

AINA CASE STUDY

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Forth and Clyde Canal



Following restoration work, and where appropriate, emergent waterside vegetation has been encouraged along the Forth and Clyde Canal

Managing a newly restored canal for its nature conservation interest requires work on the ground as well as communication with users and interest groups

The Forth and Clyde Canal was restored to navigation as part of the Millennium Link project which reopened the canals across Lowland Scotland. The number of boats fully transiting the canal remains small, but there has been a significant increase in towpath activity since it reopened in 2001.

The restoration work took full account of the canal's nature conservation value and great emphasis was placed upon biodiversity issues. The canal supports the water vole, otter, Daubenton's bat, common toad, common frog, palmate newt and smooth newt as well as nationally scarce pondweeds.

Since reopening, the general low levels of boating have not been seen as a threat to wildlife, but long term monitoring will assist in developing methods for measuring nature conservation value and identifying links to particular management techniques. Consequently, efforts have been made to ensure appropriate management actions which will help to balance canal use with wildlife interests.

Technical measures used to support both navigation and nature conservation include boat speed limits, boats carrying spill kits to deal with oil pollution incidents, canal engineering profiles which promote emergent vegetation growth and soft bank construction using native plants from elsewhere on the canal. Mooring pontoons have been positioned to allow for the development of an emergent vegetation fringe and invasive emergent and aquatic vegetation is managed to maintain the full range of habitats from open water to hedgerow.

Communication has been seen as important, and measures have been taken to spread the word about the canal's important biodiversity. This includes public meetings for specific projects, talks and presentations to groups/societies/schools, and public notices on the canal bank and in the press. Direct liaison takes place with regulators such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, and with biodiversity plan steering groups and angling organisations. Practical conservation projects are undertaken with volunteers, local community members and the BTCV.

Such liaison also aims to raise and debate any problems such as the spread of invasive species, e.g., Japanese Knotweed, and all interested parties can view the nature conservation objectives for the canal on the British Waterways Scotland web-based Biodiversity Action Plan.