

Biodiversity Matters



Issue 8

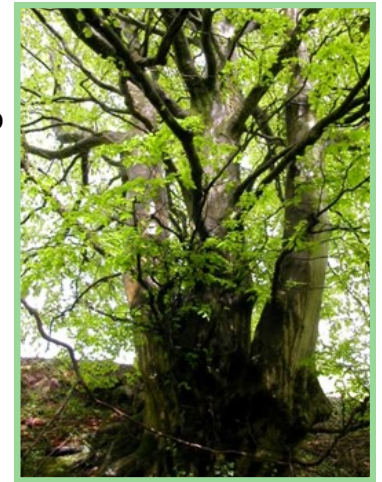
DEFA's Biodiversity News

July 2015

The Manx Biodiversity Strategy, Managing Our Natural Wealth 2015-2025.

DEFA Biodiversity Officers have been working on this Strategy with the Minister of the Environment Food and Agriculture, Richard Ronan MHK, the Manx Nature Conservation Forum and the UK which is the Contracting Party to the CBD. They reviewed the commitments in the strategy, the resources and the timescales. As a result it is now a 10 year strategy, to 2025. This recognises the Convention on Biological Diversity's 2020 targets but provides the Island with a longer term strategy. The delivery will be through partnership, and the Manx Nature Conservation Forum will have a key role. There will be an explanatory colour leaflet printed and circulated to accompany the full strategy (which will be on the DEFA website). It is hoped that the Strategy will be adopted by Tynwald in the autumn.

Liz Charter



Assessing change in the Ballaugh Curraghs

Tom Penberthy, a student from the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University came over in July to carry out fieldwork for his dissertation. Tom is looking at the changes in vegetation of the mire in the Ballaugh Curragh. He did three transects right across the Curragh looking at vegetation composition, height and density. He was supported by Dr Philippa Tomlinson whilst on the island and his travel for the field work was funded by the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society.



Tom undertaking fieldwork
© Philippa Tomlinson

Tom has now gone back armed with a sequence of aerial photographs spanning ten years and maps covering the last 140 years and he will also use infra-red satellite images to analyse the vegetation.

This visit came out of Philippa's week at Aberystwyth as part of the Habitat Mapping Remote Sensing Project earlier this year, when she worked with Environment Systems Ltd and discussed potential projects in the University. It is hoped that some of Tom's results will feed back into the remote sensing work.

Philippa Tomlinson



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Homes to help wildlife on the DEFA Estate

Staff from the Forestry, Amenity and Lands Directorate have worked collaboratively with local nature conservation organisations to provide homes for wildlife on the DEFA Estate.

Members of the Manx Bat Group constructed "Kent" style bat boxes from timber supplied by the DEFA sawmill. So far eight boxes have been put up in the Colden Plantation and ten in the South Barrule Plantation. More boxes have been made and will be erected over the next few months.

The DEFA sawmill also supplied the Manx Ringing Group with timber to construct spotted-flycatcher and tit nest boxes for the glens. Spotted-flycatcher suffered an 86% decline in its breeding population between 1967 and 2006 and are now red-listed in the UK. They are a priority species for conservationists and habitat managers.



