NFBR

NATIONAL FORUM FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

Newsletter 54 – October 2017

Contents

Welcome to Issue 54 of the National Forum for Biological Recording Newsletter.

This jam packed edition includes updates on the work being carried out by LERCs and Recording Schemes across the country (pg 9, 10, 14, 18, 21). It also showcases the important work being done by students (pg 6, 20), and of course the invaluable contribution recorders make to our understanding of British wildlife distributions (pg 25).

There are a couple of new regular features; a taxonomy round up and spotlight inteviews with an LERC and a national recording scheme. If you would like your LERC or scheme to feature in a future spotlight, please get in touch.

As this is my first edition as editor, I wanted to heartily thank Martin Harvey for his 5 years stint as the NFBR Newsletter Editor, and also thanks to the many members of the NFBR Advisory Council who assisted with the handover of this responsibility.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter, I hope you all enjoy reading it.

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Cover photo: Necrodes littoralis © National Silphidae Recording Scheme - learn more on page 16!

NFBR News

2017 Conference

The 2017 NFBR Conference saw a gathering of 63 delegates at the Nottingham Conference Centre, under a theme of "*Think globally, record locally – effective biological recording at the scale needed*". The morning session was chaired by Simon Pickles, and the afternoon by Graham Walley. Talks during the day were as follows:

Keynote address: From Bugs to Slugs *Nick Isaac, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology*
A discussion of the contribution of biological records to UK Biodiversity Indicators and the State of Nature Report

Keynote address: What has local ever done for us? *Martin Horlock, Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service*
Examples from across the UK demonstrating the way LERCs have supported work at a national level, and how national projects support local decision making.

Session 1: Using biological records at the national / international scale

- Introduction to People Ponds and Water; three initiatives that identify, monitor and protect the best freshwater sites.

Naomi Ewald, Freshwater Habitats Trust

- Uses of BTO data in the UK and across the world

Andy Musgrove, British Trust for Ornithology

- An endangered UK species in a European context

Darwyn Sumner, Dipterists Forum

Session 2: Using biological records at the landscape scale

- Landscape-scale conservation for butterflies and moths

Caroline Bulman, Butterfly Conservation

- Structured citizen science recording for habitat suitability modelling

John Altringham, Leeds University

- Lancashire Wildlife Trusts' and Merseyside Biobank's Biodiverse Society Project

Joanne Moore, Lancashire Wildlife Trust

- Carbon Landscape Project

Suzanne Waymont, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit

Session 3: Making space for nature – supported by data

- How can the NBN Atlas help to deliver 'bigger, better, more, joined-up'?

Jo Judge, National Biodiversity Network Secretariat

The day concluded with the delegates being split into group workshops; two discussing the topic of Lawton's Principles of Ecology chaired by Graham Walley and Simon Pickles, and one discussing the NBN Atlas, chaired by Jo Judge.

Further notes from the conference are available; please contact NFBR if you would like more information. The PowerPoint presentations will be available on the NFBR website in due course.

NBN Working Groups

Paula Lightfoot represented NFBR at a meeting of the NBN "Data flow, Online Recording and Verification" working group. She also joined a CIEEM webinar entitled "Introduction of the NBN Atlas as a replacement for the Gateway", presented by Jo Judge of the NBN. You can watch the full webinar on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL7UpvDQkg8&feature=youtu.be.

Graham Walley represented NFBR at a meeting of the NBN "Captivating and Engaging People" working group in February 2017. A report by Graham on the progress of this working group is available here: https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/TTE17-02-P15-Report-from-the-Captivating-and-Engaging-working-group-June-2017.pdf

Raynsford Review of the English Planning System

The English planning system is currently under review, with a public questionnaire live until 31st October 2017. The questionnaire can be completed online here: https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RaynsfordPublic. More information about the review is available from the Town and Country Planning Association here: https://www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review.

2018 Conference: Save the Date!

The 2018 Conference is currently being organised, and will be a joint event with Field Studies Council and the Biological Recording Programmes of Manchester Metropolitan University. The theme of the conference is *Skill Development for Biological Recording*, covering a range of topics from technology to taxonomy. The event will run from Thursday 10th May to Saturday 12th May 2018, at Preston Montford, Shrewsbury. Please **save the date**, and get in touch with NFBR if you are interested in contributing a presentation, quickfire talk or poster to the event.

A World First: Botanical "Doomsday Book" completed for Wales

Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI)

Wales has become the first country in the world to have a complete record of its rare flowering plants and ferns. The project, which started almost 40 years ago, has painstakingly compiled a county-by-county register of every single rare plant in the country.

No such detailed account of a nation's flora exists in any other country in the world. The project was started by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and had been supported by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and its predecessor bodies.

Dr Polly Spencer-Vellacott, BSBI Welsh Officer, said: "*Wales came up with the idea of County Rare Plant Registers in Cardiganshire in 1978, and it has now spread to all parts of Britain and Ireland. But this is the first time that any country has achieved this kind of complete coverage and it's wonderful that volunteers across Wales have done all this work.*"

People working in plant conservation can now identify sites for rare plants in all the counties in Wales. The register confirms that Wales has an extraordinary diversity of natural features. It shows that it's possible, in plant terms, to walk from the Mediterranean to the Arctic -from golden samphire at Newborough on Anglesey to purple saxifrage on the Carneddau mountains in Snowdonia.

Over the years the register has progressed from hand-written lists through typescripts and spreadsheets to databases on home computers to, finally, a web-based picture of the rare plants for the whole of Wales. During this time, the work of BSBI volunteers has been supported by grants and staff support from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and its predecessor organisations.

Emyr Roberts, Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales, said: "*NRW is proud to support such a monumental project. Over the years, we have provided funding for BSBI to continue this important work. The register gives us comprehensive and accurate evidence, which in turn means that NRW can provide the best possible advice on rare plants and the issues that could affect them.*"

Dr John Faulkner, BSBI President, said: "*Completing the full set of county Rare Plant Registers for Wales is an important land-mark. No other country has such a complete assessment of the state of its wild flowers. The authors and contributors are to be congratulated on this magnificent achievement.*"

The county Rare Plant Registers are online and can be viewed at http://bsbi.org/rare-plant-registers (*NB the Glamorgan register is currently being updated and will be online shortly*).

Urban Wildflower Meadows: The Bee's Knees

Louise Hutchinson

Male *Bombus lapidarius* on Scabious

An urban green space in the heart of a major city isn't perhaps were you would expect to find Nationally Scarce species, but then Woolfall Heath in the Knowsley Borough of Liverpool isn't just any urban amenity green space.

Formerly an area of largely unmanaged amenity grassland it was chosen as a site for creative conservation – a process by which simplified habitats (i.e. not attempting to mimic semi-natural communities) are created using a small number of species. Local charity Landlife stripped between 350 and 400 mm of the fertile top layer of sandy soil from a 1.7 hectare (ha) area of the approximately 4 ha site in 1993 and subsequently sowed 20 species of native wildflowers over the following 6 years. For 15 years after its creation it was left uncut, then subject to annual late summer mowing.

