



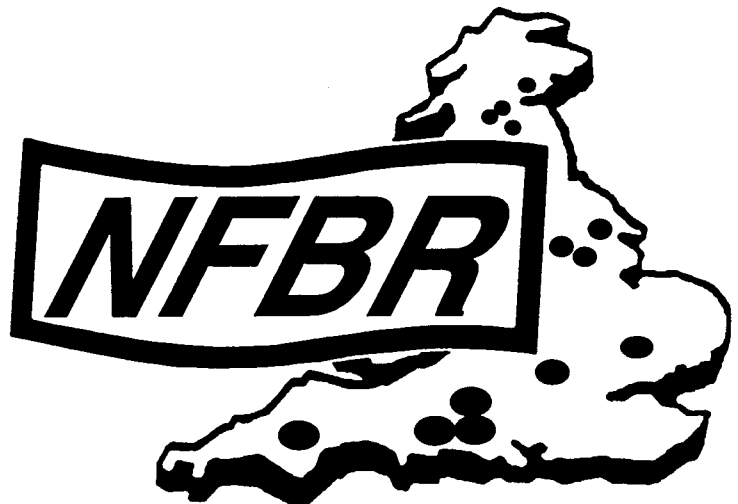
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NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

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**NEWSLETTER No. 21**

**June 1997**



# National Federation for Biological Recording Newsletter 21

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# NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

## HONORARY OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS FOR 1997

### **Chair**

Trevor James  
Herts Environmental Records Centre  
Bury Mead Road  
Hitchin  
Hertfordshire, SG5 1RT  
TEL 01462 432454

### **Secretary**

Nicky Court  
The County Planning Department  
Hampshire County Council  
The Castle, Winchester  
Hampshire, SO23 8UE  
TEL 01962 846741

### **Membership Secretary**

Paul T. Harding  
60 Boxwoth Road,  
Elsworth,  
Cambridge, CB3 8JQ  
TEL 01954 267218

### **Editor**

Phil Collins  
Lee Donaldson Associates  
8, Angell's Meadow  
Ashwell, Baldock  
Hertfordshire, SG7 5QS  
TEL 01462 743026

**Treasurer : Marie Moreau**

### **ORDINARY MEMBERS**

#### **Charles J.T.Copp**

8, The Paddock  
Clevedon,  
Avon, BS21 6JU

#### **Bill Ely**

Keeper of Natural Sciences  
Clifton Park Museum, Clifton Lane,  
Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S65 2AA

#### **Dr Colin French**

Chyloewen  
Labour-in-vain  
Illogan  
Redruth, Cornwall

#### **Dr Stuart Ball**

Joint Nature Conservation Committee  
Monkstone House  
City Road  
Peterborough, PE1 1JY

#### **Adrian Spalding**

Tremayne Cottage  
Tremayne Farm  
Crowan, Praze-an-Beeble  
Camborne, Cornwall

#### **Graham Walley**

Nottingham Local Records Centre  
Wollaton Hall,  
Nottingham, NG8 2AE

#### **John Stafford**

Westering, Moor Lane,  
Brighstone, Newport,  
Isle of Wight, PO30 4DL

#### **Dr Damien McFerran**

Centre for Environmental Data and  
Recording, Ulster Museum,  
Botanic Gardens Belfast,  
Belfast, BT9 5AB

#### **Bill Butcher**

Somerset Environmental Records Centre  
Pickney, Kingston St Mary  
Taunton, Somerset, TA2 8AS

#### **Anne-Marie Smout**

Fife Nature  
Fife House, North Street  
Glenrothes, Fife KY7 5LT

#### **Steve McWilliam**

4 Priory Close  
Halton, Runcorn  
Cheshire, WA7 2BN

#### **Sarah Hawkswell (Co-opted Member)**

The Wildlife Trusts  
The Green, Witham Park  
Lincoln, LN5 7JR



8. **Election of Honorary Auditor**  
T James proposed Mrs Shirley Bell as Honorary Auditor. *Accepted nem.con.*