Spotted Flycatcher © Pete Hadfield

Wildlife watchers must ensure they know the law before setting out



© Louise Samson

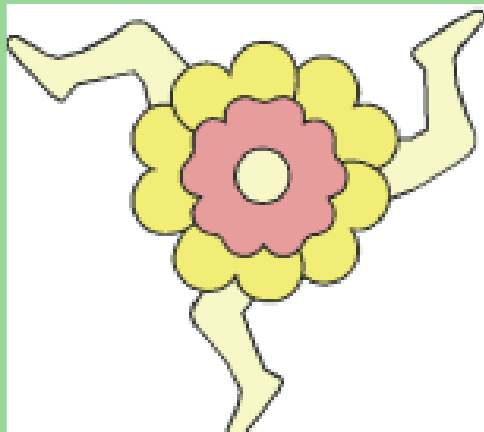
All birds, their nests, eggs and chicks are legally protected under the Wildlife Act 1990. The protection starts when the adults start building or using a nest until the young birds are independent and no longer relying on the adults to provision them with food. Some bird species are listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Act and this means that they are protected from disturbance while nesting. DEFA have produced a leaflet to inform bird watchers and wildlife photographers on Manx wildlife law. The leaflet includes information on the different protection levels given to different areas on the Isle of Man, for example under the Ayres National Nature Reserve byelaws all birds are protected from disturbance at all times. In addition the leaflet lists all of the species on Schedule 1; as well as birds of prey, whinchat, spotted flycatcher and song thrush are included amongst many others. The leaflet is available at http://www.gov.im/media/1052558/bird_code_2013.pdf and further information and help can be provided by DEFA Biodiversity Officers and Wardens.

Louise Samson

Wildflower conservation and quality of life

The Wildflowers of Mann is a Manx Government sponsored project which has seen changes over the years and is currently supported by the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture and the Department of Infrastructure, with significant funding also coming from consultancy work, a successful growing area in the last year which contributes towards the eventual aim of self-funding. With the budgetary belts being hitched ever tighter, here we take a quick look at why the government supports this project.

Wildflowers of Mann



The DEFA looks after a large estate and has responsibility for the protection of endangered plants and habitats and the DoI has interests in the good governance of rights of way and considering the wildlife effects of its developments and conservation on its own estate. Both have interests in planning successful working and living environments for our communities and there is increasing recognition of the broad health and community benefits of projects such as the Ramsey Forest Project and other communal space projects.

The Wildflowers of Mann encourages the production, protection and good management of Manx habitats, benefiting wildlife conservation through the protection of plant biodiversity and local, Manx genetic strains. Residents gain from an attractive environment, encouraging recreational and health benefits, an appreciation of natural beauty, and local pride in their natural heritage. The result is an environment that is attractive to tourists and residents alike and encouraging to businesses interested in the high Manx quality of life.

In terms of the Council of Ministers "Agenda for Change" published in 2012, under Environment and Infrastructure this links with our quality of life and the sustainable use of natural resources, promotion of the value and utilisation of our amenity, cultural and landscape resources and the encouragement of sustainable economic activity in harmony with our natural resources. With regard to Welfare Reform and Wellbeing there is a well-researched and recognised link between access to green space and the maintenance of good bodily and mental health and therefore productivity. With regard to Protection of the Vulnerable the environment is vulnerable to economic pressures but this project provides a resource that can be used to guide habitat change towards a sustainable line that protects the natural plant resource for future generations.

More specifically the project provides:

- An advisory service on the good management, propagation and development of wildflower areas to the general public, business and farming communities.
- An educational service through the production of literature, talks, interpretation material and demonstration sites.
- A source of seed and plant stocks that is available for general sale and supply to the public, farmers, the business community and the government.

The DoI benefits specifically from advice on green lanes, sensitive/conservation verges and airfield management and habitat creation in quarries. The DEFA benefits from the rescue and protection of rare and threatened plants, the production of native wildflowers using local genetic resources, dub conservation work, coordination of volunteer work for the New Manx Flora Project and surveys of important sites and species, including the recognition of ancient woodland remnants. There has been a changing emphasis in recent years and the Ramsey Forest Project fits well with the forestry and biodiversity aims of the Forestry Amenity and Lands Directorate, in addition to community and health benefits of interest to the wider government and the Ramsey and Lezayre Commissioners. The resource of a local botanist may also become increasingly important with ongoing staff reduction. With regard to the Convention on Biodiversity, the Project leads on action plans on woodland and mine-quarry habitats and is involved with the flora and wetlands groups. Both departments also benefit from the continued running of the Wildlife Sites Project, whilst it remains in a minimal operating status, until funding becomes available to further this work.

