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NFBR NEWS

WORK FOR NFBR ... IN AN NFBR WORKING GROUP

NFBR Council has set up 'working groups' to tackle some of the issues within Biological Recording. Aims of the group are:

1. To draft policy for consideration by NFBR.
2. To write discussion papers for *NFBR Newsletter* and appropriate journals.
3. Prepare 'modules' for the *Handbook of Biological Recording*.

The groups will give all members the chance to seek advice, contribute experience or to highlight issues on which NFBR should comment or campaign. Each group has a co-ordinator who will develop a work programme dependent on membership interest. Workshops are open to all NFBR members; please contact the co-ordinators to discuss the subjects they are tackling and to establish your interest as an observer or contributor. NFBR newsletter will try to keep up with the working groups as they develop. NFBR executive committee members will be happy to discuss the setting up of additional groups.

NFBR Working Groups

COMPUTER RECORDING SYSTEMS AND DATA STANDARDS

Co-ordinator - Mr W.A. Ely, Clifton Park Museum, Clifton Lane, Rotherham, South Yorks S65 2AA.
Tel: 0701 2121 ext. 3559.

ELECTRONIC CHECK LISTS

Co-ordinator - Mr G. Walley, Nottingham Natural History Museum, Wollaton Hall, Nottingham NG8 2AE.
Tel: 0602 281130.

PHASE 1 (HABITAT) SURVEY

Co-ordinator - Dr I.A. Tait, County Ecologist, East Sussex County Council, County Planning Dept., Southover Rd, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1YA.
Tel: 0273 475400.

HABITAT RECORDING (CARD DESIGN SURVEY)

Co-ordinator - Ms L. McDonnell, Somerset Trust Environmental Records Centre, c/o Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater, Somerset TA5 2EQ.
Tel: 082345 587.

SITE EVALUATION

Co-ordinator - Mr G. Walley, address as above.

APRIL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The Proceedings of NFBR 1987 Conference 'Biological Recording: The Products' are being edited by D.A. Roberts. Publication details will be announced in the next newsletter.

RECORDING FOR THE RECORD

LOCATING LOCAL RECORDS CENTRES

Please add the following corrections to the Checklist of Local Records Centres in *NFBR Newsletter* 4. The Editor aims to produce a new Checklist in the Spring 1988 Newsletter. Please look at your entry in the Checklist and write or phone to tell me what is wrong with it!

CORNISH BIOLOGICAL RECORDS UNIT

Contact: Mrs Stella Turk. Tel: 0209 712203.
Treveson House, Pool, Redruth, Cornwall TR15 3RE.

SHEFFIELD CITY MUSEUMS RECORDS CENTRE

Contact: Mr Tim H. Riley, Principal Keeper Natural Sciences. Tel: 0742 768588.
Sheffield City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield S10 2TP.

The Museums Records Centre and the Ecology Unit are separate units within the Natural Sciences Section of the Museum. Ian Rotherham, Ecologist and Geoff Cartwright, Assistant Ecologist work in the Ecology Unit.

ECOLOGY IN LEICESTERSHIRE

Leicestershire Museums Service has appointed with effect from 1st July 1987 John Mousley to the recently created post of Assistant County Ecologist. John joins the Ecology Unit, headed by Ian Evans in his capacity as County Ecologist, which has in addition a full-time contract Ecological Assistant (working on the inputting of the computerised sites index) and two part-time contract Field Ecologists.

The new post was established as a result of the rising number of consultations on sites of ecological significance which are being handled by the Museums Service and now number over 500 a year. John previously worked for the Leicestershire Habitat Survey Team.

STAFF FOR STAFFORDSHIRE

Staffordshire Biological Records Centre based in the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, has appointed Keith Bloor to develop the Centre's Environmental Data-Bank. Keith, who specialises in Mycology and computing, was appointed in May as an Assistant Keeper of Natural History. He is responsible for the curation of the Botany collection in addition to his data work.



WEST YORKSHIRE SURVEYS

West Yorkshire Ecological Advisory and Information Service has been busy raising funds and staff to carry out several surveys this year. For details of the following surveys contact Mr J.C. Lavin, Ecological Advisory Officer, W Y E A I S, Cliffe Castle Art Gallery and Museum, Keighley, West Yorkshire BD20 6LH.

