



NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

NEWSLETTER No. 19

March 1996



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF BIOLOGICAL RECORDING NEWSLETTER 19

INCORPORATING RECORDER USER GROUP NEWS

CONTENTS

Minutes of the 1995 NFBR AGM.....	3
Forthcoming meetings	6
Legislation and Planning News	8
Peterborough workshop Proceedings.....	10
Local Biodiversity Action Plans - Bill Butcher.....	10
Environmental recording in Northern Ireland - Damian McFerran & Julia Nunn	14
RECORDER Administration Support.....	15
NFBR Publications	16
Reviews.....	17
Biological recording in the United Kingdom: present practice and future development ...	17
Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report.....	19
Recent Publications	21
Software.....	22

Articles for the newsletter should be submitted to the editor, preferably on computer disc, either 5.25 or 3.5 in disc in ASCII format, or Word format on DOS compatible discs, or in ASCII on Unix format discs. The deadline for the next newsletter is

NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

HONORARY OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS 1996

Chair

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

Secretary

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

Membership Secretary

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

Editor

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

Treasurer : Marie Moreau

ORDINARY MEMBERS

Charles J.T. Copp

8, The Paddock
Clevedon,
Avon, BS21 6JU

Bill Ely

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

Dr Colin French

Cornish Biological Records Unit
Trevithick Centre
Trevenson Road, Pool
Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 3PI

Dr Stuart Ball

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

Adrian Spalding

Cornish Biological Records Unit
Trevithick Centre,
Trevenson Road, Pool,
Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 3PI

Graham Walley

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

John Stafford

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

Dr Damien McFerran

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

Bill Butcher

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

Anne-Marie Smout

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

Sarah Hawkswell (Co-opted Member)

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

NATIONAL FEDERATION FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

MINUTES OF THE 1995 AGM

Minutes of the Ninth Annual General Meeting held at the John Clare Library Peterborough at 2.00pm on 19th November 1995.

Forty members were present.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from P.Collins and A.Spalding.

2. Minutes of the 8th Annual General Meeting of 19th July 1994

Accepted without alteration as a true and accurate record.

Proposed W.Ely. Seconded C.Copp. Accepted *nem.con.*

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Proposed amendments to the Constitution

The following amendment was proposed:

Rule 8a Alteration: "The quorum of a meeting of the Federation shall be 1/10 (one tenth) of the members". Proposed M. Moreau. Seconded T. James. Accepted *nem.con.*

5. Chairman's Report for 1994-95

During my years as Secretary and then Chairman I have seen NFBR make a good deal of progress. The initial challenge to put biological recording on a firmer footing has been achieved but pressure and progress must be continued.

Council has met four times since the last AGM and all members of Council must be thanked for their efforts and contributions. Despite heavy commitments elsewhere they have all given both their ideas and their time with enthusiasm. The work carried out by NFBR is currently done by less than a dozen people. If momentum is to continue, new members of Council must be found. Those willing to take on some of the administration or supply articles of interest for the newsletter please put yourselves forward. Even if you are unable to be on Council, please give Council members feedback so that we can ensure we continue to meet your needs.

My main aim when I first became a member of Council was to work towards establishing standards in monitoring, surveying and recording. In particular national standards were needed for collecting and storing biological and biogeographical data. As you know "Recorder" was chosen as the national standard database for biological site and species information management and is now used more than any other database. Thanks must always go to Stuart Ball who designed "Recorder". NFBR has held a number of successful Recorder User Group meetings. In response to feedback from NFBR members at these meetings, alterations, and additions have been incorporated into "Recorder". NFBR was particularly instrumental in ensuring the cost of "Recorder" was lowered to well below its market value so that individual naturalists and recorders would not be prevented from using it.

Throughout the last year NFBR has continued to promote and press for higher standards and greater support for those involved in collecting, handling and managing biological information. NFBR has continued to be heavily involved in the Co-ordinating Commission for Biological Recording; for this our thanks must go to Bill Ely, Paul Harding and Charles Copp. The CCBR report produced by the latter two is of excellent quality, informative and contains recommendations for the future of biological recording. It should prove invaluable to local authorities, record centres and their funding bodies. Copies of the report summary are available today.