Whilst the flora on site has been fairly well recorded over the years, some of the fauna has not. Interestingly despite the wealth of flowering plants and woody species – the site is bordered by a variety of shrubs and trees – no intensive biological recording of the pollinating insect fauna has been undertaken.

Thus, at the beginning of this year, as part of a dissertation for an MSc in Biological Recording at Manchester Metropolitan University I surveyed the site for bees, butterflies and hoverflies from the beginning of April until mid-August. In total 67 species were recorded, including 28 species of bee, 13 species of butterfly and 26 species of hoverfly – accounting for over 10% of the UK's total species of these pollinating insects.

Whilst all of the butterflies and hoverflies were species known to be widespread across the British Isles and the majority of the bee records were of common bumble bee species, the bee fauna did turn up some very interesting biological records. The first was *Halictus tumulorum*, recorded in early May, then two weeks later, *Lasioglossum lativentre*. Both species which whilst not uncommon in the southern half of the UK, become much scarcer moving further northwards.

Over the next month nothing uncommon to the region turned up. Then in mid-June *Andrena wilkella* was recorded. Whilst widespread, it has very rarely been recorded in Merseyside. The same is true of another species that turned up on the same day – *Nomada fabriciana*, the cleptoparasite of *Andrena bicolor*.

At this stage, I was beginning to sense this site might have a much more interesting bee fauna than I had been anticipating. I was proved correct at the very beginning of July. The first species of conservation concern came in the form of the Nationally Scarce *Andrena humilis*. Widespread but scarce across England and Wales it is an oligolectic species that collects pollen exclusively from yellow *Asteraceae*.

More intriguingly still it wasn't recorded in the wildflower meadow on site, but rather on an area that has been left as an unsown, regularly mown amenity grassland. It was found on a Dandelion, *Taraxacum agg*., as part of surveys in this habitat to compare the abundance and species richness of flowering plants and associated pollinating insects in an area of amenity grassland compared to that which had been transformed into an urban wildflower meadow.

A week later yet another species rarely recorded in the vice county turned up, *Osmia leaiana*, a species that generally requires plentiful knapweed and thistles, of which several species are abundant at Woolfall Heath. The penultimate survey turned up nothing else out the ordinary it seemed, as did the final survey in July. I exited the meadow for what I thought would be the last time, satisfied with my results and still with some specimens to identify, so crossing fingers that another new species might still yet be recorded. Just as I was about to leave a humungous black and red bumblebee caught my eye. At first, I assumed a particularly large *Bombus lapidarius*, but then I was taken aback by how strikingly dark her wings looked. A closer inspection revealed she was as I had begun now to excitedly expect, the cuckoo bumblebee of the species she resembles – *Bombus rupestris*. Once listed as Nationally Scarce and considered a southern species, it has begun to expand its range, but again still not a common sight in my neck of the woods.

***Bombus rupestris* female**

Whilst completing my survey work I had been volunteering in the Entomology section of World Museum Liverpool. The next day I headed there with one final specimen, an *Andrena* female, that had me puzzled. I never seen anything like her. I began looking at her under the microscope and going through the key in Steve Falk's, 'Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland'. She keyed out no bother, very easily in fact, to one particular species – the trouble was based upon the distribution map and an intense scrutiny of the NBN Atlas, she couldn't possibly be – she would be well out of her range. Even considering historical records, the closest I could find was a record in North Wales … from 1939!

I began pulling out drawers from the museum's impressive collection of British bee specimens. She did indeed look like what she was keying out to be … in fact I couldn't find anything else that she could possibly be! For not the first time I began huffing and puffing in frustration at yet another specimen that looked set to get the better of me.

***Andrena marginata* female specimen**

The only thing left to do was take a series of photographs down the microscope and post them on the BWARS Facebook page, 'UK Bee's, Wasps and Ant's'. I felt utterly foolish posting my suspected ID. In no time at all the ever-reliable Stuart Roberts replied … I thought as I hit on the notification, it's going to be something else really obvious that I

have overlooked. BUT no … she was indeed *Andrena marginata*.

A Nationally Scarce and much declined species now largely restricted to a few southern counties, south Wales, Norfolk and the central Scottish Highlands, it is a scabious specialist, foraging primarily on Small or Field Scabious in its southern range, and Devils-bit Scabious in all of its northern sites … well thus far!

***Andrena marginata* male face**

The most intriguing thing about the record was that she was recorded on Field Scabious … as was the male that turned up in my as yet unidentified specimens from the week before. Upon Stuart's verification, I was reminded of a small dark, *Andrena* male, with a rather distinctive cream marking on the clypeus … and it soon was, yet again verified by Stuart, proved to indeed be the characteristic out curved points exclusive to *Andrena marginata* males.

After a chat with Mike Edwards from BWARS who has been carrying out a genetic study of this species, it was decided that it would be worth going out again once the Devils-bit Scabious, which was sown as part of the original meadow creation alongside Field Scabious, was in flower … and more surprises ensued.

***Andrena marginata* male on Field Scabious**

So, in August I set out again to the meadow. This time both males and females, around 10 individuals in total, were all ignoring the Field Scabious and foraging on the Devils-bit that was now flourishing! And whilst perhaps the most intriguing biological records of the entire study, they were not the last interesting records. Again, making my way out of the meadow, more new species turned up – *Lasioglossum fulvicorne* and *Megachile ligniseca*. Both, particularly the latter, were seemingly little, if at all, previously known to be present in the area.

And so, what started out as a love of spending hours walking through the meadow in summer watching the bees, before inciting a casual interest in finding out what impact the meadow creation might have had on pollinators and eventually a subsequent MSc dissertation, ended up being so much more still! It taught me the value of biological recording on a whole new level – how one person having a general interest in a single site in their local area, can turn up some invaluable finds.

Thanks to Knowsley Council for permission to survey Woolfall Heath.

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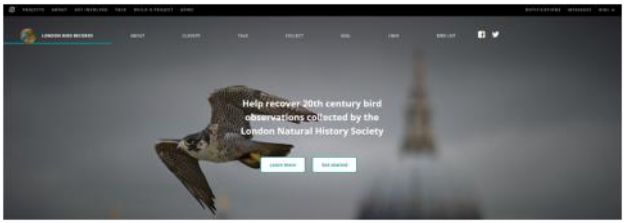
GiGL Joins Zooniverse

Claire Stewart, Greenspace Information for Greater London



As London's environmental record centre, GiGL receives data about London's 13,000 species in countless different formats from various sources including local recorders, community groups and expert ecologists. Processing all of the data GiGL receives in a timely manner and prioritising which data needs to be processed first, often means historic data end up at the bottom of our (continually increasing) to-do list.

One huge contributor of species data comes from members of the London Natural History Society (LNHS). A few years ago the LNHS kindly donated boxes of record cards containing bird sightings since the early 1900s. One of GiGL's in-house volunteers has finished transcribing record cards from the 1980s, but reckons it will take approximately 70 years to digitise the remaining cards at our current rate. This is a classic example of a huge and important source of data that we would love to add to our species dataset, but finding the time to process it has been tricky.