Leeds Metro District Phase 1 Re-Survey

The Nature Conservancy Council and Leeds Metropolitan District Council provided funds in the financial year 1986/7 for a phase 1 re-survey of Leeds District. It is the first time in Britain that an opportunity has arisen to re-survey a District. The original survey was carried out in 1977/8 and for the first time an accurate picture should be obtained of habitat loss or gain and changes in land use (e.g., agricultural production, residential expansion etc.) over this ten year period.

The survey was carried out by the unit's established staff. A report detailing habitat and land use change should be completed in this financial year.

Leeds Metro District Urban Survey

Again with grant aid from the Nature Conservancy Council and funds from Leeds Metropolitan District Council, the unit will be carrying out an urban survey of Leeds in the financial year 1978/8.

The methodology will follow that used for Nottingham and Norwich. The Leeds survey is a large undertaking, covering a land area four times that of Norwich and two times that of Nottingham.

The results will be published in a report at the end of the financial year. The survey is being carried out by Geoffrey Wilmore, the Assistant Ecological Advisory Officer.

Wakefield Metro District "Green Plan"

Wakefield have contracted the unit to produce an environmental strategy for the District entitled "The Green Plan."

The intention is to give the proposed document Statutory Status in the Unitary Development Plan which has to be produced for the District. The "Green Plan" will contain not just protectionist policies but will encompass enhancement and management policies for improving Wakefield's Green Environment. It is hoped it will cover implementation, which will include ecological techniques to create a more 'Naturalistic' approach to land reclamation and management. The Countryside Commission and Wakefield provided the necessary finance to employ to take control of this project.

SHEFFIELD INNER CITY SURVEY

70 square kilometres of Sheffield's Inner City is to be surveyed by three ecologists employed by Sheffield Wildlife Group under a £12,000 grant from NGG. The maps prepared will be incorporated into the 'Green Plan for Sheffield'. For details contact: **Mike Wild, 32 Banner Cross Road, Sheffield S11 4HR. Tel: 0742 369941 ext. 4336.**

MSC NEWS

SQUEEZE ON SCHEMES

At the end of March the number of places in the Community Programme was cut by 4%. No automatic renewals were given and now each re-application is to be examined in the light of the training and post-scheme employment records of previous schemes. Organisations which have had good relationships with their MSC agencies and link officers have had the least problems with scheme renewals and new initiatives. Very few organisations have gained CP places and most have maintained numbers or lost a few places.

Ecological surveying teams are still best 'sold' to MSC as part of a larger scheme package involving a variety of countryside management or interpretation projects; provided that these projects are themselves in some way reliant on the services of the ecological survey team.



RSNC

RSNC - UK 2000 KITEMARKED SURVEY PROJECTS

The RSNC - UK 2000 unit has been busy 'kitemarking' projects. Margaret Baines, the unit's Development Officer has summarised the projects containing survey teams which have been kitemarked by RSNC up to June. All these schemes, except for the Oxfordshire Pond Survey, were submitted for kitemarking by County Conservation Trusts. Other organisations seeking details to kitemarking should contact the **RSNC - UK 2000 unit at: RSNC, The Green, Nettleham, Lincoln LN2 2NR. Tel: (0522) 752326.**

RSNC Kitemarked Survey Projects

1. WORCESTERSHIRE TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION
PROJECT TITLE: WORCESTER URBAN PROJECT

A new team of 6 have been employed on the CP by the Trust to complete a survey of all open space in the city of Worcester. Recommendations will be made for each site on how its wildlife, recreational and educational potential can be improved. The project is supported by Worcester City Council.

Started January 1987.

2. SHROPSHIRE TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION
PROJECT TITLE: SOUTH SHROPSHIRE
COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

This CP team of 18 people are involved with surveying areas in South Shropshire, drawing up suitable management plans and implementing these plans where possible.

Started February 1987.

3. LINCOLNSHIRE AND SOUTH HUMBERSIDE TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

PROJECT TITLE: LINCOLNSHIRE WILDLIFE INFORMATION PROJECT

Survey work in part of this project which has much broader aims as the CP team will also provide information and advice to landowners and interested parties as well as monitor sites of wildlife value.

CP team numbers - 6 people.

The new project will start 1st July, 1987.

4. CORNWALL TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

PROJECT TITLE: CONSERVATION SURVEYING

The CP team of 11 people will visit over 500 prime sites, collecting information and producing sympathetic management plans. The information collected will be fed back to county and district councils as an input into planning applications. The general public will also benefit from the survey information. This project is complemented by the Conservation Data Management Project.