During the last year NFBR has published two newsletters and a report entitled "Crisies in biological recording" which were sent to all members. I would like to thank Phil Collins for his hard work in editing and producing the newsletter and Adrian Spalding and Colin French for the report. NFBR also held a very successful seminar last November for which thanks must go to Paul Harding.

Input into the UK Biodiversity Action Plan has been a major part of NFBR's work. Sound biological data and its provision should underpin all decisions regarding biodiversity and to this end NFBR is represented on the Bio-diversity Action Plan Steering Group's Data Subgroup. NFBR continues to press for resources to enable a higher standard of data provision.

Finally I would like to thank Nicky Court who has not only put a great deal of work into NFBR as Secretary but has been instrumental in organising today's seminar. I would also like to thank Charles Copp who has the onerous task of organising membership and accounting the finances.

6. Treasurer's Report for 1994-95

Draft accounts were distributed at the meeting showing total assets on 31st October 1995 of £2,482.88, a decrease of nearly £900.00 on the previous year, due largely to a number of outstanding subscriptions and the profits from conference not yet realised. Membership now stands at 211. The cost of running the Federation varies little from year to year.

It was proposed to move the date annual subscriptions are due from the 1st April to the first of January for ease of accounting. As Rule 3d of the Constitution will need to be altered members will need to be notified in advance.

7. Election of Honorary Officers and Council

The position of Chairman had become vacant and the following nomination was received:

T. James Proposed M. Moreau, seconded W. Ely.

The following nominations for Council were received:

W. Butcher	Proposed N. Court, seconded W. Ely.
Dr D. McFerran	Proposed M. Moreau, seconded W. Ely.
Anne-Marie Smout	Proposed T. James, seconded N. Court.

M. Moreau, N. Court, P. Collins, W. Ely, P. Harding, Dr S. Ball, A. Spalding and J. Stafford were all willing to stand for re-election to Council. S. Hawkswell to remain co-opted on

Council. C. French and G. Walley were co-opted onto Council last year and are willing to be elected this year.

Since the number of those willing to stand does not exceed the number of vacancies the above were elected on block.

C. Copp announced that he wished to stand down as Treasurer/Membership Secretary but would be willing to carry on for a further year until a replacement could be found. Since he has been in this role for 5 years Council co-opted him so he could remain, and expressed their grateful thanks to him for doing so.

8. Election of Honorary Auditor

M. Moreau proposed Mrs Shirley Bell as Honorary Auditor. Seconded T. James. *Passes nem.con.*

9. Any other business

There being no further business the AGM was closed at 2.55pm.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN THE UK

Workshop convened by the Co-ordinating Commission for Biological Recording and hosted by the Linnean Society on Tuesday 30 April 1996

1000 Registration and Coffee

1030-1230 Session 1 Chairman: W A Ely, NFBR/Rotherham Museum

The CCBR report and its recommendations

- 1 Introduction and background to the CCBR report**
Sir John Burnett, Chairman CCBR
- 2 Government response to Biodiversity Steering Group report**
A representative of the DOE Biodiversity Secretariat
- 3 Proposals for a UK network of local records centres**
A representative of The Wildlife Trusts
- 4 CCBR recommendations not covered by existing proposals**
Paul Harding, Secretary CCBR
- 5 Discussion**

1230 - 1330 Lunch (available at the Linnean Society)

1330 - 1545 Session 2 Chairman: R Walker, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Current initiatives in the management and use of biological records

- 1 Local biodiversity action plans**
Sara Hawkswell, Wildlife Trusts
- 2 National target species and habitats**
A representative of Joint Nature Conservation Committee
- 3 Co-ordination of recording at a local scale**
 - 3.1 Matching the supply and demand for data**
Trevor James (Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre)
 - 3.2 The direct solution**
A representative of the Environment Service in Northern Ireland

4 Co-ordination of recording at a national scale

4.1 Promoting and developing a national project

David Pearman, President BSBI

4.2 The role of a national biological data centre

Speaker to be confirmed

5 Discussion

1545 - 1630 Session 3 Chairman: Professor R J Berry

A future for CCBR?

A brief discussion paper to form the basis of a resolution from the meeting will be prepared and circulated to all participants in advance of the meeting.

