

**UK PROGRAMME BOARD FOR NON-NATIVE SPECIES
THIRD MEETING**

**VIRTUAL
13 APRIL 2022, 13:00 – 15:00**

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Attendance / apologies

Present:

Richard Pullen (Defra) – Chair
Niall Moore (NNSS) - Secretary
Matthew Bird (Scottish Government)
Olaf Booy (NNSS)
Richard Gray (DAERA – NI)
Leasa Fielding (Welsh Government)
Emilie Hall (Defra - Marine)
Rebecca Isted (FC)
Theresa Kudelska (NRW)
Jo Long (SEPA)
Christine Maggs (JNCC)
Gavin Measures (NE)
Mark Preston (DAERA – NI)
Trevor Renals (Environment Agency)
Nicola Spence (Defra, Plant Health)
Kath Webster (APHA)
Sarah Webster (Defra)
Stan Whitaker (NatureScot)

Iain Henderson (APHA) – Item 4 only
Elias Scheuermann (Defra) – Item 6 only

Apologies:

Mark Diamond (EA) – replaced by Trevor Renals
Colin Edwards (Scottish Forestry)
Nicholas Greenwood (MMO)
Bill MacDonald (Welsh Government)
Peter Pollard (SEPA) - replaced by Jo Long
Neil Riddle (Forestry Commission) – replaced by Rebecca Isted
Des Thompson (NatureScot) – replaced by Stan Whitaker

2. Minutes of meeting on 1 October 2021

Paper circulated (PB Apr 22-02)

The minutes were signed off with no modifications.

3. Actions / matters arising

Paper circulated (PB Apr 22-03)

All actions were discharged.

The Board agreed that a new carp risk assessment should be drafted. Olaf will take this forward with colleagues in NE and EA. Trevor noted that the new assessment should not include policy comments.

ACTION 1: Olaf to take forward a new risk assessment for common carp.
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4. Inspectorate update

Paper circulated (PB Apr 22-04)

Niall introduced this paper, providing the background, summarising some of its key points and noting priorities for future work.

The Board welcomed the report, commended the inspectorate on its efforts, agreed priorities for future work and approved the recommendations of the paper. The following points were discussed:

- Lack of powers is clearly a problem. To address this, we need to make the best use of existing powers (including Species Control Orders, Community Protection Notices, etc); however, there will still be gaps (e.g. stopping and inspecting boats and anglers at the UK Border). In England, Defra is already exploring legislative opportunities to address this. However, that will not cover Scotland and may not cover Wales so it will be important to consider how to address powers across GB.
- Rebecca flagged that the inspectorate needs to ensure it continues to build links and share intelligence with PHSI and engage with forestry inspectors.
- Theresa noted that NRW is keen for the inspectorate to engage with NRW's regulatory team. Niall and Iain responded that the inspectorate has been attempting to engage with NRW's regulatory team (since at least January) but NRW has not been able to find a time to meet. Theresa also stated that the priority of the inspectorate should be to set up processes and asked about the governance of the inspectorate, including its relationship with the Board (reporting lines, etc) and asked whether the inspectorate should be reporting directly to the Board. The Board noted this is something to consider as the inspectorate's work develops.
- The Board agreed that the inspectorate will remain a pilot for the next 12 months.
- Leasa noted that there needs to be more joined up working with agencies and the police in Wales. Iain noted that in England he has had contact with

individual forces and the National Wildlife Crime Unit, but feedback has been that the police forces do not have resources to make invasive species a priority. However, police forces in Wales appear to be more engaged. Defra Investigation Services have also provided support.

ACTION 2: The inspectorate to continue with its work, taking note of the Board's comments and the recommendations of this paper and produce an update report for the next Board meeting.

5. GB INNS Strategy

Strategy Review (PB Apr 22-05)

Sarah led on this item and thanked all of those who contributed, including Clare Watson (Defra) for leading on the work. She summarised the paper for the Board and invited verbal comments, with written comments invited by the end of April.