However, after attending the conference "Connecting with the Crowd" at the Natural History Museum, we were inspired try crowdsourcing citizen science online to help get this data digitised.

The principle investigator of the online crowdsourcing website Zooniverse, Chris Lintott, kicked off the conference by introducing how the platform originated from enlisting online volunteers to help classify galaxies. Today, Zooniverse is the world's largest and most popular platform for people-powered research, with hundreds of thousands of volunteer citizen scientists from around the world visiting the site each year to help interpret and transcribe data for research. The opportunity to employ crowd-sourcing to digitise the LNHS bird records convinced the team at GiGL to build our own Zooniverse project.

Back at GiGL Towers we got to work building our own project. Three months on, allow us to introduce the London Bird Project which is currently out for testing by the Zooniverse community and will be going live on the Zooniverse website in a few weeks. We set up the project with the hope that interested members of the public will help us digitise these historic bird records at a faster rate than we can currently manage with our in-house volunteers. Digitising this dataset will improve knowledge of bird populations and distribution in London, and allow historical bird data to be made available for scientific research and used by ecologists, conservationists and decision-makers. We also hope to learn how best to engage a wider community about the value of collecting species data and we look forward to sharing projects that make use of the data with Zooniverse users.

Online crowdsourcing is a new approach for GiGL. If this project is a success, we plan to continue using online crowdsourcing as it would speed up the digitisation of the vast quantities of data we receive. The London Bird Project is open to everyone to get involved and we hope everyone who joins in will enjoy finding out what birds these early 20th century bird watchers were spotting. Please get in touch with GiGL if you have any questions about the project and we look forward to seeing you there!

Winter Wetland Bird Blitz

Mike Beard, Greater Manchester Local Record Centre

The Winter Wetland Bird Blitz was created in response to reports of significant changes to the wintering duck distribution on the River Irwell in Greater Manchester, where there are regionally significant numbers of goldeneye and tufted duck. A Site of Biological Importance was created on a section of the Irwell because it regularly held large winter flocks.

Using the WeBS survey method enabled us to investigate these changes, while also adding valuable data to the WeBS dataset. However, this was to be a 'blitz', covering as much of the river as possible for just one morning to make it easier to recruit volunteers. A simultaneous count would be a more accurate snapshot indication of the population of waterbirds. It also created a stepping stone, encouraging volunteers to become monthly WeBS counters.

We were delighted to receive support from the BTO WeBS team and Jamie Dunning, our Local Organiser at the time. Almost all of the Irwell had vacant high priority WeBS sites, so the upside of the survey was greatly enhanced. Permission to use the WeBS online system meant volunteers could easily enter their own data, and collation of the results was simpler.

The count sections on the Irwell have evolved since counts began there in 1995. Clarifying the survey sections included splitting up very long ones into more manageable lengths; the counts could be combined prior to data being entered. We selected the lower reaches of the River Irwell and major tributaries, where the habitat is suitable for the key duck species mentioned above.

Assistant County Recorder Steve Atkins led a very enjoyable survey method and bird ID training course for ten trainees on 17 December. Everybody was impressed by how many birds could be found on a heavily modified section of urban river. We also recruited additional experienced volunteers. Happily, we were able to meet everybody's preferences, such as pairing with experienced surveyors and assigning convenient counting sections.

The survey took place on 21 January 2017 - we chose a non-core count priority date in case we needed to draft in existing WeBS counters from other areas. Sixteen surveyors (and two companions) covered 41 km of the River Irwell, stretching from Salford Quays to north of Bury.

After data verification by Steve Atkins, some highlight results are shown in Table 1 (opposite). Caution should be taken as these are based upon just one sample, and the data series that we are comparing to is patchy with many sections having only occasionally been counted. Also, it was optional to record some of the species listed.

From a total of 69, the highest numbers of goldeneye were found between Hough Lane Bridge and Agecroft Bridge, but numbering fifty rather than the 105-153 that were seen during January in the early 2000s. The good news is that the

next section downriver, Manchester Cathedral to Hough Lane Bridge, had eighteen whereas previously the highest January count had been just five. The news was not so good upriver as the next section, Agecroft Bridge to Ringley Road Bridge, which had previously but not consistently seen double figures, was now down to just one goldeneye. Another previous hotspot is Bury Bridge to Outwood Weir, but no goldeneye were found compared to fourteen to twenty one in the early 2000s.

Table One: Results summary from January 2017 survey

Species	Total count	No. of "count sections"
Black-headed Gull	491	6
Canada Goose	187	7
Common Gull	10	3
Coot	16	3
Cormorant	26	5
Dipper	12	5
Goldeneye	69	4
Goosander	41	7
Great Black-backed Gull	1	1
Grey Heron	15	7
Grey Wagtail	9	6
Herring Gull	2	2
hybrid duck	1	1
Kingfisher	7	4
Lesser Black-backed Gull	6	3
Little Grebe	28	4
Mallard	420	10
Mallard (domestic)	2	1
Moorhen	61	9
Mute Swan	7	2
Pied/White Wagtail	2	1
Teal	58	2
Tufted Duck	23	3
unidentified large gull	1	1
Woodcock	1	1

Tufted duck are highly mobile and none of the various other water bodies nearby were frozen over. This might explain the total for 41 km of the river – just 23. In contrast, the historic January records for Wallness Crescent 1999-2007 vary between 68 and 366. Another example, Salford Quays 1996-1998, has a low count of one and a high of 435.

Regarding other notable findings, a total of 420 mallard were seen across all ten sections. Moorhen were seen in nine sections. Their total of 61 was nearly matched by teal at 58. Good to see that goosander were in seven sections with a total of 41 birds. Seven kingfishers were found in four sections. Twelve dippers were present in five sections. Possibly the least likely bird was one woodcock. A total of twenty two species were recorded, not counting domestic mallard and those entered as duck hybrids or unidentified large gull.

There had been a previous co-ordinated count along the River Irwell during 1998-99, as reported in Birds of Greater Manchester 1998. It was a great initiative, but unfortunately for comparison to the Winter Wetland Bird Blitz; we began and finished further downriver, they report covering approximately 36km, and it is not clear if it was simultaneous. One comparison does leap out however: in January 1999 they only saw two canada geese compared to our 187. During that entire winter their highest count was 31 in December.

Another successful outcome was three volunteers becoming new WeBS counters, and two more sections of the Irwell are once more going to be regularly surveyed. After a successful first run and some great feedback from the volunteers, the group plan to run the Winter Wetland Blitz once again this winter.

This survey was initiated as part of the Natural Course LIFE IP project: a groundbreaking collaborative water management project which brings together the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Environment Agency, Natural England, United Utilities and the Rivers Trust. More information is available here: www.naturalcourse.co.uk.