Recent successes include the creation of bladderwort pools in Ballaugh Curragh, the discovery of native water lilies and rare ferns at new sites and the production of Supporting Rare Flowers, detailing changes in abundance and conservation work undertaken. In 2014 three new woodlands were planted, 6 new

meadows created, an eco-garden, an upland juniper thicket and a large thicket/hedgerow area and only 3 days a week are currently funded (including consultancy work). In my view, the project achieves quite a high impact for a relatively small cost.

Bill Henderson MHK states, 'As Chairman of the Wildflowers of Mann Project since its inception in 2000, I am extremely proud of the project achievements as illustrated by Dr. Selman. The project is particularly indebted to its hard-working manager Andree Dubbeldam without who's efforts none of this would have been possible'.

Richard Selman



Wood Vetch
© Andree
Dubbeldam

Elm Tree with Dutch Elm Disease © Jimmy Lee



Dutch Elm disease conference

In June Dr Philippa Tomlinson represented DEFA at an international seminar in Brighton about *Ulmus* trees and gave a paper entitled Elms on the Isle of Man: an island response to Dutch Elm disease, with information provided by Jimmy Lee from the Forestry, Amenity and Lands

Directorate. Though the trip was not funded by She was accompanied by Dr Peter Davey who also gave a paper on recent genetic research into the Island's non-native elm populations, the results of which are due to be published soon. The Isle of Man Government funded the initial DNA research.

The seminar was organised by the Conservation Foundation which supports the *Ulmus* Maritime project www.ulmusmaritime.org. There were talks on disease prevention; the development of disease-resistant elms; projects in Amsterdam and Brighton to curb the disease, protect trees and promote elms; a study of butterfly species dependant on elms; as well as surveys of rare species in several countries and a register of significant trees in the British Isles www.treeresister.org.

Philippa Tomlinson

Gibraltar conference of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

This July biodiversity NGOs, government officers and Ministers from the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies met at the invitation of the Gibraltar Government. The theme of the conference was Sustaining Partnerships. The island was represented at the Conference by Minister Richard Ronan, DEFA CEO Richard Lole, Principal Biodiversity Officer Liz Charter and Senior Biodiversity Officer Marine, Dr Fiona Gell. Liz is also the Chairman of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, an organisation which provides assistance in the form of expertise, information and liaison between non-governmental organisations and governments, both in the UK and in the Territories themselves (including the Crown Dependencies). The Ministerial meeting was very valuable according to Minister Ronan and Richard Lole. Liz Charter presented a paper and organised a workshop on Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the sign-up process (jointly with Defra and the South Georgia Government). Fiona Gell contributed a paper on the stakeholder involvement on Manx Marine Protected Areas.

Liz Charter



Liz Charter with Dr Joseph Garcia
the Deputy Chief Minister of Gibraltar
© Gibraltar Government Press Office

Publications

Following the flurry of interest in false widow spiders, reported in the last edition of Biodiversity Matters, a summary of the issues and the Manx species has been published by the Isle of Man Natural History & Antiquarian Society: see Selman, RG (2014-15). False widow spiders on the Isle of Man, with records of two new species. *Isle of Man Studies* XIII, 25-28.

Harlequin ladybirds spotted

In November 2014, Andrew Qualtrough found harlequin ladybirds whilst gardening in a coastal property in Santon. This is the second time that this invasive species has been recorded on the Isle of Man and the first time that larvae have been found. The first record was in 2009, inside a house, following a trip to the UK by the owner, and no more were found in the vicinity.

Though not a 'notifiable pest' there has been abundant press coverage of the potential for damage to native ladybird species and in an island situation there is potential for preventing establishment. Harlequins have been used for pest control, to great effect, but their varied diet, voraciousness and relatively large size allow them to target not only aphids but aphid predators such as native ladybirds. This is worth monitoring and controlling whilst this remains practical, so please report any harlequin ladybirds that you find, to DEFA or the Manx Museum.

Richard Selman



Bird trends contract extended

The DEFA contract to provide trends in breeding bird populations has been extended for two years following a further review, with work undertaken by Manx Birdlife, to report on population trends in 2016. This will allow a full comparison with the Manx Bird Atlas following 10 years of survey data. Robust evidence changes should then be available and these will be published.