1630 End of workshop and Tea

How to Book

Booking forms from:

Dr J Marsden

Executive Secretary

Linnean Society

Burlington House

Piccadilly

LONDON W1V 0LQ

Tel: 0171 434 4479

Fax: 0171 287 9364

Probable costs

Registration Fee £1.00 (including tea and coffee)

Optional lunch £10

NFBR AUTUMN MEETING

APPLICATION OF RED DATA BOOKS TO PLANNING, BDAP & CONSERVATION

12th November 1996, Theatre Suite, Peterborough Central Library

Further details will be circulated when the meeting programme has been finalised

LEGISLATION AND PLANNING NEWS

The Environment Act

The Environment Bill received assent in July 1995. Its two main functions are to establish the new Environment Agencies for England, Wales and Scotland and a new regime for the control of contaminated land. The agencies are expected to be operational from 1st April 1996 except in Scotland. The regional boundaries will correspond to the existing 8 NRA boundaries based on river catchments, with some modifications in the areas of responsibility previously held by HMIP.

Other provisions of the act include alterations to the administration of National Parks, updating of mineral planning permissions and the protection of important hedgerows.

National Parks

The Environment Act 1995 brought into force from September last year new planning and administration provisions for National Parks. Each authority will now be allocated the normal planning functions of the local authority. All parks will now be administered by special planning boards as previously was the case in the Lake District and the Peak Parks.

Assessment of environmental effects regulations

The Transport and Works (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No 154) came into force in August 1995. These regulations implement articles 8 and 9 of the Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects on the environment of projects that include the construction or operation of railways tramways or other guided transport systems, inland waterways and works interfering with rights of navigation. The Secretary of State is now required to confirm that he took into consideration environmental statements and

any opinions expressed before making or refusing orders authorising such projects.

The requirements for submitting environmental statements and their required contents are given in the Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) Rules 1992 (SI 1992/2902).

DoE reforms

The Department of the Environments to revise its management structure. The department will be reorganised into four sectors:

environmental protection
local government, cities etc.
housing, planning, countryside, construction
legal advice

DoE guidance on peat

The DOE has issued guidance on peat provision in England in Mineral Planning Guidance Note MPG13. The note provides advice on planning control on peat extraction, the identification of important peat land habitats and archaeological sites, sets criteria for the selection and planning of new extraction sites and a framework for updating old permissions with an emphasis on rehabilitation of sites to enhance nature conservation.

NEWS

Millennium Bid from the Wildlife Trusts to establish a UK network of Local Record Centres

The Wildlife Trusts submitted a bid for millennium funds on 12th February. The Trusts have been consulting a wide range of organisations including NFBR and CCBR with a meeting between the bodies to be held on 19th April. The proposals will be developed further as consultation proceeds. JNCC has given the application its provisional backing.

CCBR

CCBR held a meeting in November to discuss their future role following the production of their report of Biological Recording and the launch of the Biodiversity Steering Group

Report. Details of a proposed seminar to discuss the future are given above. The DoE has formerly withdrawn from CCBR on the basis that their contract with CCBR re the production of the report had finished. NFBR have contacted DoE again to try and get their support on CCBR.

BAP Data sub group

The future of the sub group is unknown. A Biodiversity 'Group' is to be set up within DoE with a secretariat in order to progress the Steering Group Report. NFBR have sent a response to DoE endorsing the report but emphasising the need for real action and funding on data.

1995 PETERBOROUGH WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

Bill Butcher, MIEEM, Director, Somerset Environmental Records Centre, Pickney, Kingston St Mary, Taunton, TA2 8AS.
Tel 01823-451778.

My aim is to describe the work that the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) has undertaken to date in the preparation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and to outline the recommendations on this subject that will appear shortly in the Steering Group report on the implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

In 1994 SERC was commissioned by Mendip District Council, with part funding from English Nature, to compile a Biodiversity Action Plan (hereafter referred to as BAP) for the District as part of its Local Agenda 21 programme. The project is believed to be the first biodiversity study undertaken at a Local Authority scale in the UK.

The project built on the work of the SERC over several years, during which intensive survey and collation of biological records has been undertaken within the District in support of the Council's functions, primarily planning related.