Two volunteers practicing the survey method during training workshop on the River Irwell

BRC Update

Martin Harvey

Recent changes for national recording schemes

A new national recording scheme has been established for beetles in superfamilies Cleroidea and Lymexyloidea, a group including six beetle families and some very attractive species. This scheme is being organised by Wil Heeney and John Lamin, and can be contacted at clely@brc.ac.uk or on Twitter via @CleLyRS

The Anthomyiidae Study Group has been in existence for some time under the expert lead of Michael Ackland, tackling a group of flies that is very under-recorded and has always been regarded as among the more challenging groups. Phil Brighton has now joined Michael and is the main contact point for the study group; he has been busy collating new data for the group.

Website support

BRC continues to host and support websites for a number of recording schemes. We have been working with the Coleoptera recording schemes over the last year or so to refresh the UK Beetle Recording website (http://www.coleoptera.org.uk/). This provides a home for 19 individual Coleoptera recording schemes. There are many new features such as a helpful guide to beetle families by Mark Gurney, and extended library of beetle images (thanks to Lech Borowiec for making his photos available for use), and information on The Coleopterist journal, which now has its home within the UK Beetle Recording site.

Online recording

iRecord (https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/) and the many linked websites and apps that feed in to the linked Indicia warehouse continue to bring large numbers of records into one place where they can be made available for verification and sharing, in conjunction with the relevant national recording schemes.

At August 2017, over 2 million records were available via iRecord. A minimum of 47% of these have been reviewed so far by the expert volunteer verifiers who check the records on behalf of the recording schemes, and of those checked, 94% have been accepted and 1.6% not accepted.

Atlases and publications

At the end of 2016, part 9 of the Provisional atlas of the aculeate Hymenoptera of Britain and Ireland (http://www.field-studies-council.org/publications/pubs/provisional-atlas-of-the-aculeate-hymenoptera-of-britain-and-ireland-part-9.aspx) was published on behalf of BWARS. This atlas series has now covered just over 80% of the British species of bee, wasps and ant.

The Earthworm Society of Britain (ESB) has published a new Earthworm Recorder's Handbook. This document was designed to provide guidance for new and existing earthworm recorders with regards to all aspects of earthworm recording, including sampling and identification. You can learn more and download the handbook for free on the Earthworm Society's website: http://www.earthwormsoc.org.uk/node/126.

Sharing Sussex beetle records

Clare Benclowe, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre

In September 2016, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) secured a grant from Natural England, under the Open Licensing of Species Data grant scheme, to deliver an ambitious project on Sharing Sussex Beetle Records. The main objective was to make an 'as-complete-as-possible', good quality Sussex beetle dataset available for use under an open 'CC-BY' licence, while minimising duplication of records and respecting the wishes of recorders with respect to sharing their data.

Peter Hodge with his field notebooks

Over 1,000 people have shared their beetle records with SxBRC; of these, the majority – 650 people – have shared between 1 and 4 records. But there is one person who has shared an order of magnitude more Sussex beetle records than anyone else. That person is Peter Hodge: the volunteer Sussex County Recorder for Beetles.

Since 1971, Peter has been keeping records of the beetles he finds in a series of field notebooks. Over the past ten years, SxBRC has been working on digitising Peter's records, using a combination of volunteer time and grant funding to pay for staff time. The Open Licensing of Species Data grant from Natural England enabled us to finally complete the digitisation of Peter Hodge's field notebooks which hold 43 years of data; or 43,000 records.

As well as recording for personal interest, since 1990 Peter has undertaken professional invertebrate surveys for a range of different clients. Records from these surveys were also entered into Peter's field notebooks. As we were designing this project, Peter alerted us to the fact that his clients may consider that the records gathered through his professional surveys, and recorded in his notebooks, belong to them. It was therefore conceivable that they could challenge Peter and SxBRC on our legal right to apply a CC-BY licence to Peter's notebook data. In order to minimise legal and reputational risks to Peter, it was decided we would write to all of Peter's clients to notify them of our intention to share his records under a CC-BY licence and give them an option to request that data collected while working under contract to them be excluded.

We also consulted with other recorders who have shared their beetle record(s) with SxBRC, to ask if it would be OK to share their records under an open data licence. Advice was sought from Martin Harvey of the Biological Records Centre, and Rachel Stroud of the NBN Secretariat, on how best to frame our communication with recorders. We agreed we should keep our communication clear and project-focussed, with enough factual context to help people understand what we were asking, and why.

Of the roughly 1,000 people who have ever shared their beetle records with SxBRC, we were able to source email address for around 300 people and we received responses from over 160. The majority of the beetle recorders who responded were in favour of their records being shared under a CC-BY licence. However, several of the major contributors (people who've shared 150 records or more) responded "No" or

"Maybe". Reasons for withholding permission to share data under a CC-BY licence included:

- Concerns regarding threats to sensitive species
- Concerns regarding collecting / recording on private land and SSSIs
- Concerns regarding the impact that open data would have on the viability of Local Environmental Record Centres
- Concerns regarding individuals or organisations benefitting financially from the data being made open
- Concerns regarding ownership rights over commercially gathered data

There were also a range of very positive responses to the consultation:
"*Delighted that these records are made 'open to all'.*"
"*More opportunities like this please - the more open the data the more successful conservation will be.*"
"*I welcome this approach to all biological records, except under exceptional circumstances where very rare species or sites could be put at risk.*"
"*I am replying on behalf of my husband … who passed away in June 2014. I'm sure he would have had no problem in his records being included, perhaps a nice memoriam for him.*"
"*I look forward to seeing the growing data set. Well done for putting it together!*"

New guidance for adding historic data to the NBN Atlas was published in March 2017, just as we were preparing the final dataset for sharing with via the NBN Atlas. This guidance is very clear that biological recorders have Intellectual Property Rights, in the form of database rights, for the data they record; the recorder's permission may therefore be required before the data can be shared via the NBN Atlas. These rights last for 15 years since the last "substantial change" to the dataset was made and persist after death. Where SxBRC was aware that a dataset or collection had been inherited by another party, after the recorders' death, we therefore sought that party's permission to share the relevant records under an open data licence.

Celebratory Rose Chafer cake

In order to ensure full compliance with the NBN's guidance, SxBRC made the decision that the 'as-complete-as-possible' Sussex beetle dataset shared via the NBN Atlas would only include records where the recorder (or inheritor) had given their explicit permission for the data to be shared. With all the effort we put into contacting recorders (and inheritors), we were successful in mobilising 83% of SxBRC's beetle data holdings to the NBN Atlas. The records should soon be available to view, if you search for the Sussex beetle dataset.

Although the funded term of the project has now finished, we are continuing to work with the national beetle recording schemes to share data and facilitate verification.

For more details about the project you can download our Lessons Learned report here.

Recording Scheme Spotlight

Each month the NFBR newsletter will be celebrating one of the many and varied National Recording Schemes in the UK. These schemes help to ensure accurate species identification, help with dataflow and are an essential part of the British wildlife recording community.

Tell us a bit about the scheme
The National Silphidae Recording Scheme is still a very new scheme, established in the spring of 2016. It covers a very small but fascinating family of beetles, which are commonly referred to as 'carrion beetles'. In the UK there are just 20 recorded species.