5. BIRMINGHAM URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

PROJECT TITLE: ECOLOGY PROJECT

Ecological surveys are part of this CP project. Important urban wildlife habitats will be identified and the potential of good educational sites will be exploited. The information collected will also provide an input planning applications and will be available to any interested party. 17 CP employees.

6. GLOUCESTERSHIRE TRUST FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

PROJECT TITLE: WILDSPACES PROJECT

Part of this CP project includes a survey of ancient woodlands. It has support from both the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council. 24 CP places.

Start date: January 1987.

Gloucester Trust also runs a Wildlife Resources Project where people employed on the CP collate biological data recorded in the county by other authorities and by Trust volunteers.

Start date: April 1987.

7. BEDS AND HUNTS WILDLIFE TRUST

PROJECT TITLE: ECOLOGICAL ADVISORY PROJECT

The CP team will carry out a county survey, locate the most important sites and provide advice on the best way to manage such sites. 6 CP places.

Started: March 1987.

8. DERBYSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST

PROJECT TITLE: DERBY URBAN PROJECT

The CP team will carry out a survey of important green space within the city and sites of interest will be managed where possible. Great emphasis is placed on local community involvement. 20 CP places.

9. LEICESTER CITY WILDLIFE PROJECT

PROJECT TITLE: SURVEY TEAM

The team will continue to collect and analyse data for Leicester City Habitat Survey. This survey of all the green space in the city is referred to by the City Council Planning Department. The work of previous schemes has just been published as 'The Leicester Habitat Survey and Ecology Strategy'. See report of the 1987 Fairbrother Group Spring Conference.

Present CP contract, started November 1986.

10. NORTEC TRAINING AGENCY AND OXFORD POLYTECHNIC

PROJECT TITLE: OXFORDSHIRE POND SURVEY

This CP team will survey all ponds in Oxfordshire and provide information to schools and landowners on conservation and management of the ponds. Again, great emphasis is placed on involving the local community. 22 CP places.

Project starts: October 1987.

SURVEYING MSC

The British Ecology funded survey of ecological employment is still underway. For details, or to contribute comment or ideas please contact **Gerald Dawes, Project Director, Centre for Urban Ecology, The Birmingham Settlement, 318 Summer Lane, Birmingham B19 3RL**. Gerald will be summarising some of the survey's findings at the 'Community Programme and the Environment' Seminar in September, see below. The impact of MSC on environmental work concerns others and the Association of Countryside Rangers has recently begun a survey among its members of the impact of MSC schemes on countryside work. The ACR is also interested in the views and experiences of other organisations and individuals with countryside MSC schemes. It is hoped to publish a report in November. Anyone wishing to contribute to the research should write to: **Dr Neil Caldwell, 44 Eversley Road, Sketty, Swansea SA2 9DA**.



Community Programme and Environment Seminar

The WPLAE with the Department of Planning and Transportation, Nottingham County Council, are running a one day 'CP and the Environment' seminar on 14 September, 1987, at Sherwood Country Park, Edwinstowe.

The programme includes the following themes:

Community Programme and its Environmental role in Notts. R. Nelson, CP Manager.

The employment of Ecologists on CP schemes. G Dawes, Project Director, Centre for Urban Ecology. The Environmental and Ecological benefits of CP schemes through the County. N. Lewis, Conservation Officer, NTNC.

The problems of supervision. S. Holham-Hunt, Ranger/
Land Manager, Notts CC.

To ascertain whether places are available, contact:
Mr C. Blackwell, Notts CC, Planning and Transportation, Trent Bridge House, Fox Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 6BJ. (0602) 823823 ext. 4557.

NCC, MSC and Phase 1

NCC has had bad luck with its excellent initiative to employ Phase 1 co-ordinators for Avon and South Lancashire. Despite considerable effort and the support of all the local organisations likely to use Phase 1 data, MSC CP teams have yet to be created to run the surveying. Efforts to negotiate MSC schemes continue. In Wales a series of contract posts have been created to pull together existing Phase 1 information.

SURVEY REGISTER

NFBR Newsletter aims to stay in touch with all national or regional biological surveys. No one professional or amateur can hope to keep up with the surveys which may be gathering data in their area unless they had unlimited funds and time to sift all the specialist journals. The editor is starting a register which will include brief details or features of surveys as they are discovered. Annually a register of active surveys with contact details will be compiled. Please get in touch to publicise your survey.

