

the GiGLer

The Greenspace Information for Greater London Environmental Recorder



Overground Underground

Alison Johnson of Atkins & Rebecca Smith of Metronet Rail explain GiGL's fledgling relationship with Metronet – perhaps one of GiGL's less obvious partners.

The London Underground network may not be the first place to spring to mind when you think of good wildlife habitat. But large parts of the outer reaches of the network run above ground and adjacent to a variety of trackside habitats. A recent report has confirmed that the Underground network is home to a wealth of wildlife. Badgers, water voles and grass snakes are just a few of the protected species to be found.

Metronet Rail, responsible for renewing two thirds of the London Underground network, has recently completed the most comprehensive study of biodiversity on the Underground to date. *'Many of the species found during the survey are declining within London and the UK, and are legally protected.'* said Ewan Campbell-Lendrum, Health, Safety and Environmental Manager

for the Metronet division that undertook this work. *'The survey shows that we can play an important role in conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the capital.'* The two year study meets with the aims of the Mayor's biodiversity strategy to provide a London-wide framework for maintaining London's diversity of wildlife.

The survey was led by ecologists from Atkins, the largest multidisciplinary consultancy in Europe. Data were collected using the same template as that used for the Greater London Authority's open space and habitat survey.

This means that Metronet's data are compatible with the major biodiversity dataset for London. Ric Collinson, Head of Atkins Ecology said, *'During the first year we walked all of the overground sections to*

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Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of the GiGLer. This time we focus on protected species and on some of the organisations that generate and need access to protected species data in London.

Since July last year, we have seen a significant growth in our data holdings, with more recorders and organisations signing up to the GiGL partnership. As Natural England's Paul Losse points out in his guide to protected species (page 3), it's not only mammals and reptiles that are afforded special protection in London. With that in mind, we have broadened the range of data contributors in the GiGL partnership, and are actively seeking data from national schemes and societies.

The work of the London Water Vole Project has greatly improved our coverage of this UK priority species in the capital. We now hold several hundred records which ensure that this protected species is considered in the planning and conservation work of all of our partners and customers.

Further developments of GiGL's data systems have made the data we hold more accessible and easier to interpret. We are now able to tag our partners' species records with their protected status, including if they are one of London's Biodiversity Action Plan priority species.

Since April 2006, over 300 customers have made use of our partners' data. Two of our partners have contributed articles to this edition of the GiGLer, highlighting the range of organisations in Greater London that need access to our services. The London Borough of Wandsworth, a long-standing GiGL partner, and Metronet, responsible for the maintenance of two thirds of London Underground's infrastructure, describe how access to GiGL partners' data assists them with their own work.

– Mandy Rudd, GiGL Director

gather data on species present and identify potential areas of interest. During the second year we carried out a whole range of detailed surveys and the results are fascinating'.

The findings highlight biodiversity hotspots, important for different species and habitats, as well as areas which should be targeted for habitat improvement. Stretches of rough grassland and open habitat along the District line between Dagenham Heathway and Upminster provide excellent habitat for reptiles such as common lizard, slow worm and grass snake, as well as for many insects and for water voles. At the western end of the Metropolitan line are sections of locally rare grassland, while badgers have made their homes on woodland slopes.

Continuous tree-lines along the trackside provide important foraging routes for bats. Over 570 species of insect have been found across the network, six of which are nationally endangered, vulnerable or rare.

Metronet has recently launched its 'Green Matters' initiative, encouraging staff to think how they can minimise the organisation's environmental footprint. Recent mitigation work has included protecting water voles and reptiles during slope stabilisation works on the District line, and stag beetle habitat creation at the western end of the Metropolitan line. Future plans include protection of badgers during track replacement works near Amersham, the creation of a wildlife pond, great crested newt habitat enhancement, and the creation of species-rich grassland alongside the Metropolitan line.