How is the scheme run?
The scheme is organised by three volunteers, all with a keen interest in Silphids; Ashleigh Whiffin, Matthew Esh & Richard Wright. The group came together with the aid of social media, with Ashleigh contacting Matt via Twitter and asking if he'd like to be involved. Ashleigh and Matt handle the records and are both verifiers on iRecord. They also run the Twitter account, promote the scheme at events and organise workshops. Richard has been vital in producing an updated Silphidae key and more recently an interactive guide.

Do you run events such as field days or training courses?
One of the aims of the scheme is to encourage more people to record these beetles. Helping people with identification is a vital part of this which we are doing by providing free, accessible ID guides and running workshops. So far we have hosted one workshop at Edge Hill University (where Matt is studying), with over 20 participants (You can read more about it here: https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/biology/2017/05/23/biologys-first-silphidae-workshop/). We are in the process of organising more.

Any highlights or achievements you would like to share from the past year?
We were very proud of attending the NBN conference last year (hosted at National Museums Scotland). Ashleigh gave a short talk introducing the scheme and our aims and matt hosted a poster/display, which included a family of live burying beetles (*Nicrophorus vespilloides*) which were a real hit with the delegates! Our presence at the conference really boosted awareness of the scheme which we were very pleased with.

Can you tell us about a particular species that readers can look out for?
Fortunately, Silphid beetles are generally quite large and the majority can be identified with the naked eye. We would like people to use our ID guides to look out for Silphids (http://www.coleoptera.org.uk/silphidae/home) as we really want to improve

the existing knowledge on current species distributions. If you are someone that uses a light trap, then you may notice that sometimes Silphids turn up in your trap. We are very interested in these records so please do send them in to us via iRecord (https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/).

One of the species attracted to light is *Necrodes littoralis*, the Shore Sexton Beetle. This species was originally believed to prefer coast habitats but this is not the case, as it is often recorded inland. Can you help us map its distribution more accurately? The key features to help you identify this species are:

- Large beetle (15-25mm)
- Entirely black apart from orange tips of antennae
- Antennae are thread-like, not clubbed
- Elytra truncate- exposing abdomen & with strong ridges

How should readers get in touch if they wish to know more about your scheme?
Website: http://www.coleoptera.org.uk/silphidae/home
Twitter: https://twitter.com/silphidaeuk
Email: silphidae@brc.ac.uk

Get involved with the Wild Watch

Alice Crosby, Nidderdale AONB

The Wild Watch project aims to carry out Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's biggest ever survey for wildlife. The project will help people learn about and enjoy Nidderdale's natural heritage by helping them to acquire the natural history skills they need to collect data on the threatened species of Nidderdale. Delivered by Nidderdale AONB and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Wild Watch will focus on surveying 50 key species across Nidderdale AONB. The data gathered will be used for ecological modelling, in the form of Habitat Suitability Models to identify priority areas where habitat could be improved and even potentially create new habitat for some of our most important species in the future.

We need people to help with surveys starting in April 2018 – no experience is necessary. If you would like to get involved, sign up to our newsletter and to find out more please visit www.thewildwatch.org.uk.

Northamptonshire's WILDside Project

Ryan Clark, Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre

Over the last 6 months the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre has been working hard on its WILDside project, which is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. As with many counties, there are numerous holes in our knowledge of Northamptonshire's wildlife, even for many common or obvious species. Northants also has 730 plus local wildlife sites, many of which we know very little about their fauna, and sometimes even the flora. For some species groups there is just one recorder for the county - or none at all - leaving Northants in a much worse position than many other counties. Encouraging new recorders now will not only strengthen surviving recording networks but help to ensure that the data vital to guiding decisions that may impact on wildlife conservation will be collected and available in future; and, perhaps most importantly it will offer a huge opportunity to anyone who is keen to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence in identifying and recording a particular species group.

The main aims of this project are to:

- Strengthen the voluntary recording network
- Recruit and train new recorders
- Help existing recorders to broaden and deepen their recording and identification skills

This project runs until October 2018, but we have been really busy already! To achieve these aims we have been running a variety of free training workshops and field sessions, these include sessions on private Local Wildlife Sites where access wouldn't usually be possible. These sessions supplement the excellent range already provided by the Wildlife Trust. We will be planning lots more of these workshops over the winter to take place next year.

We have also organised a variety of talks which take place at the Northamptonshire Natural History Society each month. These usually provide an introduction to the ecology and identification of a taxonomic group. In the next few months we have talks on freshwater habitats, and lichens, lined up. There will be lots more talks after

these ones too!
We have also been building up a library of books, resources and equipment which can be used by recorders in the county. We wouldn't have been able to purchase these resources, which are used for workshops and will be available to be borrowed, without the HLF funding.

We are also using this project to encourage online recording. You can enter records for Northamptonshire on our website and I plan to run training on using the website over the winter. We will also be signposting people via our website to existing online resources and creating a series of surveys for specific species to look out for!

Our Facebook Group now has over 90 members and is becoming a nice little community of people interested in recording Northamptonshire's wildlife. There you can get help with identification along with keeping up to date with events and what other people in the county are seeing! You can also keep up to date with the project by emailing me and asking to be added to the mailing list.

We have also been providing a number of drop in sessions, both at the Wildlife Trust's Northamptonshire office at Lings, and at the Northamptonshire Natural History Society Building. We will be running more of these sessions over the next year, enabling you to get help with identification, surveying or recording wildlife.

This project is really exciting and will leave a lasting legacy of more records and better supported recorders in the county. To keep up to date with the project, why not join our Facebook Group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/1881392962133285/), where you will find details of upcoming events and can get help with identification. If you have any questions, please drop me an email at WILDside@northantsbrc.org.uk.

heritage lottery fund

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Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre

Species identification by experts and non-experts: comparing images from field guides

Gail Austen, Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent

© Elaine Wright

Unlike many wildlife enthusiasts, my passion for local flora and fauna began in my thirties. I was in the third year of a degree. Even at that age I was amazed at the abilities of the army of local recorders. Imagine just looking at a small insect and being able to name it!

As a novice, even though I recognised something I couldn't necessarily name the species. Reference to an identification guide was helpful, but I wasn't necessarily confident in identifying and naming the unknown specimen from the photos available.

A similar process of matching unknowns with photos happens daily, but with people and security situations such at airports. Studies of face recognition have found that despite being good at recognising familiar faces, we are terrible at recognising unfamiliar faces. Within person variation can be so great that strangers do not link an individual's different photo ids, (e.g. passport, driving licence and work pass) as the same person. Interestingly, when these abilities were tested in an airport, the experience and training of the passport officers had no influence on their accuracy in identifying people from their photo id. This is not a unique situation, and is exemplified by the recent rise of 'super recognisers', so could this be the same in the process of species identification?