An annual report has been provided to DEFA (with a one year gap), showing breeding bird trends, and each year the number of species that can be assessed with confidence has increased. The data is valuable for assessing not only conservation issues but also for assessing and dealing with issues caused by wildlife-human interactions.

A saving has been made in 2015 by dropping the reporting requirement, as a full report on the 10 years of data will be provided in 2016-17. Any future contract will be subject to a full review of data requirements and the availability of funds.

Richard Selman

Ringed Plover © Sophie Costain

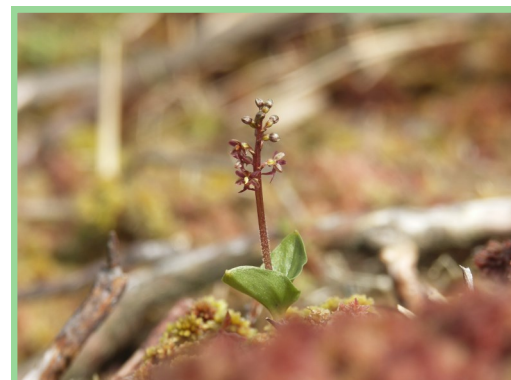


Lesser Twayblades

Lesser Twayblades have been found around the Round Table. Discovered by Shaun Gelling on the 23rd June 2015 this is one of only three sites where they have been found on the Isle of Man.

Lesser Twayblades are a species of Orchid and though not as spectacular looking as Common Spotted Orchid and Heath Spotted Orchid, it is rarer and its distribution much more limited. Not to be confused with the Common Twayblade which is at home in woods and grassland, the Lesser Twayblade favours upland moors, bogs and pinewoods. Only growing up to around 10cm high they are easily overlooked, especially as they are often found growing underneath heather.

As a member of the orchid family, Lesser Twayblades are protected under Schedule 7 of the Wildlife Act 1990



Lesser Twayblade
© Andree Dubbeldam

Sophie Costain

Ayres National Nature Reserve

A late spring, exceptionally high tides due to the current proximity of the sun and the earth and the effects of an El Niño year have not gone unnoticed on the NNR.

April saw an unusually high number of ring ouzel being seen and photographed in the Ballaghennie area. Ring ouzel are in the thrush family; they overwinter in south and north Africa and the Middle East. The birds seen at Ballaghennie would have been returning to their summer breeding grounds in the uplands of Scotland and Ireland and stopped off at the Ayres to rest and feed up before continuing their journey.

A reasonable number of whimbrel, osprey, cuckoo, and wheatears were also seen on passage and a rare treat was a male yellow wagtail seen at Rue Point. Other unusual sightings over the summer have included 70 knot flying past the Point of Ayre on the 19th June, ten black-tailed godwits flying past the Point on the 18th July, a great crested grebe off Rue Point on the 18th July and a hobby at Rue Point on the 20th July. Stock dove, lapwing and chough have all been seen more regularly and in increasing numbers on the NNR this year.



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Ring Ouzel

A 100m spit and large lagoon developed at Rue Point this spring and this has provided a popular roosting and feeding habitat for many birds. Cormorants, herring gull, lesser-black backed gull, common gull and black-headed gull are regularly seen resting on the spit. Flocks of oystercatcher and curlew are growing in size as the summer progresses and flocks of dunlin, sanderling and ringed plover feeding around the lagoon are increasing daily. Redshank are also seen regularly feeding in this area.

At least 50 pairs of little tern bred on the reserve this year and these are a high conservation priority for the NNR because of their scarcity throughout the British Isles. Despite having good numbers of adults they have not fared well and the main culprit has been hedgehogs eating their eggs, but high tides flooding the nests and crows have also been a problem. To date only three chicks have fledged. The Manx Ringing Group continues to colour ring little terns. A little tern ringed with the unique identity AAI on the NNR in 2014 was sighted at the Tanji Bird Reserve, Bijol Islands, Gambia on the 5th March 2015 and on the 30th April Sean Gray photographed AAD at Rue Point. AAD was metal ringed as a chick at The Breaches, Kilcoole, Wicklow, Ireland on the 25/06/2004 and bred on the Ayres NNR in 2014 when the colour ring was added.

