Pumping Station as it did in 2014 and signs of the first elvers there were still awaited at mid-March.

Two sites have been identified for passability under the Eels Regulations, (Bevill's Leam Pumping Station and St Germans PS). Proposals regarding Bevill's Leam PS are being discussed with EA. Trials to establish that eels can pass through St Germans pumps unscathed will be carried out during October 2015 by the Fisheries Division of the Environment Agency. Separately, at Salters Lode Locks, entry for elvers and escapement for silver eels is being provided by targeted lock gate openings during key periods.

### **Non-native Invasive Species**

The two non-native invasive plant species, New Zealand Pgymyweed *Crassula helmsii* and Parrots Feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum* discovered in a March Fifth DDC drains near Creek Road, March were treated with Roundup and submerged material removed and buried in 2014. A small amount of both species was found to be present in March 2015 so further control action will be continued to eradicate both plants and prevent their further spread into the main drains of the Middle Level system.

Both species were later found to be present in a housing estate pond in Elm. I met the pond owners, Keir Homes and advised them on a course of action for eradication which they are following which includes herbicide treatment followed by re-lining the pond with Bentonite.

### **Operations Manual Review**

The creation of a summary version of the current Operations Manual for publishing on the MLC web site is in progress and will be completed soon.

### **Presentations, Talks, Training and Publicity**

The annual Middle Level IDB Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership Meeting was once again held on at the Oliver Cromwell Hotel, March on Wednesday 3rd December 2014 and 44 people attended.

Presentations were given on Reptiles in the Fens, Creating winter roost sites for bats and Fenland roddons.



Speakers, attendees and Chairman at the Middle Level IDB Biodiversity Action Plan meeting in December 2014.



Nicholas Gibbons delivering an interesting presentation on creating winter roost sites for bats.

The date for next year's BAP meeting is the morning of **Wednesday 2nd December 2015**. It is open to any members, staff or ratepayers of IDB boards with interests in wildlife, the history of the Fens or water management topics.

Opportunities to communicate the positive work of the IDBs and MLC in conservation and biodiversity were taken during the period by giving presentations at March and Chatteris libraries, Burwell History Society and Friends of Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Welney.

For the fourth year a two-part course on Identifying Otter and Water Vole Field Signs was run. On 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April it comprised an evening session in the MLC Boardroom looking at images of the two species and was followed by a Saturday morning field trip to look at examples in local drains and ditches. The 25 places on the first course were quickly taken up so a second pair of dates were organised for the following week on 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April. 55 people attended the training days.

Press articles about the Otter and Water Vole Field Signs courses appeared in the Eastern Daily Press and the Cambridgeshire Times during April.



Some of the 55 attendees on the courses on Identifying Otter and Water Vole Field Signs.

**Cliff Carson**  
**Environmental Officer**  
**20/04/15**