No guidelines were available to us at the time of the project, so methodology was devised from first principles. Since the report has been widely distributed we have been a little surprised by the general acceptance of the methods used and the lack of critical analysis. SERC would welcome constructive comment.

Three fundamental elements of biodiversity were examined - ecosystem, species and genetic diversity. Within each element the focus was on features of biodiversity which are of special importance within the District. Evaluation, however, was set within a county, national and European context.

All semi-natural habitats within evaluated sites were mapped using a Geographical Information System and the total resource analysed. Five habitat types are identified as being of special importance within the District - ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland, unimproved calcareous grassland, unimproved neutral grassland, tufa springs and wetlands.

Species records were analysed using Recorder with reference to UK and global totals for each taxonomic group. The geographical distribution of a selection of species, notables, were examined to provide a focused analysis of species biodiversity within the District. The notable species had been selected by SERC from the total Somerset species list for all taxonomic groups on the basis of county, national and European rarity. 802 of these species had records within the Mendip District.

The status of legally protected, red data book and notable species was reported, including their relative occurrence inside and outside of protected sites. A large number of species are recorded

from a very restricted range within the District - 295 of the notable species had been recorded within only a single tetrad.

The effects of variable recording effort - both geographic and taxonomic - on the analysis were fully considered in the report.

The habitat and species data were combined to produce a biodiversity distribution map within the District. The two datasets were found to be highly correlated, underlining the reliance of most species on semi-natural habitat. The tetrad was used as the most convenient scale for analysis at this level. A biodiversity score for each tetrad was derived from a formula combining the number of notable species recorded and the area of semi-natural habitat.

Prime Biodiversity Areas were then identified from the overall biodiversity distribution map, and boundaries defined from analysis of the evaluated sites and notable species records on the GIS. The methods developed here have the potential to be adopted as a national standard for Prime Biodiversity Areas. The limestone scarp of the Mendip Hills, the Peat Moors, the Street-Somerton ridge and the Mells River Valley were identified as Prime Biodiversity Areas.

Genetic aspects of biodiversity were also discussed and suggestions made for the development of genetic tools in the future as the infant science progresses. At this stage there appears to be insufficient knowledge of genetic resources to contribute much to local biodiversity analysis.

A biodiversity monitoring strategy was recommended to build on existing work within the District. A new network of monitoring sites was established for recording at five yearly intervals and the 1994 baseline recorded. A community-based approach using 20 easily-identified species was also developed, building on some ideas borrowed from the Cornwall Biological Recording Unit.

Action plans were compiled for five habitats and ten species, selected using the data analysis as the most important features within the District. The authors believed strongly that habitat action plans merit a far higher conservation priority than species action plans and recommended that approach to Mendip District Council. The action plans identified the highest priority practical action that should be taken to conserve biodiversity by lead organisations supported by the District Council in its enabling role.

In 1995 SERC has been commissioned by a group of local authorities and conservation organisations to compile a BAP for a Natural Area - the Mid-Somerset Hills. There has been much debate on the relative merits of using local authority areas or Natural Areas as the units for BAPs. While the Natural Area approach seems intuitively more attractive there appears to be widespread acceptance that pragmatism will result in most BAPs being prepared on a local authority area basis.

In the Natural Area BAP we used similar methods to the Mendip plan but tested the application of a different selection basis for the species analysis. English Nature had proposed during national Steering Group discussions that the species used for biodiversity mapping should be a combination of national target species and characteristic species of Natural Areas. We used the "long list" as the basis of the national target species - arguably the "middle list" would be more satisfactory - and English Nature's selection of characteristic species of the Natural Area. This resulted in the analysis being based on around 70 species, a much shorter list than the 802 used in the Mendip project.

The analysis of the 70 species appeared to give satisfactory results although it must be said that there are few independent measures available to assess the different methods. From first principles the notable species analysis should be preferred because it takes into account a wider range of taxonomic groups. Further research in this area is required.

The national BAP Steering Group has had a sub-group working on recommendations for the production of local BAPs and a section of the December 1995 report will cover this subject. I am grateful for Professor David Goode's presentation to the ALGE conference in Winchester in October for some advance information on the likely content of the report. The methodology has been developed from our Mendip work and the Peterborough Environmental Audit.