The GiGL partnership has been important to the whole process – providing records of protected species, as well as up-to date information on nature conservation designations that apply to trackside and adjacent land. Metronet's survey data, together with those records provided by other members of the GiGL partnership, information on protected species and site designations, all help to build a more complete picture of biodiversity on the London Underground network.

Once Metronet's survey data are incorporated into GiGL's database, the data will provide London boroughs, recorders and other interested parties with biodiversity data for land that is frequently inaccessible – helping to inform local and regional biodiversity action plans, and future conservation work.



Guiding the planners – London's protected species

Paul Losse of Natural England sheds light on protected species – giving GiGLer readers a whistle-stop tour of the key legislation and guidance for planners.

Bats, great crested newts, common dormice and badgers are well known to be highly protected species. But did you know that the hedgehog fungus, depressed river mussel and click beetle, amongst many other species, must also be taken into account if they are found on a development site? Protected species are a material consideration in planning, and planning officers and developers often need a little guidance in adhering to this aspect of planning law.

Planning law is complex, even before you introduce biodiversity to the equation. Now planners face additional biodiversity obligations. Under the new local development framework, every borough is required to report on biodiversity. It is the borough planners, not the ecologists, that will be responsible for this.

In addition to local development frameworks, planning officers need to be aware of three crucial pieces of legislation: The Habitats Regulations (1994), the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), and the Protection of Badgers Act (1992), as well as the guidance provided in Policy Planning Statement 9 (PPS9) and the Mayor's London Plan.

Legislation and planning guidance

PPS9

The recently published *Policy Planning Statement, PPS 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation*, is the essential tool for planning officers making planning decisions which could impact on certain species and on biodiversity in general. PPS9 makes it clear that biodiversity is an important consideration in planning. One of the key principles states that, 'The aim of planning decisions should be to prevent

harm to biodiversity and geological conservation interests ... If significant harm cannot be prevented, adequately mitigated against, or compensated for, then planning permission should be refused'.

The guidance sets out how planning applications for developments on or close to protected areas, such as sites of special scientific interest or important habitats, should be treated. PPS9 also includes provisions for legally protected and UK Biodiversity Action Plan, or BAP, priority species – those species which need special action to halt their decline.

The London Plan

BAP species are also recognised in the London Plan. Policy 3D.12 states, 'The Mayor will and boroughs should resist development that would have a significant adverse impact on the population or conservation status of protected species or

priority species identified in the London Biodiversity Action Plan and borough BAPs. London BAP species include stag beetle, black poplar, house sparrow and many more. A full list can be downloaded from the London Biodiversity Partnership website, www.lbp.org.uk.

Habitats Regulations (1994)

The highest level of protection is given to European protected species, as defined by the Habitats Regulations. This includes all species of bat, the great crested newt and the dormouse. If any of these species is known or suspected to be present, the local planning authority is required to undertake three tests before deciding the outcome of a planning application for the site:

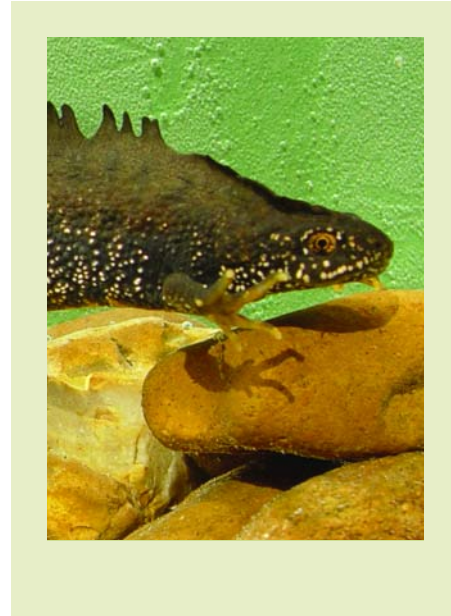
1. There should be no satisfactory alternative to the development.
2. The development should not have a detrimental impact on the species, such that its population drops below 'favourable conservation status' within its natural range.
3. The development is in the interests of public health or safety, or has other overriding social, economic or environmental benefits.