The Board approved the recommendation of the paper, which was to share the draft strategy with stakeholders, subject to incorporating any comments from the Board. This will be done through the stakeholder forum – which will be held on 15 June in Bristol. In addition, officials may wish to share the draft with stakeholders in other ways, including via stakeholder working groups once PB comments have been incorporated and it is ready to share with the stakeholder forum. The Board discussed how to reach stakeholders beyond the usual ones that we engage with – Emilie has a document about diversifying stakeholder engagement and Rebecca noted that they have various lists that can be used to contact stakeholders. Matthew and Stan noted it would be useful to include mainstreaming in the strategy (particularly in relation to action 5.4). Nicola noted that Plant Health is close to publishing its strategy – join up with this would be good. Sarah noted that both these aspects are covered in Chapter 10 of the strategy on collaboration and partnership. Rebecca noted the rather specific reference to tree planting in the foreword that is then not covered elsewhere in the strategy. She offered to assist with drafting text to achieve a correspondence between the foreword and the main text of the strategy. Sarah welcomed Rebecca's offer.

ACTION 3: The Board is invited to provide any further comments on the draft GB Strategy to Clare Watson (clare.watson@defra.gov.uk) by the end of April.

ACTION 4: Rebecca to work with Sarah to make changes relating to novel tree planting.

ACTION 5: Stan to provide written comments in relation to mainstreaming.

ACTION 6: Defra, Welsh Government, Scottish Government and GB NNSS to proceed with inviting stakeholder views on the draft Strategy, once the Board's comments and been incorporated.

Country working group feedback

Wales:

- Since the last Board meeting this group has met twice (October and March) and received presentations from the inspectorate (Iain Henderson), the Wales Resilient Ecosystem (WaREN) Project and partner updates. Also discussed was the comprehensive review of species of special concern.

Scotland:

- The action group met in January. Topics covered included economic costs, mink control in the Outer Hebrides, saving Scotland's red squirrels, pink salmon and *Crangonyx floridanus* (probably transported by anglers / boaters to Scotland); Scotland's horizon scanning; pathway analysis; non-native trees seeding onto peatlands; the GB strategy drafting and inspectorate; the comprehensive review; and the biodiversity strategy and delivery plan. The purpose and remit of the group was also discussed.

Northern Ireland

- Has been obliged to act against widely spread species (300 incidents they have been working through including giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam). Looking to set up meetings with Local Authorities to receive support. Trying to get a project on muntjac underway. There have also been reports of ring-necked parakeets, Egyptian geese and ruddy duck. Action against grey squirrels continues.

England:

- Held in February 2022, with the comprehensive review of species and the GB strategy review the main topics of discussion. There was also a presentation from the 25-Year Environment Programme team on their work.

6. Evidence

Strategic plan (PB Apr 22-06)

Niall led on this item, noting that a new chair (Elias, Defra) has been found for the research working group. Elias reported that since the Board's last meeting feedback has been received from researchers on the plan (44 approached with 18 responses). There was broad approval for the plan, with some gaps (e.g. reference to climate change) that were noted and which have now been addressed.

The Board commended the work and signed off the plan.

In the process the Board clarified that it provides guidance to researchers and funding bodies but is not intended to be prescriptive. There is no restriction on how research should be done or commissioned. However, it might be useful to consider ways to coordinate research across administrations. This could involve collaboratively funding research or different administrations leading on different aspects of the research requirements.

Rebecca noted that Forest Research should be included as an important research body. In general, where possible it would be useful to link this plan with others. Niall noted a possible plan to bring researchers together annually to help with coordination, make connections and report on research. This could coincide with the annual stakeholder forum. Chris noted that this might help re-invigorate the BES research group.

Economic impacts

Sarah presented some of the headline figures from the update of the 2010 costings work Defra had commissioned from CABI, noting that the total economic cost to GB of invasive non-native species (excluding fungal pathogens) is now £1.86bn. The next stage will be to try to assess the Natural Capital impact of invasive non-native species (probably a 2-year project), noting that the previous (2010) figure only included direct costs. Trevor welcomed this but noted the challenge of valuing biodiversity.