Using images from two identification guides, with different illustrators, we tested this theory using a visual matching task. Two bumblebees were presented side by side, on a white background from a dorsal view. Participants were asked if they believed them to be the same or different species; 'don't know' was also an option so people were not forced to guess. The main findings were that overall accuracy in identifying whether pairs were the same or different species was between 54% and 57% for all expertise groups, but that experts were more consistent, and more cautious about committing to an answer if unsure. These were interesting results that fit with similar studies in other disciplines, and show variation between species and inter-observer accuracy. Although an initial study, it would be of great interest to see this tested in other scenarios, for example across different taxa, mimics and with specimen collections.

These results may not be a surprise to those involved in recording. I have heard many comments noting that images have limitations, whereas in practice there is much more information to be had by seeing something in-situ or examining a specimen. However, with an increase of images being collected by digital means, misidentification errors should be considered when using data to make decisions, such as man-

agement plans or policy.
On a final note, while the subject of expertise is a discipline in its own right, it is worth remembering that it changes with new findings and is subject specific. These findings do not detract from the vast knowledge that experts have regarding distributions, interactions and the ecological significance of particular species. As with the examples in face recognition studies, the more we investigate variations on this theme, we may find that the skill is in the image matching ability rather than the subject of the image itself.

The full paper is open access and available at: http://www.nature.com/articles/srep33634.
You can read some thoughts and responses from NFBR members on our Facebook Group, specifically on this post from Sept 2016: https://www.facebook.com/groups/NatForumBioRecording/permalink/757708197703918/

Celebrating ten years of the Welsh LERC network

Colin Russell, West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre

Staff from the four Welsh LERCs at the anniversary event in Carmarthen

The Local Environmental Records Centres Wales celebrated a decade of close collaboration at a special event at the University of Wales Trinity St Davids, Carmarthen, on Friday, July 14th 2017.
Wales is the only nation in the UK with a complete network of LERCs. The network started with the establishment of Biodiversity Information Service (BIS) for Powys and Brecon Beacons National Park in 2000, followed by South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) in 2005, and Cofnod also in 2005. In 2007, the network was completed with the launch of West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre in Carmarthenshire.
The four LERCs have closely collaborated and shared expertise since 2007. Recognition of this close collaboration and shared vision grew over the years, culminating in the formation of a consortium to formalise the partnership in 2015 under the banner Local Environmental Records Centres Wales.
In 2016 LERC Wales launched the public tool of Aderyn (Biodiversity Information Reporting Database at aderyn.lercwales.org.uk) which uses a collated Wales-wide database. It allows visitors to view the full Welsh distribution of a species or taxon group, and also to pull out a species list for any one km square in Wales.

NBN Update

Mandy Henshall, National Biodiversity Network

Update from NBN Atlas makes UK the 2nd-largest data publishing country to GBIF

In July, when the NBN made its first major update of datasets from the NBN Atlas to GBIF.org, the 47 million occurrence records it added immediately made the United Kingdom the second-largest national contributor of data to the global index.

This milestone marks the conclusion of NBN's own efforts to implement machine-readable licensing of all occurrence datasets. In August 2016, to give NBN more time to work with our data partners and ensure appropriate licensing and permissions, GBIF and NBN withdrew 329 datasets containing 27.3 million records, representing 72 percent of all occurrences published by UK institutions at that time.

More than half of the withdrawn datasets have now returned, restoring nearly 12 million records, joined by 484 new ones holding more than 35 million occurrences. About two thirds of NBN's data partners now choose to share open data through the GBIF network.

Thanks to a reconfiguration in how NBN shares data from the UK, each of these NBN data partners all now appear in publisher search results on GBIF.org. That change means they also receive clearer, more direct credit when their datasets contribute to published research, at least when researchers use recommended citations for their download DOIs.

This practice makes it easier for GBIF to link user downloads applied in research and policy back to its contributing datasets, publishers and countries.

You can read the full article written by Kyle Copas of the GBIF Secretariat on the NBN website: https://nbn.org.uk/news/update-nbn-atlas-makes-uk-2nd-largest-data-publishing-country-gbif/

Download limit on NBN Atlas has been increased

We are pleased to report that the original limit of 50,000 as the number of records that could be downloaded from the NBN Atlas has been removed.

This is the same for NBN Atlas Scotland and NBN Atlas Wales. A much higher figure of 10 million records is now in place and this seems to be working well. With the 10 million record download facility users can download all the data for any species and all the data for any dataset except for the BTO dataset – Birds (BTO+Partners) which has 151 million records.

The new system is queue based, which means that if there are lots of requests, they are queued and handled one at a time. During periods of high activity this may result in a longer response time, but this should only be noticeable for the larger downloads. There are several queues in use, larger downloads being handled on one queue, smaller on another.

New features include:

shapefile downloads

customised downloads – allowing users to select groups of fields

Thank you for your patience whilst we resolved the issue with downloads and speed of response from the NBN Atlas and we hope you find the larger download facility suits your needs.

Nominations are in for the 2017 UK Awards for Biological Recording and Information Sharing!

The National Biodiversity Network seeks to recognise significant achievement and celebrate success in biological recording and information sharing. The NBN therefore established a national award scheme, in 2015, in partnership with the Biological Records Centre and the National Forum for Biological Recording. These awards are made annually to individuals, groups of people or organisations that are making outstanding contributions to biological recording and improving our understanding of the natural world.

We are delighted to announce that 2017 saw us receive more nominations than in the previous two years, with 59 people nominated across the six award categories. The five short-listed nominees from each category were announced on 29 September and are listed alphabetically below. Congratulations to all!

Adult Newcomer Award
Dave Braddock – from Surrey
Adrian Cooper – from Suffolk
Annie Irving – from Vale of Glamorgan
Liam Olds – from Rhondda Cynon Taf
Hugh Tooby – from Stirlingshire

David Robertson Adult Award for marine and coastal wildlife
George Catchpole – from Essex
Paula Lightfoot – from Tyne & Wear
John Newnham – from West Sussex
Jack Sewell – from Devon
Rob Wells – from Cornwall

Gilbert White Adult Award for terrestrial and freshwater wildlife
George Catchpole – from Essex
Peter Hodge – from East Sussex
John Newnham – from West Sussex
Adrian Norris – from West Yorkshire
Dan Watson – from Stirling

Lynne Farrell Group Award for wildlife recording
Community Science – from Derbyshire
Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership – from South Yorkshire
Inner Forth Landscape Partnership – from Falkirk West
NESBReC Mammal Atlas – from Aberdeenshire
Sorby Natural History Society – from South Yorkshire

Youth Awards for wildlife recording
Jann Billker – from Buckinghamshire
Tyler Ingleheart – from Somerset
Mhairi McCann – from Inverclyde
Evan Potter – from Greater Manchester

The winners will be announced at a special ceremony on the evening of 16th November as part of the NBN's annual conference, so why not come along and meet them in Cardiff?

The Awards are kindly being sponsored by Opticron, Paramo and the Field Studies Council.

NBN Conference – not too late to book!

This year's NBN Conference 2017 is taking place on **Thursday 16th and Friday 17th November** at the **National Museum of Wales, Cardiff**.

As we continue to move around the UK, and based on feedback from 2016, Wales was the next logical place to visit, especially with the launch of the NBN Atlas Wales this year.