At least 37 pairs of Arctic terns have nested between the NNR and the Point of Ayre. Although they have suffered extremely high egg predation by rats enough have hatched to ensure that a reasonable number will fledge. So far 7 chicks have fledged and there are still good sized chicks on the beach that should fledge over the next week.

The NNR has an exceptionally high density of nesting ringed plover which are often overlooked. As with the little terns these suffered from hedgehogs and crows eating their eggs and the high tides. Approximately 5% of chicks that hatched have made it to fledging. Fifty-one clutches of oystercatcher eggs have been recorded between Blue Point and the Point of Ayre and most of these have hatched successfully and at least of a third of chicks hatched have gone on to fledge. At least ten pairs of curlew bred on NNR this year and many of these raised chicks successfully.



The Ayres Visitor Centre, run by the Manx Wildlife Trust, was refurbished in spring and has new information boards and a short video on the Ayres. The visitor centre is run by volunteers and is open from 2pm to 5pm Tuesdays to Sundays from late May to the end of September. Many thanks to everyone who volunteers on the NNR and for contributing important wildlife sightings.



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Little Tern

For information on the NNR, or if you would like to get involved with wildlife monitoring, or volunteering on the NNR/DEFA estate please contact Louise Samson on 365131.

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UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man

Another important DEFA initiative for biodiversity and sustainability is the Biosphere project.

The nomination paper is to be submitted for a Biosphere site which covers all the island's land and sea.

The proposal recognises the special quality of our island environment and community. We already care for our habitats and species and this will be guided in future by the Biodiversity Strategy which complements this initiative. We are working towards greater sustainability and understanding of climate change implications. There has been valuable consultation over how the three Biosphere zones on land and in the sea will work. If successful the Island could be the first entire jurisdiction to be recognised under the Man and Biosphere programme.

For up to date news about the project go to www.biosphere.im or UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man facebook page.



Liz Charter

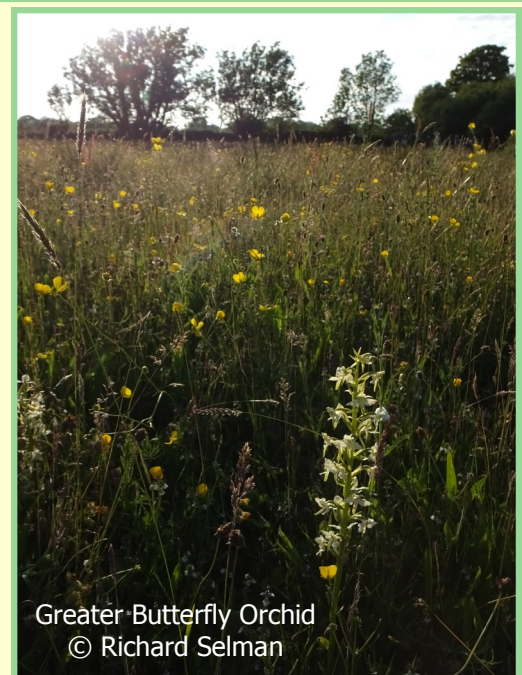
Ballachurry Meadows ASSI wildflower walk

In June 2015 DEFA led a public walk on an Area of Special Scientific Interest in the centre of the northern plain, with support from the Wildflowers of Mann, the landowner Johnny Crellin and the tenant Bryan Radcliffe.

The ASSI is designated for its large proportion of species rich and agriculturally unimproved lowland grassland which is a mixture of fairly dry hay meadows and very wet, sedge-rich meadows on glacial deposits.

Flowers seen during the walk included Greater Butterfly Orchid, Northern Marsh Orchid, Common Spotted Orchid and Heath Spotted Orchid and their hybrids, Yellow Rattle, Eyebright, Marsh Marigold, Lesser Spearwort, Selfheal, Whorled Caraway and Carnation Sedge. Other species seen/heard included Common Frog, Curlew, Song Thrush & a female Great Diving Beetle.