If the development is likely to result in an offence being committed under the Habitats Regulations, the applicant must also apply for a licence from Natural England once planning permission has been granted.

Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, all species of bird are protected – but not all birds are equal! Some species, including the kingfisher, peregrine falcon and black redstart, are specially protected from intentional or reckless disturbance at or near the nest. A higher level of mitigation work would be needed if these species were present on a development site.

Other species, including the common lizard, slow worm, grass snake, adder and water vole, receive less protection but their presence must still be considered.



Protection of Badgers Act (1992)

Badgers are a special case and are well protected by their own act of Parliament. Under this piece of legislation, badgers' setts are protected from damage or destruction, as are the badgers themselves while they are in their setts.

To survey, or not survey?

Information on protected species present is needed from the applicant at the time of the planning application. But how do you know if these species are there in the first place?

This is a bit of a grey area, however there are several clues which might indicate the need for a species survey:

- If there are historic records of a protected species on the site.
- If there is suitable semi-natural habitat (e.g. woodland, a waterbody, rough grassland, old trees) which could support protected species.

- If nearby habitats are known to support protected species, and the development will result in the removal or alteration of similar natural or semi-natural habitat.
- If there are good casual observations of species present on site – for example, if bats have been seen entering or exiting roof spaces.

Your starting point for all this information should be GiGL. GiGL collects, collates, manages and disseminates information relating to wildlife in London, and can provide details of any records of protected or BAP species. However it is important to note that if GiGL does not have a record of a species at a particular site, this does not mean that the species is not present.

If an environmental impact assessment is required, an evaluation of the suitability of the site for protected species should be carried out as a matter of course. In many cases a rapid site assessment by an ecologist to establish the likelihood of their presence may be all that is needed. A full survey could follow if the ecologist recommends it.

The decision making process

Once the planning officer has the relevant information from the applicant, Natural England recommends the following sequential approach to determining the application:

- Information – Do you have sufficient survey information from a suitably experienced and qualified ecologist?
- Avoidance – Can harm to protected or priority species be avoided altogether?
- Mitigation – If it is not possible to avoid damage, can the impact be minimised?

- Compensation – If harm is unavoidable, can the applicant provide features to ensure that the species continues to be supported?
- Net benefits – Development can often be beneficial to wildlife. Has the applicant considered how habitats that support species can be enhanced or incorporated into a development?

To ask GiGL to carry out a data search for you, contact Lauren Alexander lalexander@wildlondon.org.uk.

If you would like further information on becoming a GiGL partner, on appointing GiGL as your data custodian, or on making your survey data more widely available to GiGL's service users, contact Mandy Rudd mrudd@wildlondon.org.uk.

Paul Losse is Natural England's Senior Specialist (Land Management and Communities).

Natural England training information

Natural England's London Office has developed a one day training course on protected and priority species to help planning officers digest and interpret the new guidance. The course covers:

- Legislation and policy,
- When species surveys should be carried out,
- Mitigation and compensation measures, and
- The decision making process.

Learning is reinforced using London case studies and real life examples.

The course is supported by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) London Region, and is intended to assist RTPI members with their continuing professional development requirements.

This free event for development control planners will run on Friday 2 March 2007 at City Hall in Southwark.

If you would like to attend this event or are interested in courses later on in the year, please contact Paul Losse at: paul.losse@naturalengland.org.uk.

The view from here Valerie Selby - Wandsworth Borough Council

Like all borough biodiversity officers, I require access to reliable species information for many aspects of my work including strategic and development planning. A variety of people will expect me to be able to tell them what lives where in the borough, the moment that I pick up the phone to them. Yet many biodiversity officers inherit what information we have in various forms – paper notes, spreadsheets etc. – from a variety of sources. These can be hard to collate at short notice. Equally, our records are often incomplete. We often don't have access to data held by recording groups and societies that operate regionally or nationally.