Bookings are still open and you can find the latest information and programme on the NBN website: https://nbn.org.uk/news-events-publications/nbn-conference-2/nbn-conference-2017/

Taxonomy round up

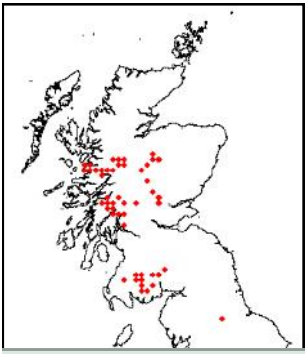
Chris Raper, Natural History Museum

Some key taxonomic changes in the UK Species Inventory from the last six months:

- A brand new Freshwater checklist has been created, which precipitated the need for a FRESHWATER flag in the ORGANISM table. Prior to that we had MARINE_FLAG and TERRESTRIAL_FRESHWATER_FLAG and the plan will be to slowly convert this old joint-use flag to just TERRESTRIAL only.
- A complete revamp/bug-fix of the JNCC Designatory checklist has taken place, tackling some significant problems created by recent updates. Graham French and I have synchronised it with the JNCC's own database and provided a mechanism that will allow us to generate reliable updates easily in the future.
- Further significant updates to the Lepidoptera Checklist by Les Hill. Although the checklist followed the original book closely, the format of the book was deemed wrong for biological recording. This meant that we had to add over 300 new rows to allow for binomials where trinomials existed. There are a few tweaks that still need to be done but the current version is a great improvement.
- Further large updates to the British Mycological Society Checklist. Richard Shotbolt ran his synchronisation scripts in earnest at the end of last year and they brought the UKSI into line with the IndexFungorum world taxonomy and the BMS UK Checklist. Since then the Lichenologists spotted some issues and these have largely been fixed now.
- A lot of ad-hoc additions to the List of Additional Names. The LoAN checklist continues to be the list where all ad-hoc additions reside, with almost 300 new names being added in the last six months. These include reclassifications such as the promotion of [Grass Snake] *Natrix natrix subsp. helvetica*. to a full species, *Natrix helvetica*. New species to the UK tend to be added to the LoAN checklist; many of the new taxa are marine crustaceans, as super-recorders like David Fenwick Snr and Steve Trewhella find more and more non-natives on driftwood and flotsam coming over from the USA and Carribean.
- I'm currently working on big changes to the Coleoptera checklist, in collaboration with Mark Gurney at the RSPB.

Square Bashing in Scotland

Roger Morris, Hoverfly Recording Scheme



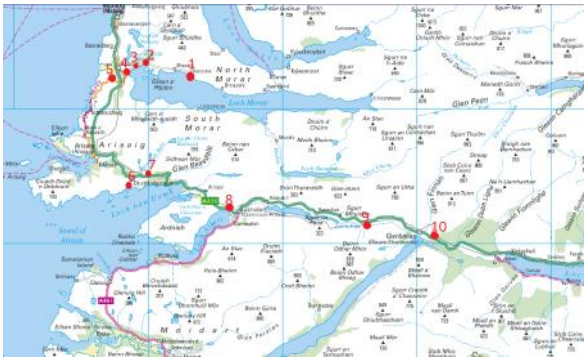
Coverage at 10km resolution

The Trip

Between 31 May and 10 June 2017 I made my way through Scotland, staying at four localities: St John's Town of Dalry, Moffat, Tarbet (Loch Lomond) and Kingussie. Conditions were far from ideal, with several spells of wet weather and most of the time there was a risk of rain. I made a serious effort to record Nematocera for the Cranefly and Fungus Gnat schemes in addition to hoverflies.

The Square Bashing Process

For those who are unfamiliar with the concept of square-bashing, I thought it might be instructive to show how I approach the subject. The map below depicts the route I took on 9th June between Mallaig and Fort William. It involved a total of ten stops, mainly on roadside verges as real 'sites' are often hard to come by. Where I can, I try to stop by a stream or woodland so that there is potential to collect Nematocera. In other places I stop for a matter of minutes when I spot somewhere that might yield a few hovers: after all, every record counts!



On this day, my aim was to cover part of the west coast that is very poorly recorded. The day was not ideal – a mixture of sunshine and showers – and there were very few nectar sources. So, apart from checking out the occasional roadside Rowan, it was a matter of sweeping to generate the majority of records.

Even so, I did find two very nice localities. The first (location 6) was a lovely iris flush running to the shoreline, which is very characteristic of the west coast of Scotland, and the second (location 9) was a delightful section of stream with adjacent meadows covered in pignut and with localised patches of brambles and dog rose. Both were pleasant and the second site yielded a reasonable list of hoverflies. Nevertheless, hoverflies were thin on the ground and I did far better for Nematocera.

Location 6: Flushed shoreline with iris beds

The Hoverfly results

[The weather conditions] meant that I spent far more time sweeping and relatively little time watching Rowan flowers. The [Hoverfly] records reflected this, with Bacchines and Chrysogastrines dominating the catch. The dominant species in most samples were the genera Melanostoma, Platycheirus and

Sphegina, which is not entirely surprising bearing in mind that sweeping tends to yield far more of these genera than basic visual searches. There was a relative lack of Syrphini [and Cheilosini], which are far more likely to be recorded as flower visitors and by active searching.
Generating a decent list does involve retaining quite large numbers of specimens because there is always a dominant species and a tail of species that are far scarcer.

The Nematocera results

When recording Nematocera I simply hoover up everything that flies like a cranefly or gnat and then sort them when I get home. Out of this morass I also identify what I can from other families, and pin a small amount of specimens for identification in the winter (or a winter!). The end result often yields records of Lauxaniidae, Empididae, Dolichiopodidae, Tephritidae and Larger Brachycera, so lots of schemes benefit in the long-run.

Sample of Nematocera separated into craneflies and fungus gnats.

[Since the trip I have] had a summary of the fungus gnat results back from Peter Chandler. It transpires that I managed 221 species/site records from 30 sites comprising a total of 94 species (about 17% of the British fauna). Unfortunately, my timing was not ideal and I was probably a little early in the year but I did get a few whose distribution is mainly Scottish. The best site list I generated was at Craigellachie where I managed to find 42 species which is almost a respectable total!
Possibly the best record I generated was *Ditomyia fasciata* from a site near Barnard Castle in Co. Durham. I also took a specimen of this species in Wingate Plantation in June. These two records are northward extensions of its known range. Maybe it is responding to climate change but, then again, coverage is not fantastic in NE England.
Peter tells me that fungus gnat recording has been very limited this year. This feedback is very useful because it highlights just how important parataxonomists such as me could be to this recording scheme. Peter lives in southern England and will never manage to cover the country on his own. So a combination of field meetings and individual efforts is needed to improve coverage. So, do you own a net and a microscope (and pooter)? If so, it is not too late to start collecting fungus gnats and supplying them to Peter.

