Options for Local Biodiversity Management in Protected Areas: The Case of Bulgaria

Plenary III Biodiversity Action Plans in Scotland: an example of local co-ordination and communication of conservation issues

Peter Dennis [25' talk, 35' discussion]

Historical

Conservation strategy prior to 1992 followed the "last of the least, best of the rest" strategy common to many industrialised nations whilst a majority of land was managed for increased efficiency of, predominantly, agricultural or forestry production. Land was either purchased by conservation agencies, or more commonly designated, whilst remaining under private ownership. The designations were usually of small areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest; SSSIs) and a number of problems were encountered:

1) Continuity of management was disrupted and target species often suffered extinction or population decline.
2) Landowners could threaten Potentially Damaging Operations (PDOs) that could only be prevented by compensation for lost income. Conservation agencies could not compensate in all cases due to limited public funds despite the fact that many land-owners had no real intention of carrying through PDOs.
3) The management of land around SSSIs continued along commercial lines and aspects of the economic management impinged on the state of the nature reserves (e.g., eutrophication).
4) SSSIs were often too small an area to support all target species and the partial designation of local networks of habitats led to the loss of critical elements as they succumbed to intensive land use.
5) This strategy gave no attention to widespread habitats and species that formerly co-existed with traditional land uses. High profile publicity of declines in hedgerows, ancient woodlands and farmland birds created pressure to implement a broader, holistic conservation strategy.

The period after the UK became a signatory to the Rio Convention on Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (1992) initiated a shift in policy and the initial development of a UK-wide Biodiversity strategy (Department of Environment, 1994). A year later, the UK Steering Group published the first National Biodiversity Action Plan (UK Biodiversity Steering Group, 1995ab) and Local Authorities were given responsibility for developing Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) to address the status of habitats and species represented locally. It is this approach and organisational structure that will be illustrated today, with the purpose of highlighting aspects that have general applicability.

Setting Local Priorities for LBAPs

The National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) comprised habitats and species that were either internationally or nationally rare or threatened. The first were broad habitat statements, with some detailed Habitat Action Plans for Priority Habitats (UK Biodiversity Steering Group, 1995b). These plans were primarily strategic in nature, although later refinements increased the number of habitats and species included and recommended specific gross changes in the area or quality of habitat or the population sizes of species, after a given period (UK Biodiversity Group, 1999). The delivery of the NBAP was not easily achieved because it was too general to define specific deliverable actions for local areas. Furthermore, the stakeholders (participants) tended to be representatives of National

Government and Non-Government Organisations with specific strategic interests in land management for various objectives (Forestry Commission, English Nature, SNH, CCW, Agricultural Departments, Environment Departments, landowner and farming representatives). Delivery on the ground has been dependent on a partnership of individuals and organisations agreeing specific actions for a defined locality. However, devolving the responsibility to Local Authorities provided the current UK Biodiversity Group and UK Biodiversity partnership with a means of delivering and implementing LBAPs but has led to compromises, for two basic reasons:

1. resources are limited and the drafting and implementation of plans has depended upon voluntary effort, the existence of local sources of data on the status of species and habitats, and external sources of funding relevant to the management recommended in a given plan.
2. local stakeholders with motivation to contribute to the process often have different priorities than at the national level, and hence the local priorities tend to reflect the individuals/ organisations that contribute time to the local groups.

Hence, the compromises have led to the piecemeal development of local versions of NBAPs and the acceptance of a dilution of effort by the inclusion of Local Habitat and Species Action Plans (LHAPs and LSAPs) that reflect local in addition to national/international priorities. This has been further formalised by the inclusion of local priorities, specifically for LHAPs, on lists for regional implementation of agri-environment schemes that involve habitat creation or restoration. Such schemes are commonly the sole financial incentive for delivery of LHAPs, at least in pre-dominantly agricultural areas.

Production of Local Habitat Action Plan

I will describe the process by which a habitat is selected and an action plan drafted and published under current procedures using examples from North East Scotland and Cairngorms Partnership areas. There are currently 160 LBAPs published in Great Britain as a result of this process, and the major hurdles to the drafting and implementation of the LBAPs are slowly being resolved by further national initiatives. The lack of scientific information is being addressed by expert scientific knowledge (UK Biodiversity Research Working Group, 2001). Information on the distribution and abundance of priority habitats and species is being collated by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

The process of developing a Biodiversity Action Plan in NE Scotland (refer to Fig. 1) began with the commissioning by the Scottish Biodiversity Group of an audit of habitats and species represented in the region (Alexander et al., 1998). Since then a bundle of LBAPs have been published (North East Biodiversity Steering Group, 2000) and additional plans are being developed each year. Volunteers within the Habitat and Species Action Plan sub-committee adopt a habitat from the local or national priority list and proceed to draft an action plan following a standard template and using all available information. Once drafted, the sub-committee review the document, suggest changes and request that the Local Biodiversity Officer forms a thematic working group of all local stakeholders in the selected habitat with two major purposes. Firstly, to raise further comments and additional information about the status and threats to the habitat to include in the LHAP and secondly, to secure the commitment of the participants to take responsibility for implementing one or more actions within the LHAP. The example of the development of a LHAP for Wet and Riparian Woodland is given to illustrate the process and demonstrate the specific action points that emerge from the process.