7. Risk assessment of novel tree species

Paper circulated (PB Apr 22-07)

Olaf led on this item, with contributions from Sarah. He summarised the paper and explained that this was a complex issue, flagging that there is no agreed approach in GB to assessing the potential risk of invasiveness from novel non-native trees introduced for forestry.

Trevor stressed the need to be precautionary, given the very long lag phases of many invasive non-native trees (>150 years). However, Stan added that a pragmatic approach was necessary rather than preventing the use of any novel non-native tree species. Rebecca agreed that there was a need to attempt to assess risk carefully from proposals to plant novel non-native trees. Olaf explained the NNRAF's advice that the GB risk analysis mechanism is not designed for proposals such as this (deliberate planting of large plantations) and that a more substantial risk analysis process, similar to that used for biocontrol, may be more appropriate.

The Board was clear that there is a need for a robust process to assess the risk of invasiveness from the planting of novel non-native tree species in GB. They agreed that the GB risk analysis mechanism will not be used for this but noted that the NNRAF are willing to help advise on the establishment of such an approach. They agreed that the establishment of an appropriate risk analysis mechanism would probably start with an international trawl to identify any good practice relating to this. The Board discussed who could lead this work, with Forestry Commission and / or Forest Research being the most likely body. Rebecca suggested that this should be picked up with other colleagues within Forestry Commission (i.e. Ewan Calcott).

On the key principles for the Bern paper, Rebecca raised concerns that they were somewhat anti-tree planting in general, which is not in line with government policy.

Forestry Commission supported written comments made by the Forestry Policy team in Defra.

ACTION 7: Rebecca to raise the issue of a need for appropriate risk analysis of novel tree species with colleagues in FC. **GBNNS** to support FC in the development of appropriate risk analysis protocols where possible, for example by providing access to NNRAF expertise.

ACTION 8: Sarah to liaise with Bern Convention Secretariat to recommend a change in the tone of their tree planting paper to achieve a text that the UK can support when this comes to the Bern Standing Committee

8. Rapid responses

Update from agencies

As time was short the chair invited written updates instead (see Annex 1).

9. Secretariat Report

Paper circulated (PB Apr 22-09)

Niall highlighted key areas of work and the priorities for the coming 6 months.

10. AOB

None.

11. Date of next meeting

The Secretariat is yet to confirm that Welsh Government will chair the next meeting, which will be in approx. 6 months' time – i.e. late September or early October 2022.

ACTION 9: GBNNS to trawl for dates of the next meeting and confirm the chair.

ANNEX 1. Rapid response updates from agencies.

Environment Agency

- Topmouth gudgeon – there are 8 remaining populations in England (26 have been eradicated) with 2 being treated this winter and a third to follow. The future eradication programme is subject to funding availability.
- Gibel carp – four sites confirmed in England out of 12 suspected and a response group of NE, Defra, EA, GBNNSS and FHI has been established.
- Water primrose - there have been four new water primrose sites confirmed in 2021, bringing the total for England and Wales to 47 (46 in England and 1 in Wales). Of these, 19 are believed eradicated (including the site in Wales). The most recent eradication was on 21st December 2021 at the SSSI at Pawlett, Somerset when the ditch site that had been in water primrose management since 2013 was finally filled in.

DAERA

- Ruddy duck - in December 2021 a ruddy duck was sighted off Kinnego Bay in Lough Neagh. A signage and social media campaign was launched to try and track down what is thought to be one of the last remaining individuals in Northern Ireland. Volunteers involved in WeBS counts were also alerted to look out during their surveys. The report was entered onto the NOTSYS system – no follow up sightings have occurred despite extensive raising awareness.

APHA

- Ruddy Duck - since early October 2021 we have seen reports of Ruddy Ducks on 13 different sites but there are doubts about the accuracy of at least three of these reports and some almost certainly involve the same single adult female moving around a number of sites in the East Midlands. The peak count was four at a site in January, but the site manager is sceptical of the accuracy of this report. Despite this, we have discussed arrangements for control should the birds reappear and the site manager has promised to let us know if this happens. One adult female was shot at a site in Leicestershire in January 2022. As far as we know only one pair bred successfully in 2021 (at least three young fledged), and our best estimate of the remaining population is between 15 and 21 birds across the UK. Our biggest difficulty now is receiving accurate and timely reports of the presence of the birds at specific waters. Often reports are received too late to act because the bird(s) have moved on by the time we become aware. Where the birds arrive at a “traditional” site i.e. one where they have been seen regularly in the past, we would expect the owners or site managers to tell us.