GALLS, GALLS, GALLS

British Plant Gall Society is running an Oak Gall Survey in conjunction with both BBC Wildlife Magazine and Biological Recording in Scotland Campaign (BRISC).

BRISC Oak Gall Survey

BRISC offer a free identification guide based on Dorset Environmental Records Centres oak gall guide. It is available to S.A.E.'s sent to: **BRISC, c/o Scottish Wildlife Trust, 25 Johnston Terrace, Edinburgh.** The BRISC survey also involves the Orange Tip Butterfly and the Stinkhorn.

BBC Oak Gall Survey

The BBC has produced special survey literature which helps survey the 'reasonably easy' galls selected from the 40 which can be found on oak trees, Large S.A.E.'s to: **BBC Wildlife Broadcasting House, Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 1LR.**

DAY FLYING BATS SURVEY

Bats occasionally emerge in daylight. Throughout 1987 Dr J.R. Speakman is conducting a survey of daylight flying British Bats and would be grateful if any records of the interesting phenomenon could be sent to him at the **Department of Zoology, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB9 2TN. Tel: 0224 480241.**

He is interested in several types of record:-

- (i) First hand observations made during 1987.
- (ii) First hand observations from previous years.
- (iii) Records from old natural history journals.
- (iv) Second hand records from reliable sources.

An ideal record involves: Time, date, location, grid reference, habitat, weather, behaviour notes, size and colour of bat. Partial records are still worth sending.

TRANSPLANTATION ATTEMPTS SURVEY

The NCC is examining attempts to physically move habitats as a first step to preparing recommendations on this subject. This process appears to be on the increase as a last resort to 'save' valuable sites lost to development. NCC is very keen to look at:

- (i) Examples of completed transplantations
- (ii) Would like to survey areas prior to transplantation so please let NCC know of projects in the pipeline.

Please let NCC know of any transplantations in your area. To pass on information or to find out details of the project contact: **Dr J.J. Hopkins, CSD, NCC, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA. Tel: 0733 40345.**

COASTWATCH: SURVEY FEATURE

by Teresa Bennett

Coastwatch is a survey of the coastal habitats and human impacts for the whole coast of Great Britain. It covers the area between mean low water mark and the cliff tops and extends into estuaries, inlets and sea-lochs to the point of normal tidal limit.

Funded By NCC & BP

The project is funded by the Nature Conservancy Council and British Petroleum, with BP donating a total of £48,000 over a three year period. It is managed by NCC in collaboration with BP, the Field Studies Council, the Marine Conservation Society, the Royal Society for Nature Conservation and the World Wildlife Fund-UK.

In order to continue with a worthwhile programme for the conservation of our coastal heritage we need to know the location and size of all coastal habitat types and the range and intensity of human pressures that may be damaging them. It is this type of basic information which has not previously been collected in a consistent manner for the whole coast of Great Britain.

How the Data Will be Used

One of the aims of Coastwatch is to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge of the coastline. The results will be used by NCC in several ways. The intertidal habitat data will be used directly in the *Marine Nature Conservation Review* as a phase one survey. Information of human uses of the shore and shallow seas will be available for use in marine casework. The terrestrial coastal habitat

data along with information on the adjacent land use and associated human impacts will be used by the coastal section of NCC. From the data collected, sites for more detailed survey will be determined with subsequent evaluation of their nature conservation value. Apart from the value to NCC, the data will also be available to the voluntary conservation organisations.

Education

The other aim is that of education and public awareness. This is achieved through public participation in the project. Coastwatch is open to all who are interested in the coast and concerned about our coastal heritage. WATCH groups are being encouraged to take part and surveys are particularly suitable for GCSE and 'A' level students. Coastwatch is a project in which the general public can make a positive contribution towards the conservation of our coast.

Habitat Mapping Survey

The project has now been running for just over a year during which time two surveys have been developed and piloted. The first is called the Habitat Mapping Survey and involves recording and distribution and extent of habitats such as rocky and sandy shores, saltmarshes and sand dunes on to large scale maps using a coloured code. Once the boundaries of the habitats have been indicated on the map, their areas or lengths can be measured. Different forms of land use adjacent to the coast are also noted, as these may be affecting coastal habitats. As far as possible the colour codes match those used in terrestrial habitat mapping.

Coastal Uses and Activities Survey

The second survey is known as the Coastal Uses and Activities Survey and requires the type and intensity of human pressures on the coastal habitats to be noted on simple recording sheets. Such pressures include bait digging, sand extraction, sewage outfalls and recreational activities.