The key addition to our methodology is the recommendation that a partnership should be established to develop and implement the BAP. It is envisaged that Local Authorities will generally lead but that statutory agencies, the voluntary sector, landowners and business will need to be included in the partnership. A major public consultation exercise is also recommended before the BAP is drawn up.

NFBR members will welcome another key recommendation of the report - that local records centres are essential to the local BAP process and that, if no local data centre exists, action should be initiated to establish one.

The next few years are likely to see a great deal of activity in the preparation of local BAPs. I fear that there will be a great tendency to "get them done quickly" without proper consideration of the quality of the plans or of the adequacy of the available data on which they are based. It seems to me to be far preferable to wait a few years in those areas where data is poorly collated at present and to use the time to set up high quality records centres on which high quality local BAPs can be based.

I would suggest that we must all work to ensure that quality local Records Centres are at the heart of the local BAP process and that the plans are prepared to the highest standards.

MENDIP BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN - THE KEY QUESTIONS

HABITATS

- What are the key habitats?
- How much of them do we have in Mendip?
- How important are these habitats?
- Where do they occur?

SPECIES

- How many species are recorded in Mendip?
- How does this compare with UK and global totals?
- How important are the Mendip species?
- How abundant are the most important species?
- Where do the most important species occur?
- Do they occur within protected sites?

GENETICS

- How much is known about the genetic variation within Mendip species?
- Can species of particular genetic importance be identified?

OVERVIEW

- Can Prime Biodiversity Areas be identified?
- Which features of Mendip biodiversity are especially important?

FUTURE CHANGE

- How will we know if Mendip biodiversity is increasing or decreasing?

ACTION

- What priority action should be taken to conserve Mendip's biodiversity?

ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Damian M. McFerran & Julia D. Nunn

Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR), Ulster Museum, 12 Malone Rd., Belfast,
Northern Ireland BT9 5BN

As a consequence of the increasing demand for information relating to natural history and geology of Northern Ireland (NI), the Ulster Museum, through grant-aiding by Environment Service: Countryside & Wildlife (Department of Environment (NI)), established the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR) in 1995. The role of CEDaR is to accumulate, store and supply information relating to the geology and distribution of the flora and fauna within NI and its coastal waters. Three databases (Recorder, GD2 and a Marine database) have been installed by CEDaR. Importantly, it is not the intention of CEDaR to 'replace' databases which are currently in use, rather to ensure the transfer of index information to the CEDaR databases. Whilst ensuring the confidentiality of sensitive records, CEDaR will provide planners, environmental consultants, conservation bodies and amateur and professional naturalists with environmental information.

In order to maximise the rate of entry of environmental records an effective recording network of satellite sites for all databases supported by CEDaR will be established throughout NI. As well as increasing the rate of data entry, this will also allow the distribution and status of species to be determined more readily and accurately. In effect the Ulster Museum will function as a Local Records Centre (LRC). It is the intention of CEDaR that this network will incorporate individuals and groups with a broad range of expertise. Environmental data will be obtained from a variety of sources, for example, national recording schemes, information currently stored on other databases, for example, Biorecs and Oracle, through literature searches and by extracting information from relevant museum collections. This fits well with the traditional role of the Ulster Museum in curation, display and interpretation of collections of biological and geological specimens.

CEDaR is continually adding to and updating the environmental information stored on its databases. To achieve this goal, we assist statutory agencies, voluntary groups and individuals with the computerisation of their environmental records. In NI we have a strong tradition of data collation by 'amateur' naturalists and these volunteers are central to the success of CEDaR. The role of CEDaR is therefore to establish, and be directly responsible for, the day-to-day support of database satellite sites. Through the support and guidance of English Nature (for example, the supply of documentation and upgrades) CEDaR has expanded the limited number of Recorder satellite sites established by the NI Biological Records Centre (1991-1994) and Recorder users now include;

- Ulster Museum - Sciences Division
- Environment Service (DoE(NI))
- Co. Fermanagh BSBI recorders
- Department of Applied Plant Science - Department of Agriculture (NI)
- Northern Ireland Bat Group
- Birdwatchers' Association
- British Butterfly Conservation Society (NI Branch)
- National Trust
- Ulster Wildlife Trust
- Experienced naturalists - Groups being recorded include- beetles, non-marine molluscs, spiders and fungi

There are currently **14** Recorder satellite sites in NI, and each has been supplied with a unique centre number. To assist with data transfer and amalgamation of records, each satellite site has also been issued with default numbers for each of Recorders' files. Co-ordination of all files is central to the successful operation of this network. **CEDaR** currently holds 226,395 records on the Recorder database, the majority of this information having come from satellite sites.