9. **Any other Business**

a) Bill Butcher mentioned the recent draft Hedgerow Regulations which refer to the importance of data held by local record centres. he would welcome comments in order for NFBR to put together a response to DoE.

b) David Mellor proposed that the NFBR Council start discussions with the Millennium consortium and CCBR to ensure the creation of a new body to represent LRCs, as set out in the Bid. He referred back to the "Need and Network" document which recommended the establishment of a co-ordinating body to be a supervisory body for the LRCs - with a short life. CCBR has had a long life and has not created this "body". He noted that CCBR are keeping a watching brief depending on the outcome of the Millennium Bid, but whether the Bid is successful or not, we still need a network of LRCs and therefore a supervisory body.

T James thanked him for his proposal but stressed that NFBR Council cannot itself be the supervisory body as it is presently set up as it has no resources and its members are in full time jobs. The Millennium Bid has a mechanism for this organisation to be developed, and that the precise nature of this organisation is being discussed. NFBR with the BCG are supporting such an organisation in agreement with the Bid proposals. NFBR are to produce a statement on this, and if the Bid fails we will still push this forward.

C Copp commented that NFBR need to look at this fairly soon - when/if the Millennium money starts flowing we will need a validating body fairly quickly and we will need to get it right first time. No individual group currently has a remit to do this. NFBR could but would need to change its constitution.

S Hawkswell replied that the new supervisory body will need paid staff and that not all individuals/organisations with a biological role are represented on NFBR. We will need a new organisation and we will need to decide its main functions, how it will be funded etc. These are issues which will be addressed early in the new year.

G Walley expressed concern over the wider Bid - cannot see the links between what was being proposed nationally and what was happening on the ground, locally. JNCC, NERC and NHN are not democracies but powerful bodies with their own remits. Local people/LRCs need to be in control of what they do and it is possible they will end up serving bodies like JNCC !

P Harding responded that there is no large amounts of new money coming from these organisations - they are having to redirect existing money and are dependant on match funding - some from the local level. Local organisations will therefore have control over their own work programmes.

D Mellor ended the discussion by stating that the nature of the proposed supervisory body should be debated by everyone and not just the Bid consortium

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2.05pm.

## **NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING 1997 AGM**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE 1997 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WILL BE HELD AT THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, LIVERPOOL ON SATURDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 1997.**

Nominations are invited for Council and should be sent to Trevor James with the names of the nominee, the proposer and the seconder by **October 3rd 1997**.

Herts Environmental Records Centre, Bury Mead Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1RT

## DEVELOPMENTS ON THE BIOLOGICAL RECORDING FRONT

NFBR Council has continued its involvement with developments at the national level. The demise of the Millennium Bid for the National Biodiversity Network proposals is probably a fact well known to most readers of this newsletter. What might not be so apparent, however, is the continued impetus for core areas of the Bid among the consortium members, and the NFBR's continued involvement.

A comment purported to have come from Sir Robert May was to the effect that "if a national biodiversity network or something like it did not exist, then someone would have to invent it". After many years of effort, it now seems that those in authority have truly realised that hard biodiversity facts are essential if we are going to do anything practical about ecological "sustainability". For this reason, the NBN was a logical development, and the need to focus resources into getting the programme up and running became an evident priority, regardless of the Millennium Bid. For this reason, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, as well as the Wildlife Trusts and the Natural History Museum, all remain very committed to the concept. This was confirmed at a meeting in March between the partners. It was also considered that the basis of the NBN needed to be broadened to include other major players, such as the RSPB. It is likely that the NFBR will be brought in to the core group as part of this broadening in scope.

