

National Federation for Biological Recording

**BIOLOGICAL RECORDING:  
THE PRODUCTS**

edited by

**G. Stansfield and P.T. Harding**

**1988**

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING: THE PRODUCTS

Proceedings of the annual conference of the National Federation for Biological Recording, held at Churchill Hall, Bristol, 22nd-24th April 1987.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Geoff Stansfield**

**Chairman, National Federation for Biological Recording**

In welcoming the 80 delegates to the Bristol Conference, the Chairman made reference to the first conference at Chelsea which looked at the activity and operation of biological recording and at the users and uses of biological records, and the second conference at Cambridge on the theme 'Biological recording in a changing landscape', which included papers on the roles of various bodies, and workshops which examined some of the issues.

The present conference focussing on 'The Products', with a selection of papers on the practical aspects of biological recording and discussions on how the products can be better tailored to the needs, was seen as a logical progression from the earlier conferences. The intention was to ensure that biological recording did not become a self-indulgent activity, but that it was organized in such a way as to meet defined needs. This was seen to be essential if the community at large was to be persuaded that biological recording is a valuable public service.

The Chairman paid tribute to the executive committee and to the small conference sub-committee which had organized the conference, and in particular to local organizer Charles Copp of Bristol Museum, and his colleagues, and Andrew Roberts and the Museum Documentation Association for handling the bookings.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE

**Charles Copp**  
**Conference Organizer**

Biological recording is the pursuit of knowledge about the status and distribution of wildlife and an understanding of its habitat requirements. One of its declared aims is to provide the information needed to ensure a secure future for wildlife in a diverse urban and natural landscape. But, however much we may believe that the pursuit of biological recording and its spin-offs in conservation and education are intrinsically worthwhile, sympathy and financial support for our aims will only be generated in relation to our ability to come up with products targetted at specific markets.

The main market areas include education, leisure and tourism, scientific research and planning. The different requirements of these markets are already recognized and understood by some, but there is much room for improvement in co-ordination of activities, in higher and more widely applied standards and in channelling of funding. To achieve this improvement, we should be looking more closely at the definition of the roles of all the organizations involved in biological recording, conservation, planning and countryside education, and especially the roles of local record centres. I believe that the best way to do this is for work to be divided into defined projects with end products achievable in a reasonable time span. These targets can be aided by guided funding and good management.

This conference is intended to bring these threads together and to learn from the experience of those who have mounted successful projects. It is also hoped that we shall receive some guidance from the grant-giving bodies on how grants are administered.

**BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN ITS POLICY MAKING CONTEXT****Adrian Phillips**

(Edited account of Mr. Phillips paper prepared by Geoff Stansfield from notes made by Andrew Roberts and Geoff Stansfield)

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Phillips and expressed the delight of NFBR that Mr. Phillips had agreed to present the opening paper at the conference. It was seen as recognition that the end products of biological recording should include a better environment in which to work and live. It was also important to remember that much biological recording in Britain was carried out by amateurs and professionals who derived a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from the activity. The Countryside Commission during its relatively short history, and with modest resources, had been a major catalyst in stimulating greater public understanding and enjoyment in both the natural and man-made environment.

Mr. Phillips began his paper by suggesting that biological recording was primarily of importance in the conservation field and he referred to the impact that biological recording had made by facilitating the production of lists of endangered species such as the IUCN Red Data Books. Biological recording was, however, also of relevance to organizations such as the Countryside Commission which had more general responsibilities for the countryside. The Countryside Review Panel, which had reported earlier in the year, had drawn attention to the fact that the countryside in Britain was on the brink of major changes, as dramatic as any since the Enclosures. The context of this change was the increase in agricultural output, the growing agricultural surplus, the fall in agricultural income, and the fall in the price of agricultural land, the combined effects of which necessitated re-consideration of the use of the countryside.

The Commission was in the process of reviewing the options, and these would be the subject of forthcoming reports on Forestry Policy, Recreational Policy, Planning in the Countryside, and New Directions in National Parks. These reports, whilst stressing the statutory role for conservation, would also emphasize the need to take account of public enjoyment. Within agriculture, the Commission saw the need for the promotion of the concept of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA's) and the use of agricultural money to re-adopt traditional farming practices. At present there were 6 ESA's but the aim was to establish between 40 and 50 based upon the list drawn up with the Nature Conservancy Council and embracing public access as well as conservation. The Commission would like to see the ESA principle extended into other areas of the countryside.

