




# NFBR

National Federation for Biological Recording



## From Recording to Revelation

Strategic Plan 2011-15



## Introducing NFBR

The National Federation for Biological Recording exists to champion and support the entire biological recording community - from recorders to information users, amateur and professional - across the UK. This gives it a unique perspective and an important role. Established in 1986, NFBR promotes the collection, dissemination and use of terrestrial, freshwater and marine data to meet local and strategic information needs, especially in relation to

- ◆ Sustainable stewardship of the natural environment
- ◆ Biodiversity conservation
- ◆ Environmental change
- ◆ Policy formulation
- ◆ Spatial planning
- ◆ Development control
- ◆ Impact assessment and mitigation
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Community involvement

The National Federation for Biological Recording:

- ◆ advocates the importance of accurate biodiversity information and environmental evidence in decision-making;
- ◆ engenders high standards and best practice in biological recording and data management;
- ◆ encourages the flow of biodiversity data;
- ◆ brings together recorders, schemes and societies, data managers, record centres and biodiversity data users;
- ◆ provides a forum for knowledge-sharing and discussion of all aspects of recording and record management;
- ◆ publicises recording initiatives and novel information uses;
- ◆ encourages the teaching and mentoring of biological recording at all levels;
- ◆ fosters broad public participation in recording activities;
- ◆ promotes continuation of the UK's recording tradition throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We publish a regular members' newsletter, maintain an active website ([www.nfbr.org.uk](http://www.nfbr.org.uk)) and run conferences on topics of relevance to all aspects of biological recording.


## Past work and achievements

- ◆ NFBR supported the founding of the Coordinating Commission for Biological Recording (CCBR) and was instrumental in the publication of its seminal report, *Biological Recording in the UK*.
- ◆ NFBR has played key roles in encouraging recording schemes and fostering the establishment of a UK network of local record centres.
- ◆ We supported the creation of the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC).
- ◆ We have been involved with many aspects of the development and implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan process.
- ◆ NFBR is a founder member of the National Biodiversity Network and continues to promote the interests of the wider biological recording community to the NBN Trust.



## Our vision for 2015 and beyond

By 2015, increased awareness of the importance of biodiversity information supply will enhance opportunities for public engagement with the natural world, in tandem with securing the provision of high quality data to meet key needs and obligations.

- ◆ Biodiversity information requirements - quantified, prioritised and appropriately resourced - will increasingly help to develop and sustain the activities, services and networks on which biological recording depends.
  - ◆ Data from a wide range of sources, readily accessible in standardised formats, will meet wider information needs, fostering new synergies and creating opportunities for education, study and new understanding.
  - ◆ Data flows will be streamlined by the introduction of innovative data access provision, control and funding arrangements.
  - ◆ Identification of key initiatives and activities to sustain the collection, checking, sharing and use of records will enable effort and resources to be targeted to greatest effect.
  - ◆ Enhanced accessibility of biological records, environmental data and the means of putting them to use will ensure that biodiversity information plays a fundamental role in the framing and appraisal of environmental policies, strategies and guidance, and in the decision making and operations of national and local government, developers, NGOs and other users.
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## The future for biological recording and biodiversity information

In the wake of Countdown 2010 and the International Year of Biodiversity, 2011 provides a fitting point at which to assess UK biodiversity information provision. Impetus is provided by the scale of current public spending cuts and the 2020 biodiversity targets. Opportunities are presented by the drafting of a new environmental legislation, notably the new Natural Environment White Paper, as well as the Big Society. Of more far-reaching consequence are the impacts of projected climate and demographic change on the UK's highly fragmented landscape.

Alongside a broad array of recording schemes and societies, the UK now has an almost complete network of record centres providing access to what detailed local information is available to meet various different needs. Together they make up much of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and provide access to a significant part of the wealth of historic information about species, habitats and locations. Voluntary and professional efforts contribute millions of new records every year. A growing number of datasets are widely shared and the NBN Gateway alone now provides online access to some 70 million records.

However, decisions continue to be made without reference to essential, up-to-date biodiversity information of requisite quality, despite statutory, procedural and professional obligations. Similarly, the monitoring of conservation and mitigation activities is often inadequate or altogether lacking. Although biodiversity information has become mainstream, insufficient priority is given to the sustainability and success of the assortment of arrangements on which its supply and use depend. The importance of the NBN, of national schemes and societies, local record centres and ancillary activities needs to be better understood and supported.

Whatever their source, the quality, communication and potential utility of new records and long running datasets depend in various ways on:

- ◆ skill levels, training and mentoring;
- ◆ the methods used in data collection and management;
- ◆ access to reference collections or identification materials;
- ◆ support for and coordination of recording effort;
- ◆ funding, guidance and publicity;
- ◆ the development and adoption of tools and initiatives to meet new challenges;

as well as the dedication and capabilities of those providing the support infrastructure on which effective recording, data quality and information flow all rely. Each represents a potential point of strength or weakness in the chains of processes involved in **recording**, **review** (validation and verification), **repository** (in relevant databases), **reporting** (of data to those who need it), and **revelation** (via data analysis and appraisal of derived information) or in their coordination.

New methods and ideas addressing each of these; development of flexible tools, customisable to specific needs; and a growing ability to respond and provide rapid feedback to recorders

whilst data are being accumulated: each has helped strengthen recording in general, from the planning and organisation of surveys down to simply helping individual recorders to participate and benefit from their experience.

Technological advances and novel approaches continue to transform the once impracticably possible into everyday practice. Driven by new communications technologies biological recording is more capable and responsive than ever before. We seem poised for a quantum leap forward - subject to the resolution of various outstanding concerns.