Having a service level agreement with GiGL has enabled me to streamline many of our data handling processes. GiGL undertakes the tedious task of entering all the odd notes, old surveys and various files onto their database in a form that is

easy for me to retrieve and interpret. GiGL also increasingly works with various recording groups and societies making their information available to me as well. This has huge benefits, providing me with access to data of which I would not otherwise be aware – such as records of bat roosts and other protected species.

During 2006, Wandsworth Borough Council made comments on over 100 planning applications that had potential impacts on, or benefits for biodiversity. Had each developer or consultant come to us to fulfil the 'existing data' element of their desk study, we would never have had the time or resources to provide comprehensive information. The IEEM guidance for ecological consultants states that they should contact their local record centre at the earliest point in the process. When consultants call, we can refer them to GiGL, confident that their data search will be as comprehensive as is possible. Consultants can use the data that GiGL provides to decide what additional surveys are necessary before development proposals are finalised. GiGL's involvement gives me peace of mind that a developer is providing accurate information to the borough planning officers. My time can be better used fully assessing the potential impacts and benefits on the species using a proposed development site.



Tales from the riverbank

Alex Draper, London Wildlife Trust

The water vole is a UK priority species for biodiversity conservation. Its presence on a site is a material consideration in planning applications, and under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) it is an offence to damage burrows and nests, or to disturb water voles while they are in their burrows. The water vole is also protected from persecution and unnecessary suffering under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act (1996). A review is currently underway which will hopefully lead to the water vole being given full protection – making it an offence to take, possess or intentionally kill a water vole.

In 2001 a partnership launched London's 'Water Vole Biodiversity Action Plan'. At the same time, the London Water Vole Project was launched to deliver the action plan. The project carries out a programme of distribution surveys and monitoring, in an attempt to answer three questions: Where are London's water voles? What is their status? And, how is this changing?

The project's first task was to collate existing data to set a baseline for future surveying and monitoring. Records were

helpfully provided by GiGL's precursor, the Environment Agency and British Waterways, as well by generous local naturalists. This process yielded just 55 water vole records across London, highlighting the urgent need to identify key populations to target future work.

The project now has over 600 records which show areas of strategic importance for water vole populations. Although water voles are still widespread in much of the periphery of London, populations are often highly localised and fragmented. The project has identified important water vole locations within London, including: the key national site of the Inner Thames grazing marshes at Erith, Crayford and Rainham; the Rivers Ingrebourne, Rom and Beam in Havering and in Barking and Dagenham; the River Crane in Hounslow and in Richmond; the River Colne Valley in Hillingdon; and in the area north of Waltham Abbey and at Walthamstow Marsh in the Lee Valley Regional Park. Surveys have also identified where water voles are currently absent but could be considered for reintroduction. The Beverley Brook in Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common, and the River

Wandle catchment, have both been identified as possible reintroduction sites.

The water vole project has initiated a programme of survey work of large scale river catchment areas, starting in 2007 with the River Ingrebourne and Roding catchments. These surveys help us to understand local population dynamics and to assess the quality of the river corridor habitat. This information helps to inform further conservation action. For example, knowing the location of water vole populations and how fragmented they are helps us to aid water vole migration.

Water vole colonies can expand or be lost in a relatively short space of time. The water vole project's ongoing monitoring programme will help to define population trends and give early notice of the need to target conservation action, as well as recording the impact of previous work.

Over a hundred 500 metre sections of watercourse are surveyed annually. Water vole surveys involve searching for field signs – primarily burrows, droppings and feeding remains. Where these are found, they are mapped and counted.

Unlike the river catchment surveys, the monitoring survey programme is not designed to survey every water vole colony in one area, but to provide a representative sample across London. Such an extensive investigation of water vole and mink activity requires considerable resources to implement. We are grateful to the dedicated band of volunteers who are central to making a regular monitoring programme sustainable.

