

Linking life in the Torridge

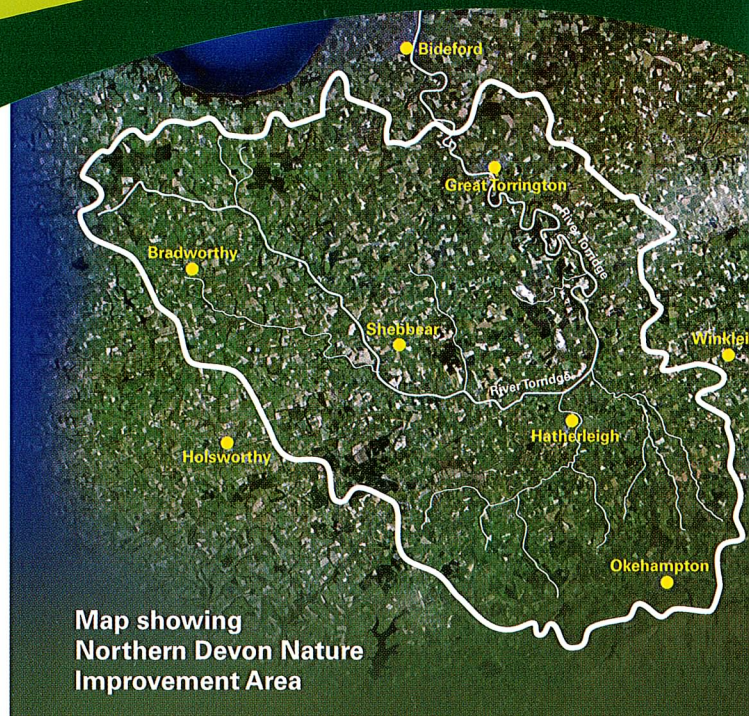
Progress and learning so far: April 2012 – December 2013

The Northern Devon Nature Improvement Area (NIA) is an active, ambitious partnership of 15 organisations working on the river Torridge catchment, led by Devon Wildlife Trust. We are working towards bigger and better quality areas of Culm grassland, woodland and river habitat, better water quality, and more wildlife habitat re-created and re-connected by landowners and local people. We are also seeking to strengthen the connections between local people and this deeply rural landscape, and promote a better understanding of the ecosystem services it provides.

The NIA is already delivering impressive results, demonstrating that large and ambitious landscape scale approaches really work and deliver added value and multiple benefits. This summary outlines our progress from April 2012 to December 2013.



Volehouse Moor towards the River Torridge. Photo, David Chamberlain



Map showing
Northern Devon Nature
Improvement Area

Embracing the greater part of the river Torridge catchment and covering 72,000 hectares, the Northern Devon NIA holds 35% of the UK resource of Culm grassland, a variety of purple moor-grass and rush pasture, surviving in vulnerable fragments. Broadleaved woodland is difficult to access and often neglected. River Torridge water quality is poor, largely due to high levels of phosphates and sediment. The landscape supports many key species, including two of Europe's top ten threatened species: marsh fritillary and freshwater pearl mussel.

Working within the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, the Northern Devon NIA partnership includes charities, statutory agencies, local authorities and businesses with over 30 years' experience of land management work in the area. Since 2012 the NIA Business Plan has been delivered by a team of 5.5 full time equivalent staff employed by Devon Wildlife Trust, with direct input from partners and a wide community of landowners and other local people.

Northern Devon NIA: our vision to 2015

By 2015 firm foundations will have been laid and impressive progress will have been made in the delivery of a robust and resilient catchment ecosystem. Over 1,000 hectares of priority habitat will have been restored and re-created. This will enable the unique wealth of wildlife in the area to flourish, in particular threatened species such as marsh fritillary and breeding curlew. Degraded ecosystem services, such as water resources, will be restored.

Communities will value nature and place it at the heart of their decision making. They will feel a greater sense of connection with the natural world and understand the ways in which a healthy environment helps to support a sustainable local economy. Resilience to climate change will be enhanced for all. These outcomes are fundamental tenets of the wider Biosphere Reserve and UNESCO ambition.



Learning the art of hedgelaying with Northern Devon NIA



Soil aerator machinery demonstration

Progress to December 2013

- 1,172 ha of Culm grassland, 92 km of hedgerow and 28 ha of broadleaved woodland have been restored through working with local landowners
- 36.2 ha of wetland has been re-created and 33 ha of woodland planting initiated
- Land management has been positively influenced adjacent to 76 km of river
- 28 Entry Level Stewardship, 13 Higher Level Stewardship and 15 Woodland Grant Schemes achieved for landowners totalling £2.9 million
- 499 advisory site visits have been made to 171 different land holdings
- 19 land management workshops have been held with landowners
- A 'first stop shop' integrated model for land management advice is being trialled
- The practical contributions of wildlife habitat to flood risk management, water quality, woodfuel and carbon storage are all being investigated
- Curriculum materials on ecosystem services have been developed and trialled with six primary schools, and 17 school groups have attended habitat visits
- 99 community events have been held across the NIA
- 39 Parish Biodiversity Audits have been completed, covering over 70% of the NIA
- An interactive community theatre performance has been delivered in four parishes, with another show in development for 2014
- Five Citizen Science projects and 16 biodiversity volunteer tasks have been completed; volunteers have contributed 2,500 hours
- The NIA has attracted £138,390 through in-kind contributions
- Partners have generated over £250,000 for additional projects in the NIA area

Next steps

Defra funding is underpinning the NIA's work until the end of March 2015. For this period, the existing team and partnership structure will work to achieve, and where possible exceed, the overall targets set for this phase of the project.

The Northern Devon NIA Partnership is now identifying targets, ambitions and funding opportunities for the next stage of the NIA from 2015-20, including environmental, social and economic aspects.



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A more detailed evaluation of progress against project outcomes will be completed at the end of the first phase of the NIA in March 2015.

Further details, updates, links and references can be found on the NIA's website: www.northerndevonnia.org

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