Both Coastwatch surveys are based on 1:10000 (or 1:10560) scale OS maps divided into tetrads of four 1 km grid squares which form manageable survey units. Observations for the surveys are made while walking a stretch of coast as shown by a map or tetrad.

Simple, New and Useful

In designing the surveys it was necessary to fulfill two requirements. The first was that they had to be simple to enable both adults and children without any previous experience in coastal survey work to participate. The second was that it was essential to ensure that both new and useful information was being gathered. From the educational point of view, areas which had already been surveyed in considerable detail by NCC, such as saltmarshes, were left in. Refinements were made to the surveys such that a reasonable balance was achieved between obtaining the most relevant information on the coast and keeping the surveys as simple as possible.

Coastwatch was officially launched on Wednesday 25 March of this year by John Craven at a press reception at the London Ecology Centre, Covent Garden. The launch marked the start of the information gathering phase.

Coastwatch Days

The project is being organised such that people may become involved in either of two ways. One is to obtain the Coastwatch package of instruction and recording sheets and attempt the surveys individually; the other is to attend a 'Coastwatch Day'. Coastwatch days are for those who require more guidance and encouragement in carrying out the surveys or who enjoy a social event. Participants on these occasions receive instructions by means of a talk with slides before tackling a section of nearby coastline. Coastwatch Representatives, who are based in coastal counties and regions around Great Britain, are co-ordinating the project locally and helping to run Coastwatch Days. NFBR members might consider becoming Coastwatch representatives.

Covering the remote parts of the Scottish coastline in the above way will be extremely slow. It is therefore planned to have special expeditions to cover the west coast and islands of Scotland next year.

For further details of Coastwatch contact:

Teresa Bennett, Coastwatch Co-ordinator, Nature Conservancy Council, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA.

COMPUTING

WILTSHIRE HAS THE EQUIPMENT

After a long hard period of fund-raising and a good deal of persistence, Claire Appleby purchased computer equipment for Wiltshire Biological Records Centre in May. WBRC now has COMPAQ 286 (IBM AT compatible) micro with 20 Megabyte Winchester drive and a 40 Megabyte tape drive. Claire is running DBIII+ databases and hopes to develop map-based plotting using AUTOCAD. The equipment was funded by a combination of local organisations and World Wildlife Fund grant aid.

HARDWARE FOR STOKE

The City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent installed in May an ICL DRS 300 system with, at present, three work-stations. Each work-station has three virtual screens. The system has a 20 Megabyte hard disk and an on-line connection to the City Council's mainframe.

The Natural History Section, containing the Staffordshire Biological Records Centre, shares the system with the rest of the Museum. The 20,000 biological records presently on an Apple IIe will be read onto the new system. MUSCAT software package from Martin Porter in Cambridge has been implemented on the mainframe. Data entry formats and methods are being analysed.

DIGITISING WIGAN

In 1986, an MSC survey team working for the Department of Technical Services, Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council, completed a Phase 1 survey for the 253 square kilometres of Wigan. Demand for multiple copies of the Phase 1 maps lead to the development of a system to digitise the maps. 50 square kilometres are now digitised and a new MSC scheme will complete the process in 1987. The team will also conduct a Phase II and woodland surveys. Wigan's digitised Phase I is a pioneering development following success of the Cheshire digitised habitat maps.

MSC, Wigan NCC, Countryside Community all contribute

Though the labour for the project was provided under the Community Programme, computer equipment, general running costs: and travel (new minibus) received 50% grant from the Countryside Commission. After six to eight weeks' training, the survey team ran pilot surveys which were supervised by NCC staff who continued to check the standards of the survey throughout its length.

Phase 1 refinements

Wigan MBC chose 1:5,000 scale maps to produce the paper master copy survey maps. Experience showed that the normal 1:10,000 maps did not cope with the smaller and more complex urban land units and habitats. Aerial photographs were used to complement field surveying. The computer system was designed to take on the following Phase 1 tasks:

- i Accurate reproduction of shaded maps.
- ii Editing and updating of maps.
- iii Limited statistics i.e. % of woodland, grassland, open water etc.
- iv Storage of written target notes.