Unfortunately, they are not always aware and there is still a lot of secrecy in the bird watching community around the reporting of Ruddy Ducks, precisely because we use the information to track them down and remove them. Because the birds are at such low numbers they seem to move around a lot (looking for company I assume – they are very gregarious), and now often turn up at unexpected locations. We rely quite heavily on internet reports which is relatively cost effective, but it can be hard to assess the accuracy of reports. Where doubt remains, we send a counter out to check the location, but reports can be submitted days or weeks after the sighting and the birds have often moved on.

- Monk parakeet - all current control activity takes place in the nesting season, thus no further progress since October 2021. For 2021/22 financial year as a whole: During the 2021 breeding season, egg control was undertaken at the one known remaining monk parakeet breeding colony on the Isle of Dogs, London. During five nest control visits (April-July), a total of 24 eggs were removed from three active nest chambers in two trees. Other pairs active in additional nest chambers in these trees failed to lay eggs. A maximum of 11 birds were observed on any one occasion. During the 2023 breeding season, egg control will continue. With the lifting of all Covid restrictions, full access will be possible again facilitating surveys for any nesting pairs that may have relocated from the known controlled nesting locations.

NatureScot

- Purple pitcher plant – no re-growth was observed in 2021. Final 3-year monitoring visit scheduled for Sept-22, although BSBI advise that seeds may germinate up to five years. A recent record in Perthshire was a recording error.
- Ring-necked parakeet – monitoring was delayed until January 2022 due to COP22 then Covid, by which time no birds were present at the main roost site in Victoria Park. Glasgow City Council has a policy of no lethal control and would need to be convinced of evidence of likely impacts to allow control to occur on their land.
- New owners of two islands have proposed to removal of non-native mammals, which might result in eradications from Scotland / UK. Inchconnachan (Loch Lomond) – red necked wallaby. Incholm (Firth of Forth) - black rat. Both are likely to prove controversial.

SEPA

- First record of *Crangonyx floridanus* in Scotland was confirmed in a sample from a tributary of the River Spean in the West Highlands, collected in May 2021. SEPA has notified landowners who have agreed erect CCD posters at main water access points. SEPA plans to review recent *gammerid* samples from other parts of Scotland to look for evidence of species elsewhere.

NRW

- Topmouth gudgeon – Welsh Government funded an FTA post to complete the monitoring of waterbodies to establish the distribution of TMG in Wales, one further site was identified as being infested with TMG which takes the overall number of sites to 5 where it is present in Wales. WG have agreed to fund eradication work in the 22-23 FY, this is likely to involve the eradication of TMG at 1-2 sites in Wales. NRW may need to contribute financially and/or in kind to this eradication work.
- Raccoon dog - NRW received reports of a sighting of a Raccoon dog at large on a residential housing area at Coelbren, Neath Port Talbot/ Powys border on 20th January. The original sighting was based on CCTV photos and the account of the landowner (and his son), initially the sighting was considered to be 'likely' to be a Raccoon dog. NRW is required together with the Police, to investigate the release. A multi-agency Incident Response Group (IRG) was stood up to co-ordinate tactical response for the incident (the group meet 5 times between 20/1/22 and 21/3/22 - NRW, Welsh Government, GBNNSS and Dyfed Powys Police). Trail cameras were deployed in the area, targeted comms and engagement with stakeholders were undertaken to raise awareness and some door-to-door enquiries were made in the area. Several further reports of sightings were received in the likely range area (and outside the range area) they were investigated, and none were substantiated. Following investigations, no further sighting or evidence of the animal were received. Incident Response Group confirmed that the incident was closed on 21/3/2022. If a further sighting is received it will be investigated as a new incident.