Forestry was on the edge of a major development. Forestry was seen as the principle major alternative land use, but a new kind of forestry was needed, with multiple use, which would offer opportunities for timber production, rural employment, landscape enhancement, nature conservation and leisure. Particular attention needed to be given to areas around cities.

The aims for recreation should be both quantitative and qualitative with an increase in the use of, and interest in, the countryside. Setting up National Parks and Country Parks was not enough. There should be emphasis on public rights of way and encouragement to farmers to provide access, perhaps with financial incentives. There was also the need to manage access to common land and here new legislation might be needed. There should be the opportunity for the public to become involved and this would entail a fundamental change of policy.

Planning policy had come back into the forefront of public debate due to political emphasis of the need to reconsider planning arrangements as the agricultural argument was removed. There were opportunities for improved motorway design with separate carriageways (as in the USA), expanded picnic areas, the redirection of military activities away from National Parks, and perhaps out-of-town shopping centres set in large areas of parkland. The Commission considered it important that farmers, landowners, community and voluntary groups should become involved in the debate (perhaps with some Commission support). Overall, more actors were needed in the countryside together with a loosening of attitudes towards the countryside.

Mr. Phillips saw biological recording as relevant in five main areas - information for decision makers; databases for land management; helping people to enjoy the countryside; helping local organizations to become involved in caring for the countryside; and contributing towards improved public education.

For decision makers there was a need at a national and local level. For example, at a national level the Ministry of Agriculture had prepared a draft proposal to create woodland with the declared purpose to encourage conservation. There was a danger that land marginal to agriculture could be most changed, and the consideration of the use of such land should perhaps be given a higher priority. At a local level databases were needed by the local planning authorities to assess the consequences of development. This was seen to be particularly important in a period of change. Databases were also needed by land managers. As surplus land became less intensively used there were opportunities to restore habitats. For example, in the South Downs, priority could be given to the re-creation of downland. With new forests the emphasis should be on creating interesting habitats and

this would need local expertise. As far as enjoyment of the countryside was concerned, there was as a place for the amateur recorder who was often motivated by conservation and/or recreation. It was important to maintain the links between disciplines. As far as local knowledge of the countryside was concerned, there were opportunities for raising the level of interest through the changes which were taking place. There was a need to stimulate local interest and grass roots concern, and to establish a local sense of guardianship and a caring partnership. For education and interpretation there was a need for the democratization of countryside policies. The availability of an information data base was important in creating a better informed public.

Mr. Phillips summed up by restating his view that biological recording was primarily a concern of nature conservation. The Countryside Commission had limited resources, but it could assist with recording at the broader level particularly if it was linked with activities in the countryside and with access and enjoyment.

## SURVEY FUNDING BY THE NATURE CONSERVANCY COUNCIL

Dr. K. Charman and Dr R. J. Keymer

The purpose of this talk is to explain NCC structure and funding in relation to research and survey. Although this may appear rather academic as with any organism (or organisation) a knowledge of structure and function is important in understanding how an organism works. An understanding of how NCC as an organisation works will provide a framework in which other organisations can structure their own research and survey effort and lead to increased co-operation and reduced duplication of effort.

NCC's organisation and management is based on a three tier structure.

1. Great Britain Headquarters (GBHQ)'s function is primarily to act in overall policy formulation and administration and to provide the link with central government. In addition to this central co-ordinating function GBHQ provides technical advice from specialist GB sections such as the Chief Scientist Directorate (CSD).
2. Country Headquarters (CHQ)'s are responsible for policy implementation at the country level and the conversion of GB policies into a series of co-ordinated programmes.
3. Regions are responsible for the planning, management and implementation of programmes of work locally and any policy development that this may require.

The whole of NCC's work has been divided into a series of themes and sub-themes outlined in Nature Conservation in Great Britain (1984) and the corporate plan. The science base theme covers the scientific information gathering and analysis which we normally understand as research, survey and monitoring. Within each of these three tiers elements of work on the broad "science base" theme are undertaken.

Within GBHQ the major aspects of the science base work are undertaken by the Chief Scientist's Directorate. This consists of the Chief Scientist (Dr. D. Ratcliffe) and Assistant Chief Scientist (Mr J. Blackwood and Dr. K. Duff) and a group of expert advisors within thematic, habitat or species groups. CSD members are responsible for:

- a. providing specialist advice and expertise in their specialist area;
- b. commissioning research of relevance to nature conservation in their specialist field. The work funded centrally is usually of a strategic, fundamental or process nature with "wide" relevance of principle to a range of activities in a wide geographic area.