Hardware

Digitising and Database are run on the following:

- i Honeywell micro system executive - 20 Megabyte Winchester drive.
- ii G.T.C.O. A3 digitising table.
- iii Epsom FX85 printer.
- iv Facit 4551 plotter

Software

The software for the mapping was supplied by G.F. Marshall Computer Services. Details on the software package can be obtained from 30 Hawthorn Road, Godalming, Surrey.

The software runs on the PC86 series of micro computers developed by Future Technology Systems Limited and now maintained by Honeywell Computers Limited. The software runs under Concurrent DOS Version 4.1 supplied by Pagoda Computer Services,

Glasgow. The software for the collation of the written material uses the Data Master system, which is written by Sapphire Systems of Ilford.

A link between the two types of software will be designed by Wigan Metropolitan's Computer Section. The link will enable the user of the computer to enter the grid references for a specific location and a map plus notes for the area will be produced on the screen.

Products

The editor regrets that the excellent full six-colours sample map could not be reproduced by the Newsletter. The six colours combined with shading types can produce 60 distinct habitat types. Digitising a 5 x 5 km map takes a day. The survey will be used by the Technical Services Department for development control including mineral extractions and for Structure and Local Plans. The environmental planners will find it very useful when developing management plans for areas of wildlife importance, in preparing land reclamation and other environmental schemes.

Prior to Phase 1, Wigan had 58 sites identified in the Greater Manchester survey of sites of biological importance. The Phase 1 survey has shown that there are many other areas which are now being submitted to the register.

Contact:

For further details of the projects, please contact: **Ms S Crombie, Dept. of Technical Services, Wigan M.B.C., Civic Centre, P.O.Box 16, Millgate, Wigan WN2 1YD. Tel: (0942) 44991.**

NFBR COMPUTER RECORDING SYSTEMS AND DATA STANDARDS WORKING PARTY

Bill Ely, the co-ordinator of this working party has produced the following discussion paper to 'warm up' potential members of the group. Please contact Bill with your comments at the address given in the 'NFBR News' section of the Newsletter.

Towards a National Standard For Computerised B.R.C.'s

The Rotherham Museum B.R.C. will gain computer facilities this financial year and I have been given the task of sorting out what I want. It was with a feeling of great surprise, not to mention disappointment, that I discovered the almost total lack of standardisation in this field. As I have no particular wish to reinvent the wheel yet again, I decided to explore the possibility of encouraging a consensus on our requirement which could lead to a nationally agreed standard. To this end I circulated a discussion paper at the NFBR Annual Conference with the request that comments should be returned to me by 1st June this year. I am now collating these comments into a second (and much improved) draft which I will circulate during the summer, and a working party on this will be held in September. If you have not returned comments but would like to be involved please send me a s.a.e.

Requirements And Idealism

The initial purpose of the discussion document is to identify our requirements. This means sorting out our various clients and their needs as well as the needs of ourselves. This will provide us with a list of the types of question we need to be able to answer and some idea of the sort of finished product we wish to achieve. I am being deliberately idealistic in this and asking for far more than can be achieved on any realistic budget, for these main reasons:

- (a) Although we will not achieve perfection we will end up with a far better system than would get if we aimed our sights lower;
- (b) It will provide us with some justification to keep pressing our paymasters for extra facilities;
- (c) Technology is advancing so rapidly that we need to be able to take advantage of new developments.

This will give us a 'shopping list' to take on to the second stage, which is to ensure that our requirements are in phase with those of other organisations with whom we work - NCC, BRC, Countryside Commission, RSNL and county trusts etc. Other, less immediate, contacts will be with Ordnance Survey, Water Authorities, MDA, etc.

Building Up Programmes

At this stage we will be able to write a program brief setting out what we wish to achieve and how we wish to achieve it. Some aspects of the program may already exist in a suitable form and it may be possible to link different parts together. I anticipate that we could begin with a program which will do certain aspects satisfactorily and gradually build in other programs as time, finance, expertise and technology allow. It is at this stage that decisions on the computer system may have to be made. Several people (many outside biological recording) have said that IBM compatibility is where the immediate future lies, so our decisions may well be constrained by such consideration.

Standard

Finally I must point out that the adoption of a nationally agreed standard and the production of appropriate programs will not dictate the way in which local BRC's progress. There can be no coercion in this matter. The aim is to provide a facility for those who are being offered the possibility of computerisation which will allow them to use a system which is compatible with as many of their users as possible. Other BRC's may wish to change to this system if it proves itself when they come to replace their existing equipment.

Standardisation offers many advantages such as cheaper programs (we can all share the cost of they could be provided centrally), cheaper updates (it only needs doing once and the other users benefit) and a more professional approach.