Biodiversity Information

The NBN is using a national network of Local Record Centres (LRCs) to gather, collate and validate any form of available information on wildlife species and habitats held by Government and Non-Government Organisations or members of the public who are amateur

experts for specific taxa. There is a process of digitally recording data from old notebooks and record cards in order to obtain the best information from existing data, however obscure the source. This information will be supplemented by commissioned surveys where it is apparent there is a deficiency in the information for particular habitats or species. This would normally be in response to a particular requirement for audit of the status of habitats and species initiated by the Local Biodiversity Group or Local Biodiversity Officer.

Summing-up

1. The process attempts to capture "local" interest and voluntary effort to conserve and enhance biodiversity in a broad range of contexts.
2. The system is slow due to the limited availability of resources and to a lesser extent, data on the status of habitats and species in the countryside, and experts able to list realistic means of delivering a restoration of habitats or recovery of population of species.
3. The process is generally achievable but requires a central source of freely accessible biodiversity data.

References

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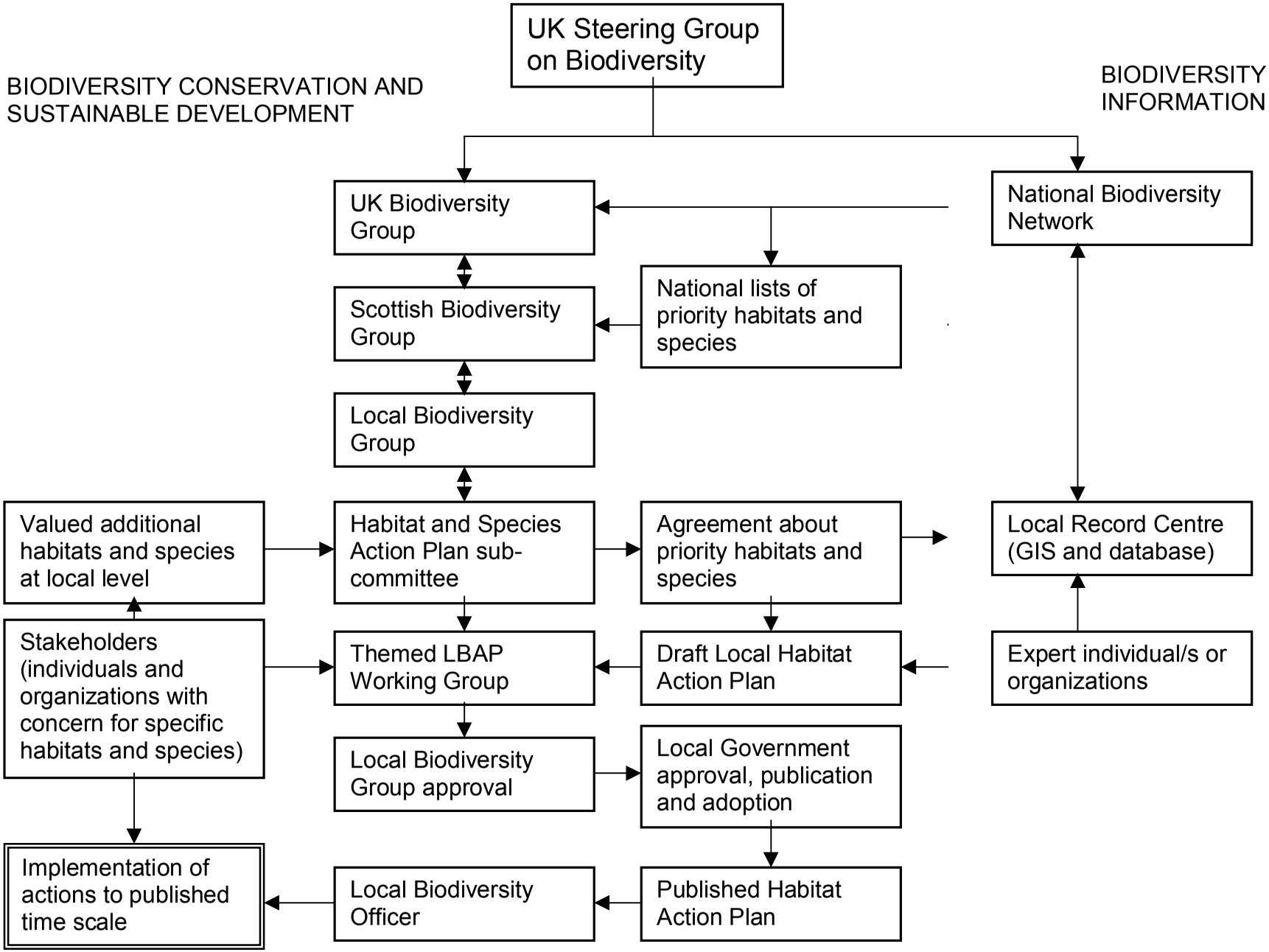
Figure 1. Flow chart demonstrating the national to local organisation for the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the local system of recruiting stakeholders into the drafting and implementation phases.


UK Steering Group on Biodiversity
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION
UK Biodiversity Group
National Biodiversity Network
Scottish Biodiversity Group
National lists of priority habitats and species
Local Biodiversity Group
Valued additional habitats and species at local level
Habitat and Species Action Plan sub-committee
Agreement about priority habitats and species
Local Record Centre (GIS and database)
Stakeholders (individuals and organizations with concern for specific habitats and species)
Themed LBAP Working Group
Draft Local Habitat Action Plan
Expert individual/s or organizations
Local Biodiversity Group approval
Local Government approval, publication and adoption
Implementation of actions to published time scale
Local Biodiversity Officer
Published Habitat Action Plan