Whilst it is possible to identify strengths and weaknesses - gaps, overlaps, obstacles and opportunities - both widespread and specific to particular situations, there are several over-riding issues to be addressed:

- ◆ the status of biological recording;
- ◆ the mismatches between the influence biodiversity information could, should and actually does have;
- ◆ the resulting gaps between biodiversity information and communication needs and provision;
- ◆ failures to perceive or grasp the significance of these gaps and mismatches;
- ◆ resulting uncertainties as to what direction and actions to take; and
- ◆ lack of security for those depending on ephemeral, uncertain arrangements.

Current uncertainties pose a threat, to not just individual links in the chain but to the operation of entire information networks of which they are part. This reflects the patchy implementation of the CCBR review's recommendations. The causes, rather than individual symptoms, need to be tackled at their root.




As a prerequisite to such efforts, there is a need for and considerable benefit to be gained from:

1. a gap analysis of existing information provision, need and use on a geographic, taxonomic and target-led basis;
2. the identification, quantification and prioritisation of future biodiversity information supply needs and the means by which they may best be met;

leading to the development of a first UK biodiversity information strategy (UKBIS).

The form each of these take will necessarily depend on a synthesis of views and objectives from across the entire biodiversity information spectrum - from recorders to information users of all sorts and interests - as to what the future could and should hold for biodiversity information and biological recording in relation to the challenges ahead and their particular needs and objectives.

Ensuring that the necessary mechanisms are in place to support priority needs will provide, in turn, greater support for biological recording and the expanded use and provision of biodiversity information.





# From Recording to Revelation - NFBR's Strategic Plan 2011-15

NFBR has always been at its most effective in highlighting issues and opportunities from which a way forward can be identified. In launching this five year plan to coincide with its silver anniversary, NFBR will be seeking to • celebrate the many advances in biological recording over the past twenty-five years, • address the threats to the flow of high quality biodiversity information and • ensure that maximum benefit is derived from future opportunities and potential synergies.

Fostering a wider understanding of biodiversity information provision, from recording to revelation, will

- secure greatest return from the resources and efforts devoted to the recording, dissemination and use of accurate biodiversity data;
- help to ensure that the provision of biodiversity information is adequate to the task of guiding sustainable environmental stewardship against the backdrop of global climate change.

Much of what occurs will depend on the choices and actions of the various bodies in some way involved with the provision of biodiversity information, relying on its timely supply or providing services that support or directly foster recording activities and on the structures within which they are required to operate.

NFBR will work towards the launch of a collaborative venture, linking various initiatives under a banner heading of *Joining the Dots*. This will feature a series of interlinked projects of intrinsic value to or cutting across different sectors of the biodiversity information community.

Each scheme will contribute to the development and support of a strategy that will result in a more coordinated, better informed and better supported framework for biodiversity information provision. In turn, this will provide a more secure basis for all aspects of biological recording, ensuring that it will continue to flourish as the foundation to evidence-led decision-making.

## During 2011-15 NFBR will

### 1. Advocate for the development, adoption and implementation of an effective and sustainable Biodiversity Information Strategy for the UK (UK BIS).

We will work with others to

- 1.1 Undertake a strategic review of the UK's present and future biodiversity information and communication needs. Where relevant, this will draw on and publicise assessments carried out within different sectors over the past 15 years.
- 1.2 Identify and propose measures to address existing gaps in biodiversity information provision, its collection, management and accessibility.
- 1.3 Encourage measures to facilitate the collection, integration, management and use of environmental records - from recording to revelation - in support of sustainable biodiversity action at local to international level.

In addition, we will seek to build on existing initiatives to

- 1.4 Highlight the importance and various roles of the NBN, national recording schemes and societies, and local record centres, in collaboration with individual recorders and survey organisers in maintaining data flow and quality.
- 1.5 Promote easy access to environmental and biodiversity information and to the means to contribute records.
- 1.6 Promote taxonomic skills development, training and mentoring at all levels.
- 1.7 Encourage recognition of the need to enhance resources for the identification and verification of species and the making of records.
- 1.8 Highlight the importance of natural science collections and professional staff capable of using them to promote and support recording.
- 1.9 Support development of outreach programmes that make a sustainable contribution to the capacity and skills of individuals and organisations involved in with the biodiversity information spectrum and their ability to pass on good practice.
- 1.10 Promote biological recording as a rewarding pastime that can make a difference, locally and nationally, especially in relation to the impacts of climate change.

### 2. Encourage and support the leadership of other organisations and individuals engaged with biodiversity information provision - in identifying and prioritising actions based on the views and needs of their sector - as part of developing and implementing an integrated UK BIS.

- 2.1. Develop and strengthen our relationship with all sectors of the recording community and representatives of organisations that require or are obliged to have or provide access to biodiversity information.
- 2.2. Work with other organisations and individuals to develop, implement and support a UK BIS and any daughter strategies, addressing their needs and priorities at a local to national level.

### 3. Ensure that we have the organisational capacity and the resources necessary to support our advocacy and partnership working in support of our objectives.

- 3.1. Seek opportunities, as appropriate, to engage our members in or to employ staff for the purposes of organising consultations and liaison activities, conducting reviews, and preparing and disseminating reports.
- 3.2. Continue to develop our website, newsletters, newsgroups and other means of communication to promote the work of the NFBR and its partners.
- 3.3. Raise awareness of NFBR and its objectives.
- 3.4. Promote personal and corporate membership of NFBR.

We welcome views on our proposals and your own perspective on the future for biodiversity information and biological recording.

Please submit comments to [joiningthedots@nfbr.org.uk](mailto:joiningthedots@nfbr.org.uk)



Visit [www.nfbr.org.uk](http://www.nfbr.org.uk) for more information and news of progress.