ARTICLES

WORKING PANEL OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ECOLOGISTS

When local government was reorganised a number of local authorities employed ecologists. These people have been meeting regularly for the last twelve years in the 'Working Panel of Local Authority Ecologists'. Our twice yearly meetings are informal affairs at which we discuss a topic of mutual interest. These have included biological recording and local records centres. The Panel also acts as a consultee on matters affecting ecologists and has recently been co-operating with the British Association of Nature Conservationists in the 'Local Authorities and Nature Conservation Project' which is intended to encourage local authorities to further their role in nature conservation. Full membership of the group is open to all employed in local authorities public utilities and groundwork trusts, who spend 50% or more of their time on work of an ecological nature. There is also an associate membership category which is open to all. Details of membership are available from **Alan Scowen, 'Foxgloves', The Common Surlingham, Norwich NR14 7AP.**



AIDGAP... THE KEY TO
THE IDENTIFICATION
PROBLEM

(by Steve Tilling, Project Co-ordinator).

AIDGAP Project: The Early Years

Although the Field Studies Council's AIDGAP (Aids to Identification in Difficult Groups of Animals And Plants) project has only been in existence for ten years, the origins of the problems which led to its birth are much more deep-rooted. The project arose out of a growing recognition that the science of taxonomy in general, and biological identification in particular, was showing a rapid demise in education. This was true not in formal education, - in schools, field centres, colleges, etc., but also in general interest studies. Although popular groups, such as wild flowers and butterflies were well-covered by keys and guides, other areas were less well served. The absence of easy-to-use, well written and scientifically accurate identification aids was a major obstacle to investigative work in many biological groups.

This demise had reached the stage where the extent of taxonomic expertise which was available was insufficient to service other disciplines, including ecological research (e.g. NERC Report, *The Role of Taxonomy in Ecological Research*, 1976).

The difficulties were two-fold. Firstly, many of the existing keys were useable only by people with an intimate knowledge of the taxa being covered. Secondly, many groups were not covered at all.

AIDGAP was started in 1976 in an attempt to address these problems. The project establishes areas of need and then sets out to produce an aid to identification which works. In order to achieve this, it has adopted a unique testing procedure. In addition to the usual refereeing and editorial processes, a preliminary draft – the “Test” version – is sent to several hundred biologists who are asked to use it and report on their failures, successes, areas of difficulty, etc. The published version is revised in the light of their comments. Hopefully, this ensures that the final has combined scientific and technical accuracy with maximum ease-of-use.

Volunteers needed

It is important to ensure that the testing process is effective. To be able to do this we do need people who are able to spend some time using the AIDGAP test versions and commenting on their effectiveness etc. Members of the NFBR would be ideal guinea pigs. The AIDGAP project co-ordinator would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to “test” the guides listed below, or from those who have suggestions for future projects. “Test” versions are usually in short supply, but they are sent free-of-charge. It would be useful if volunteers could indicate particular areas of expertise or interest.

Please Help Fill The Gaps

So far only a small proportion of the British coastline has been covered by Coastwatch. Areas that are particularly in need of more volunteers are Scotland, Wales, Cumbria, Humberside and Lincolnshire.

AIDGAP Published Guides

- Hiscock, S. (1979). *A field key to the British brown seaweeds*.
 Sykes, J.B. (1981). *An illustrated guide to the diatoms of British coastal plankton*.
 Unwin, D.M. (1981). *A key to families of British Diptera*.
 Grothers, John & Marilyn (1983). *A key to the crabs and crab-like animals of British inshore waters*.
 Cameron, R.A.D., Eversham, B & Jackson, N. (1983). *A field guide to the slugs of the British Isles*.
 Unwin, D.M. (1984). *A key to the families of British Coleoptera (beetles) and Strepsiptera*.
 Wilmer, Pat (1985). *Bees, ants and wasps – the British Aculeates*.
 Pankhurst, R.J. and Allinson, J. (1985). *British Grasses: a punched-card key to grasses in the vegetative state*.
 Hiscock, Sue (1986). *A field guide to the British Red Seaweeds*.
 Croft, Paul (1986). *A key to the major groups of freshwater invertebrates*.
 King, P. (1986). *Sea Spiders: a revised key to the adults of littoral pycnogonida of the British Isles*.

The following guide was also AIDGAP tested:

Hayward, J. (1987). *The New Wild Flower Key*. Cambridge University Press.