If you would like to help with our survey and monitoring work please contact the London Water Vole Project at enquiries@wildlondon.org.uk, or phone 020 7803 4266.



GiGL's data expansion

GiGL's species database has increased by an incredible 184,000 records since the first edition of *the GiGLer* in July last year. The sources of these data include London boroughs, London Natural History Society recorders, consultants, the Zoological Society of London, and the Greater London Authority. By collaborating with the Natural History Museum on their species dictionary project, and with the London Biodiversity Partnership, we can now tag all species data with their status. Protected and BAP species are now flagged in our customers' reports.

A new look and a new website

GiGL's new website will provide a range of data related services for everyone – partners, customers and the general public. A 'what's in my back yard' page will make species data available to everyone at varying levels of detail, while a data search request facility will be accessible to registered GiGL service users. We hope to launch the website and accompanying email addresses by the end of March.

GiGL has also recently undergone a rebranding exercise, using the extremely successful look and feel of *the GiGLer* to guide the development of a new logo. New design guidelines have also been applied to our new website.

New service for borough biodiversity reporting

Now that local development frameworks have replaced unitary development plans, borough officers have been tasked with annual monitoring and reporting on a whole raft of matters, including biodiversity (see *article on page 3*). In conjunction with

GiGL's existing borough partners, we have developed a London-specific methodology for reporting on borough-wide biodiversity statistics – as required by 'The Core Output Indicator 8' (COI8).

To take advantage of this new service, contact Matt Davies mdavies@wildlondon.org.uk.

Partnership development

The first edition of *the GiGLer* has proved a useful tool in attracting the attention of potential new partners and customers. This, along with the continued promotion of our work by many of our existing partners has led to the busiest year we've had so far. We hope that the increasing number of enquiries and data requests will facilitate the further growth of the GiGL partnership in 2007/08. A huge thank-you to everyone for their continued support with partnership building.

Staff structure

GiGL's increased workload has required us to increase our staff capacity. The GiGL team now includes three full-time members of staff, based at London Wildlife Trust's offices in Southwark, as well as two short-term contract workers assisting us with data entry. More GiGL staff positions are in the pipeline. We will keep you informed of further staff developments in the July 2007 edition of *the GiGLer*. (See *page 8* for staff contact details.)

GiGL Partners

1. British Waterways
2. City of Westminster
3. Darwin at Downe
4. Environment Agency
5. Greater London Authority
6. Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
7. London Bat Group
8. London Borough of Bromley
9. London Borough of Harrow
10. London Borough of Lewisham
11. London Borough of Redbridge
12. London Borough of Richmond
13. London Borough of Tower Hamlets
14. London Borough of Wandsworth
15. London Natural History Society
16. London Underground
17. London Wildlife Trust
18. Metronet
19. Natural England

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GiGL and London Wildlife Trust



GiGL is an open space and biodiversity records centre that collects, manages and makes available detailed information about London's plants, animals, wildlife habitats, statutory and non-statutory wildlife sites and open spaces. GiGL works in partnership with the many individuals and organisations that produce and use this information through their work or leisure activities. The information is already used by many of GiGL's partners and

customers to help protect, study and enjoy London's wildlife and open space. GiGL is currently a semi-independent project hosted by London Wildlife Trust.

Erratum

On page 12 of the previous issue of *the GiGLer*, we incorrectly credited a photograph of Canary Wharf's green roof. This image was taken by Mathew Frith and should have been credited as such. Apologies to Mathew for this mistake.

the GiGLer

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Page 3, *Adder*, Jim Foster
Page 4, *Great crested newt*, Jim Foster
Page 6, *Water vole*, Terry Whittaker
Page 7, *Waterlilies*, Miranda Waugh
Page 8, *Oak tree*, Miranda Waugh

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