The walk was a great success with 36 people in attendance and the Department hopes to organise further guided walks on different ASSI's in the future, providing access to some special but private sites and explain the ongoing process of site assessment and designation.



Greater Butterfly Orchid
© Richard Selman

Sophie Costain

Aggressive gulls

In the June-July period there are always queries regarding aggressive gulls nesting in towns and the problems often arise when the young wander from a rooftop nest and fall to ground level. The adults then protect a relatively small area around the young, but this frequently includes gardens and streets, with the adults swooping on passers-by. So what can be done to relieve the issue?

In the interests of public safety there is a general licence (see gov.im) and the following actions are allowed where there is a public safety issue, provided here in the order of consideration:

1. return the chick carefully to the nest area;
2. move the chick to a nearby place taking care that the adults follow and they continue to care for the chick;
3. remove the chick if the above are not practicable (the MSPCA may take them in this case, or they could be destroyed).

The adults will then cease their aggression.

Where aggressive gulls are protecting a rooftop or ground-level nest and giving rise to a public safety issue then the nest can be removed (to a safer position or completely). This should be followed by gull-proofing the site against future nesting to avoid a reoccurrence. This licence does not cover actions where there is no public safety issue. Note, there is no government service for such work, but private contractors are available.



Herring Gull © Richard Selman

Architects should take account of the issue and in problem areas design out the sheltered corners and flat roofs that encourage gull nesting. Feeding gulls is also discouraged as they are piratical by nature and bad habits can be formed easily. Herring gulls are, though, declining in population both in the IoM and the UK and have therefore been red-listed, though remaining a numerous species.

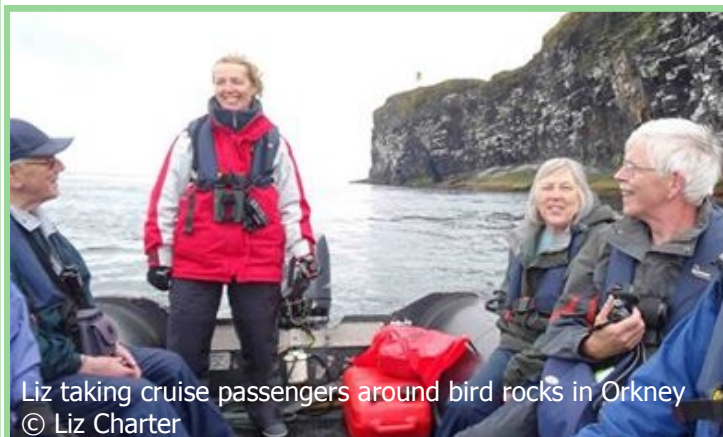
Richard Selman



Farewell to Liz Charter—Principal Biodiversity Officer (Strategy and Advocacy)

Liz Charter came to the Isle of Man with her family in 1998 to establish the Wildlife and Conservation Office. She came from Orkney where she worked with farmers for 10 years and had extensive experience of Agri-environment Schemes. The appeal of the job was that a Manx Agri-environment Scheme was required and the pilot scheme was launched in 2002. During her term with DAFF and then DEFA she built up a team which became a directorate in 2004, with 7 full time and contract officers in 2009. Protected site designation was progressed, including the Ballaugh Curragh Ramsar site of international importance in 2006. She was instrumental in establishing the Marine Spatial

Planning Group with officers from the DoT and DoLGE in 2006. The Manx Nature Conservation Forum was established in 2009. The Convention on Biological Diversity was extended to the Island in 2012 with public and political support. Her most recent task was drafting and obtaining agreement for the first Biodiversity Strategy, Managing Our Natural Wealth 2015-2025. Liz leaves to take up ecological consultancy work, assist the Overseas Territories, drive Zodiacs for a cruise company and show people wildlife. She plans to stay on the island.



Liz taking cruise passengers around bird rocks in Orkney
© Liz Charter