



G.Hitchcock

# Tees Valley Stepping Stones

## Why the Tees Valley?

The river Tees has been a centre for international trade for over 200 years. As larger ships were used to transport materials the older ports at Yarm became obsolete and new facilities to accommodate larger vessels were developed at Stockton-on-Tees and Middlesbrough. The opening of a new dock in Middlesbrough in 1829 led to the town developing from a small hamlet into one of the largest urban areas of the region.

In the early 1800s the Tees mudflats extended to the outskirts of a rapidly expanding Middlesbrough and by the mid 1880s major ironworks had been built on land reclaimed from the estuary by in-filling with blast furnace slag. Heavy engineering, shipbuilding and chemical industries all followed the investment in iron and steel with most of the developments sited on reclaimed land from the estuary. Reclamation at Teesmouth using blast furnace slag continued until the early 1970s. Now the last remaining areas of inter-tidal mudflats are a SSSI, Special Protection Areas (SPA) and National Nature Reserve. Much of the reclaimed, but undeveloped land, has weathered over the years creating a low-nutrient, high pH (alkaline) habitat supporting important and diverse plant and invertebrate communities.

Buglife has carried out a considerable amount of brownfield work in the South East of England and in the Thames Gateway in particular. Many sites within this area have proved to be extremely important for invertebrates, supporting UK BAP and Red Data Book species. The Teesside Brownfield Stepping Stones for Wildlife Project provides Buglife with an excellent opportunity to assess brownfield invertebrate biodiversity in the North East (an area which is highly under-recorded) and to use this information to create a network of suitable habitats across the Tees Valley.

### Site Locations

The project is taking place on four sites across Teesside to include two active industrial sites – Lucite International and BP CATS; and two Tees Valley Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves – Maze Park and Gravel Hole.

### Lucite International

This site was formerly known as ICI Cassel Works and dates back to at least the 1950s. Traditionally the site produced cyanide derived products and methyl methacrylate and continues to do so under Lucite ownership.

The invertebrate project habitat creation area is on land that was formerly dominated by hydrocarbon storage tanks which were removed by the early 1970s.

### BP CATS

The BP CATS facility is built on land reclaimed from the Tees Estuary in the 1970s. Prior to this the habitat was inter-tidal mudflats. The reclamation was carried out using the traditional method used across many areas of the Tees Estuary. This involved creating cells using blast furnace slag revetment walls, infilling with river dredging and topping off with more slag. Over time these pH high substrates developed a calcareous-type flora with coarser grassland developing in sections where there are deeper layers of top / subsoil.

### Maze Park Nature Reserve

Maze Park is situated on the southern bank of the River Tees just outside of Middlesbrough. The reserve was created in the early 1990's during the construction of the Teesdale development area and has been managed by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve since 1998. Earth moved during the construction of the Teesdale development was deposited on near-by marshalling yards, creating the three large mounds on the reserve which have developed distinct plant communities due to individual soil characteristics. The reserve covers an area of 42 acres and also supports wildflower grassland, wildflower meadows, areas of tree planting and scattered scrub; along with numerous footpaths and a cycle path which runs along the bank of the River Tees.

### Gravel Hole Nature Reserve

Gravel Hole is a disused sand and gravel quarry situated on the edge of the Billingham Beck Valley and was last quarried in the 1960's. The site is only 3 acres in size but supports a diverse wildflower grassland in areas where sand and gravel have been exposed by past quarrying activities which created free draining, nutrient poor soil. Where the ground has not been disturbed the soil is richer in nutrients and the area covered in species poor rough grassland. The site also supports hawthorn scrub which provides an important nectar source for invertebrates and nesting habitat and feeding opportunities for birds.



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