Conclusions

The final tally of coverage was relatively good, with 49 10km squares visited. Had conditions been better I would have expected the coverage to have been closer to 60 10km squares and a lot more records, but I made up for the lack of hoverflies by recording other taxa. I have lots of sawflies, a few beetles and a scattering of other Diptera families to deal with. So, overall, the trip should have been reasonably productive.
This [method of square bashing] is the sort of recording that others might wish to try. It is arguably the most effective way of making sure that one uses one's time efficiently and makes sure that as many schemes as possible benefit from what is a very expensive trip.

This article is a combination of 3 posts from Roger's blog Syrphing Time.

Local Environmental Records Centre Spotlight

Each month the NFBR newsletter will be celebrating one of the Local Environmental Records Centres [LERCs] in the UK. These organisations are centres for the collation, management and dissemination of biodiversity data on a local scale, making biodiversity information available to decision makers throughout the UK, alongside supporting British Biological Recorders in a myriad of ways.

North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre [NEYEDC] is based in York, and covers all five of the Yorkshire Vice Counties (VC61 to VC65) to some degree. The NEYEDC database contains 470,000 species records, focussing on data required to inform local decision-making, including information on 2000+ Local Wildlife Sites.

Tell us a bit about the LERC

Getting things started: Historically there was no LERC covering the counties of North Yorkshire or East Riding of Yorkshire. Following a feasibility study conducted by English Nature, Environment Agency and Local Authorities in the late 1990s it was determined that the LERC needs of North and East Yorkshire, along with the Unitary cities of York and Hull, would be best served by establishing an independent charitable trust, whose function would be to operate a Local Environmental Records Centre. The Deeds of Trust to establish the North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Trust were signed rather fittingly on Yorkshire Day (1st August) 1999.

Organisation type: The Charitable Trust, since renamed the Yorkshire & Humber Ecological Data Trust, has a single operating function – North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre. We are an independent LERC not hosted by another organisation.

The office: Having moved from the medieval St William's College in 2015, our offices are conveniently located above a sweet shop, and occupy three floors of a Georgian town house owned by the Dean and Chapter of York Minster. The office has a fairly boring plain blue door when viewed from the street, but we have good views of York Minster from our third floor meeting room. We've been known to spend time spotting the Peregrines that roost on top of the Minster towers from our office windows.

The view from NEYEDC's office

Tell us about your team

Three full-time staff along with one part-time data officer make up the permanent staff of NEYEDC and we host the ALERC National Co-ordinator. We also have a number of surveyors we can call upon as and when required, in particular botanical surveyors. We have engaged a number of volunteers and short-term employees over recent years, helping with both the running of the Centre as well as specialists in areas such as GIS, aerial image processing and technical IT developers. Our staff have developed an interest in remote sensing and in particular using Drones for aerial mapping, and two of our staff are qualified as Drone pilots with CAA certification. We also have an interest in botanical ID and surveying and training new naturalists in data management and use.

Tell us about the local recording scene

The area covered by NEYEDC includes many active organisations and resources for biological recorders.

The Yorkshire Naturalists' Union (YNU) is one of the country's oldest wildlife organisations, having celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2011. NEYEDC provide administrative support to the YNU, and hosts its reference library and archives within the office. The YNU publishes a journal, The Naturalist, three times a year, as well as an annual bird report and butterfly and moth report. YNU also publishes atlases for specific taxanomic groups. NEYEDC have been involved in the production and publication of two recent atlases; the South Yorkshire Plant Atlas (2011) and Water Beetles of Yorkshire (2017). We set up YHEDT Publishing to enable the publication of atlases of lesser recorded groups.

There are many smaller local recording groups within North and East Yorkshire, some of whom work closely with NEYEDC, in particular the East Yorkshire Bat Group and North Yorkshire Bat Group, Yorkshire branch of Butterfly Conservation and the Yorkshire Dragonfly Group. There are also several museums in North and East Yorkshire with natural history sections, in particular the Yorkshire Museum in York.

Tell us about how you support local recorders

We host an annual conference for data providers, which includes naturalists, consultants and land managers. We support an MSc training day in conjunction with Leeds University and the YNU. We also support a local Mollusca recorder who manages the national Conchological Society database, helping to run their Recorder 6 database, publish the data to NBN Atlas and to take and store backups of this database. We have helped to organise and given technical support at a number of successful Bioblitzes over the past few years including events at Scarborough seashore and Nosterfield Nature Reserve.

Any highlights or achievements you would like to share from the past year?

The Nosterfield Nature Reserve BioBlitz in July 2017 was a great event, plus we provided aerial mapping of the site using our Drone.

We published the Water Beetles of Yorkshire in January 2017 (of which a few copies remain at the bargain price of £6!).

NEYEDC is approaching its five year anniversary as an ALERC accredited LERC, so we are currently preparing for our re-assessment.

What are the top three sites you would recommend to visiting wildlife recorders?

This is a difficult question to answer as NEYEDC covers 75% of Yorkshire! Aside from the obvious, nationally designated honeypots of the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks, two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Nidderdale and the Howardian Hills) and stunning coastline that runs from Staithes to the unique site of Spurn National Nature Reserve at the mouth of the Humber Estuary, there are numerous wildlife havens.
A couple of NEYEDC staff highlights that are lesser known, but support a wide range of species are:

© Chris Heaton

Nosterfield Nature Reserve, North Yorkshire. A 150 acre former quarry site owned and managed by the Lower Ure Conservation Trust. NEYEDC helped to run a very successful bioblitz here in July 2017, recording over 600 species in one day. http://www.luct.org.uk/nosterfield/

Askham Bog Nature Reserve, York. Situated between a pig farm and former tip on the urban fringes of York, Askham Bog is a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve. It is the relic of an ancient lake, left behind some 15,000 years ago by a retreating glacier. Its long and fascinating history, as well as its biological diversity makes it a truly individual site. http://www.ywt.org.uk/reserves/askham-bog-nature-reserve

© Malcolm Temple

© Ian Lavender

Tophill Low Nature Reserve, East Yorkshire. This active Yorkshire Water Treatment Works and surrounding mosaic of woodland and grassland habitats provide an important wildlife haven not only for migrating birds, but a whole host of other species from otter, water vole and great crested newt to the East Yorkshire rarity of greater water parsnip. A full list of species can be found on their website: http://tophilllow.blogspot.co.uk/

How can we find out more about North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre?

Visit our website: www.neyedc.org.uk or call 01904 641631

Site images all sourced via http://www.geograph.org.uk/, please click on each image to view original.

National Forum for Biological Recording

The National Forum for Biological Recording is the premier UK organisation for practitioners engaged with biological recording across the UK. Membership includes individual naturalists, national organisations and recording societies, local records centres and their staff. This gives it a unique perspective and an important role.

Whether you are an experienced naturalist or taking your first steps in biological recording, we want to hear from you.

To offer an article for a newsletter, please contact our Newsletter Editor: Elaine Wright on editor@nfbr.org.uk

To join the NFBR, please contact our Membership Officer and Treasurer: Clare Langrick on membership@nfbr.org.uk

For all other enquiries about NFBR please contact our Chairman: Graham Walley on chairman@nfbr.org.uk

Join the discussion on Facebook and Twitter.