The AIDGAP testing stage.

TESTED AND TO BE PUBLISHED IN 1987

Tilling, S. *A key to the major groups of terrestrial invertebrates*.

Skidmore, P. *Insects of the cow dung community*.

All the published titles are available for sale. Prices will be supplied on request, but the majority of the booklets will cost £2.30 or less. Discounts are available for bulk orders from educational establishments and commercial booksellers. For further details contact: **AIDGAP. The Leonard Wills Field Centre, Nettlecombe Court, Williton, Taunton, Somerset TA4 4HT.**

UNDERGOING TESTING IN 1987

Friday, L. *A key to adult British Water Beetles*.

Ryland, R. *A revised key to littoral Bryozoa*.

Jones-Walters, L. *A Key to families of British spiders*.

Legg, C. *A computer-based multi-access key to sedges (for the BBC micro-computer)*.

Trudgill, Steve. *Soil types: a field identification guide*.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE NEWS

Draft is passed

For those of you who have been avidly following the progress of the ‘Draft Recommendations of the Third Colloquy on Computer Applications in the Field of Nature Conservation’ (see Newsletter 3 & 4) the news is encouraging. The Draft was adopted in April by the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE) but it is unclear if the Council of Ministers has passed the Draft. If the Council has not, it soon will.

CDPE selects PE-R-BD

CDPE is a new committee derived from the disbanded CDSN which initiated the colloquy. Despite disruptions in CDPE, work on the Draft recommendations has a high priority and a select committee of experts on nature conservation data-banks (PE-R-BD) (!) is being set up with the following terms of reference: “Co-ordination of national data-bank programmes in the field of nature conservation and their uses.”

The UK will have a seat on PE-R-BD and NCC is currently advising on a suitable representative. The following is a copy of the Draft recommendation. It is different from the pre-April draft in *Newsletter 4*. Please impress your employees with this Council of Europe support of your work.

Draft Recommendations of the setting up of Computerised Databanks on the Environment and the Management of Resources

Considering the immense benefits of ... (computerised) databanks to the decision-makers, the scientists, the educators and the general public;

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15b of the Statute of the Council of Europe;

Recommends that the governments of member States take the appropriate steps to:

1. Speed up local inventories of biotopes providing detailed information on their flora and fauna together with data on present land uses;
2. Intensify the collection of data on populations of wild flora and fauna species, specially those in red lists;
3. Promote and support the development of local, regional and national data banks to be used for land management, nature conservation, scientific research or education purposes so that these data banks be the base of natural habitat statistics and include specially indicators of change;
4. Strengthen the co-operation and the co-ordination of local, national and international efforts for the development of a coherent network of data banks on all regions of Europe;
5. Encourage reference to Flora Europaea for standard names to be used by all data banks dealing with the flora of Europe;
6. Promote and support the different efforts to elaborate and use by all data banks lists of standard names for the major groups of organisms of the fauna of Europe and make plans for their periodic updating.

Recommendations for Scottish Local Records Centres

The Museums and Galleries Commission set up a working party chaired by Prof. H. Miles to comprehensively review Scottish Museums. Reporting in 1986, the working party made the following recommendations regarding biological recording and museums:

We recommend that there should be a semi-formal system of co-operation between institutions within agreed areas of Scotland and the recognition of a number of central natural history departments, each responsible for curatorial duties of its area. We believe that it would be possible to define some six to eight areas covering the whole of Scotland for natural history provision. These areas would not necessarily correspond with those covered by Regional Councils. The functions of such a reserve collection centre would, we RECOMMEND, include:-

Acting as the biological and geological record centre for the area in liaison with the Biological and Geological Curators' Groups.

Acting as the local field conservation centre, primarily in site resource evaluation and in assistance with the scientific monitoring of conserved sites in the area. In this work the centre would liaise with the Nature Conservation Council and with such voluntary wildlife conservation bodies such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust.

To be a centre for the publication of local natural history records, either through museums, local societies, or the press; and to act as a catalyst through local societies or educational courses designed to stimulate interest in and knowledge about natural history in the area.

Report by a Working Party, 1986. *Museums in Scotland*. Museums & Galleries Commission. ISBN 011 290451 3 available from HMSO.

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The Editor welcomes articles (line diagrams, black and white photographs), short news items, reviews and comment.

Material for Newsletter 6, December 1987, to the Editor by Friday 14th October.