One urgent priority in all this is the need to do something about RECORDER. It has been a valiant warhorse in the business of marshalling information for more than 8 years, but its AREV base is becoming increasingly antique, and the need for modern data management to be brought to bear is increasingly obvious. The JNCC's commitment to re-designing RECORDER as an open-architecture database, able to handle far more diverse data-sets than heretofore, is therefore very welcome. That

it is planned for the test version of this to be ready by the end of the year is doubly welcome, and shows a recognition of the urgency of this if biological recording across the country is not to fall victim to another round of "do-it-yourself" databases. NFBR has been involved quite closely in discussions over the systems analysis behind this project, which was carried out by our past Treasurer and co-author of the CCBR Report, Charlie Copp.

An important part of all this activity, though, remains the need for the interests and energies of existing biological records centres and their volunteer networks to be represented in the discussions. The NFBR remains the **only** national forum for these very disparate bodies to be brought together, and for their concerns to be aired, although one or two other bodies, such as BRISC and BCG do represent their own constituencies independently too. For this reason, the chance for NFBR to take its place in discussions over the development of the Network must be taken up wholeheartedly, even if we, as an organisation, do not have financial resources to match. Our input will be the experience and expertise of our members, and their contacts, especially with local authority and voluntary sector interests.

Meanwhile the Biodiversity Action Plan rumbles on, nationally and locally. NFBR has been involved in the initial development of the UK Biodiversity Information Group - which reports to the BAP Steering Group itself. So far this has involved an analysis of data needs at the national level, and an examination of key areas where further work is needed. While the core need of supporting the BAP target species lists is fundamental, it has become very apparent that there is a need also to have an overview of what is known as "cross-cutting" research - research aimed at broader monitoring etc. of species, habitats and processes, so that not only is everyone aware of what is going on, but that future problems

are focused on in an efficient and timely way. So many organisations, each with its own set of priorities, are involved in these areas, that trying to get to grips with the question is proving difficult.

While the panoply of the NBN and the BAP is being constructed, there remain some nagging doubts about "what next?" After 10 years or so, we seem to be getting to the point where much of what the NFBR was set up to achieve has come, or is coming to fruition. However, the next problems might well stem from our inability to sustain the demand for all this information! We have relied on armies of valiant volunteers, coupled with a long-suffering cohort of "professionals" in such under-resourced places as museum natural history units. For some time now, we have been ringing alarm bells about the dwindling number of people in a position to be trained particularly in the skills of identification, especially in specialist areas. On the one side, taxonomy is becoming ever more complex, while on the other, the number of people able to interpret the science to the amateur level is dwindling. New recruits to the field sciences are surprisingly limited, partly because of lack of funds to train new staff "on the job" in museums, for example. Graduates come out of college with precious little real taxonomic expertise, and not having realised what is actually required. This might be the next area for NFBR and its colleagues to pursue with vigour, because without these specialists, amateur or professional, then we will not have much good data to put in to the NBN!

Trevor James  
Chairman

## NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY NETWORK

The consortium of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), the Natural Environmental Research Council (NERC), the Natural History Museum (NHM) and Wildlife Trusts who had prepared the Millennium bid met in March to discuss how the project should be taken forward and reaffirmed its enthusiasm and support for the project. A new Executive Group is proposed to take forward the NBN project, chaired by Andy Brown (Chief Executive, JNCC). This will have a wider membership than the original consortium but will be confined to those prepared to come to the table with resources and real commitment. This new group met in mid May.

There is recognition that the NBN will need to be more narrowly focused than the proposals that went to the Millennium Commission. The new Executive Group will need to confirm the scope of the "new look" NBN. The new project is likely to focus on the following revised aims:

- To give a range of groups, sectors and organisations access to the information they need in order to make wide choices about the environment
- To encourage participation in using biodiversity information to enjoy, understand and take action to conserve the biodiversity that has shaped our culture
- To help individuals and organisations involved in collecting biodiversity data to see how their contributions can fit into a clear and scientifically based picture of the status of UK wildlife, habitat and landscape
- To help individuals and organisations collecting and using biodiversity data to maximise the value of their individual contributions by co-ordination and developing standards for biodiversity information management