A common sites structure has been developed for Co. Fermanagh and this is being used by all current satellite sites. The desktop mapping package 'Maps in Action' will be used to revise this structure, and to assist with the development of a common structure for the remaining counties. **CEDaR** also provides training and support to all Recorder users in NI. Where appropriate, **CEDaR** will also assist Recorder users with the development of suitable recording cards which will be linked to a species popup within Recorder. This development will facilitate the rapid entry of data. **CEDaR** recognises the important role of satellite users, and has recently established a forum through which Recorder users can meet and discuss requirements and current policy (NI Recorder Users Group). An initial GD2 User's Group Meeting has been arranged for January 1996.

CEDaR will also answer queries from commercial enquirers, statutory and non-statutory bodies, and the general public. **CEDaR** will provide environmental information, in a variety of formats, to assist with the implementation of policies relating to the protection of the local environment. An Information Request Form must be completed by all enquirers before the release of data. If data are used to generate income, then a charge will be made to cover staff time, interpretation, analysis, further research, photocopying etc. Data are supplied by **CEDaR** with the understanding that it will be acknowledged in all subsequent documents where this information is used.

RECORDER SUPPORT

Please note that the Wildlife Trusts (RSNC) technical support contract for the Recorder software package came to an end on 31.3.1996. There will be a period of several weeks before the replacement contractor is in place. All support calls until further notice should be directed to JNCC:

Telephone:	01733 62626
Fax:	01733 555948
Letters	Eva Leck JNCC Monkstone House City Road Peterborough PE1 1JY

NFBR PUBLICATIONS

NEWSLETTERS

Back numbers of NFBR Newsletters are available from the editor, address on page 2

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The 1993 NFBR Conference Proceedings have been published and were distributed as a separate document with Newsletter 18

The 1992 NFBR Conference Proceedings have now been collated on disk and copies are available from the Secretary, address on page 2. They are not being published insofar as some of the material is now out of date.

Proceedings of the 1991 NFBR Conference, 'Invertebrates in the landscape : Invertebrate recording in site evaluation and countryside monitoring' have been published by the British Entomological and Natural History Society as a supplement to the British Journal of Entomology and Natural History as Vol. 7, Supp 1, Harding, P. (ed.), Feb 1994, ISSN 0952 7583. Copies are available from R. D. Hawkins, Sales Secretary, 30d Meadowcroft Close, Horley, Surrey RH6 9EL.

All other published conference proceedings, 1985-87 & 1989 are available from Paul Harding, address on page 2.

SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS

Proceedings of the 1994 Seminar, 'Action on Biodiversity' are to be published separately and will be distributed to all members.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership leaflet is currently being updated. In the meantime please send applications for membership to the Membership Secretary, Paul Harding, at 60,Boxworth Road, Elsworth, Cambridge, CB3 8JQ. Please send a cheque for £6.00 made payable to NFBR and state your name, address, organisation and post held (if applicable). Membership runs from the 1st April each year.

REVIEWS

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: PRESENT PRACTICE AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Sir John Burnett, Charles Copp and Paul Harding, for the Co-ordinating Commission for Biological Recording. 2 volumes. Department of the Environment, 1995. ISBN: 1 85112 265 6 (Vol. 1-Report); 1 85112 266 4 (Vol. 2 - Appendices); 1 85112 265 8 (Summary Report). Price: Vol 1: £12.50; Vol.2: £11.50; Summary: £2.50.

Available from Publications Sales Unit, Block 3, Spur 7, Government Buildings, Lime Grove, Eastcote, Ruislip, Middx., HA4 8SF (phone: 0181 429 5187).

Hurry, or you will be too late! Not that many copies were printed, and even fewer of these august publications were bound, in expectation of poor sales, on account of no publicity!

