

Section A: Summary

- The Biodiversity Action Planning process began a new and exciting period for nature conservation in the UK, based on partnership and co-ordination between those who advocate the sustainable management of wildlife and wild landscapes, and those whose remit gives them the power to achieve that management.
- Nationally, the UK Government signed and ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and subsequently in 1995 set out an approach to fulfilling the obligations which the Convention imposes: the UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report, *Meeting the Rio Challenge*. This seminal document outlined the actions needed to sustain and enhance this country's biodiversity.
- *The Nature of Devon - A Biodiversity and Geodiversity Action Plan* is Devon's response to the national biodiversity planning process. Informed by the guidance set out in *Action for Biodiversity in the South West*, published in 1997, this document takes the objectives and targets of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and translates and amplifies them into a Devon context. Focusing on the most significant elements of Devon's natural environment, it sets out the actions needed to achieve those objectives and targets.
- A key feature of the Devon BAP, however, and one which distinguishes it from most other UK BAPs is its integrated approach to nature conservation. It addresses both ecological and geological conservation issues. The decision to adopt this approach is not as radical as it may at first appear but reflects a basic principle long ago established in UK approaches to nature conservation – that for practical purposes ecological and geological conservation are inseparable and, indeed, that the latter underpins the former. This approach goes back to at least 1949, with the establishment of the UK's first nature conservation laws within the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act and continues to be reflected today in documents such as central government's *Planning Policy Statement 9 on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation*, issued in 2005.

- The Devon BAP contains Action Plans for 20 of Devon's key wildlife habitats and geological features and for 20 of its species, notable either for their threatened status or popular appeal, or both. As perspectives and priorities in nature conservation evolve, it is likely that the habitats and species covered by the Action Plans will change in the future.
- The Devon BAP, however, is more than just 40 habitat and species action plans. It also sets out a broad range of key nature conservation features in Devon, all of which are of importance and many of which will be directly or indirectly benefited by the action plans. In addition, 5 Action Plans are presented for common themes which permeate most aspects of nature conservation in Devon. Accompanying sections and appendices provide background to the biodiversity planning process, an overview of Devon's wildlife and earth heritage, and an outline of some of the key steps which will need to follow for this initiative to succeed. Much of the content of these sections has evolved from the draft nature conservation strategy, *Nature's Place*, produced by Devon County Council in 1994, which is superseded by this document.
- This BAP seeks to apply principles of business planning to a strategic view of Devon's natural environment. It identifies collective objectives, sets quantified targets to measure progress towards those objectives, and defines the actions needed to achieve those targets. It makes no apology for prioritising some habitats, geological features and species over others, recognising that resources for nature conservation are limited.
- The UK Biodiversity Action Plans are backed by Government, and the achievement of the targets they contain is government policy. They are not simply the work of conservation bodies acting in isolation. The Action Plans have been produced through an exhaustive process of wide involvement, discussion, consultation and agreement between local authorities, statutory agencies, voluntary bodies, farming and land-owning interests, business, industry and educational and scientific organisations
- Campaigns for nature conservation have often been criticised, for failing to clearly define what actions are necessary. Similarly, development and agricultural activities are often blamed for the decline or loss of habitats and species. Frequently, though, the choices available for avoiding such impacts, have not been clearly presented. This document seeks to address these blocks to successful conservation, and to seek a realistic consensus between potentially antagonistic parties. It clarifies what a

sustainable future for Devon's most significant wildlife and geological features requires, and presents this information in a form which is available to all.

- These plans are intended to reflect a common purpose and agreed action. They will require continued partnership if their aspirations are to be fulfilled. This document represents the single largest and most concerted attempt to lay the ground for this partnership to succeed. History will judge whether we have risen to this challenge.