If you have not already read this, and, more importantly, waved it under the noses of whatever funding body is relevant, then it is a must. The product of many years of gestation, frustration and delay, the full report represents the extremely well-considered summarisation of the results of the CCBP's massive questionnaire which was circulated back in 1992. It also goes on from there to develop a soundly reasoned case for the proper development of a more secure biological recording network in the UK, with a series of carefully structured recommendations. For those who can't afford the full report, and who probably haven't got time to read it, then the bones of the matter are well-presented in the summary. This includes shortened versions of the full report's main sections: on the current state (at 1992, of course) of biological recording; a very important review of biological recording and the law (especially copyright); a review of future needs in biological recording; an outline of a national scheme for recording; and a methodology for its development.

In many ways, of course, this report says what we have been telling everyone since the late 1970's at least - that if "society" wants to protect and enhance its natural environment, then it has to have access to sound information about it in the first place. The important thing is that it spells out in detail, firstly where we are (were) at, secondly, what the problems are, and thirdly a reasonable set of solutions which would not break the bank. Its bottom line conclusion is that, for something about £10.8 million per annum, spread across the entire UK, and funded from a massive range of potential sources, then a good quality system, based on what we have already got, would be feasible. It recognises the importance of real partnership working with all the volunteers involved (who number about 70% of all the personnel involved in recording), and that a consensus would have to be reached about the details of the scheme, such as any accreditation of centres, or the development of data standards.

But are we too late already? In some ways, its appearance is timely, because its meticulously worked up conclusions contrast with the thin detail of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Report which came out shortly after this one late last year. But it may have been eclipsed by the razzle dazzle of the UKBAP report launch. Certainly, the response of the DoE has been deafeningly silent. Maybe, despite much lip service to biodiversity, its real measurement and monitoring is a bit too much to stomach. Perhaps such real information might throw up too many cans of worms. Perhaps DoE doesn't really like the idea of an outside body telling it what it ought to be doing.

Also, it does look dated, already! There are some interesting statistics, such as the quote that there are (were) 160 copies of the RECORDER database in use (when in fact my recently acquired copy was number 300 something). Then, things have moved on at quite a speed - not least because the Wildlife Trusts are endeavouring to secure Millennium funding for the setting up of just such a system of local records centres, as envisaged in this report, but outside the structures which the report suggests, based on the DoE and/or the JNCC.

The issue of biodiversity will not go away, but the importance of this report is that it looks at the pro's and con's of developing an agreed scheme carefully, and with the continued support of all those involved - amateur, local authority, central government, national societies and so on. It also points up that recording is not just about the current biodiversity fashion, nor even just for conservation. It is about building a sound, reliable database for whatever purposes such data would be useful for in the future.

This is an important report, and one which needs to be acted upon. Will the government do anything about it? Or, if the voluntary sector has to push it forward, will the end product be as well-founded as the report envisages? With current cuts in funding for so many public sector records centres, already overstretched to supply the goods, the omens don't look too good, with or without Millennium funding.

Trevor J. James

BIODIVERSITY: THE UK STEERING GROUP REPORT

Volume 1: Meeting the Rio challenge (ISBN 0 11 753218 5)

Volume 2: Action plans (ISBN 0 11 753228 2)

Published by HMSO, London. 1995

Volume 1: 103pp £26. Volume 2: 324pp £30.

These volumes are the second phase in the UK Government response to its ratification, in 1994, of the 1992 *Rio Convention on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity*. The first phase had been the publication of three reports at the end of 1994 including *Biodiversity the UK Action Plan* (Cm 2428).

Following the publication of the *Biodiversity the UK Action Plan*, a Steering Group was set up under the chairmanship of a senior DOE mandarin, with mainly besuited representatives of many government departments and agencies, national collections, local government, academia, industry, farming and the voluntary conservation movement. This Steering Group delegated most of the real work to 4 sub-groups to cover Targets, Data, Public Awareness and Involvement, and Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The Sub-groups drew heavily on the expertise of individuals in JNCC, the country agencies and some other organisations, leading to the expenditure of much midnight oil ('Good to see these civil servants working hard' I hear you say).

In less than 12 months these august (sub-)groups (aided and abetted by a secretariat at DOE, who were armed with a seemingly endless supply of blue pencils) have come up with what could be perceived to be a new framework for UK nature conservation policy for the next decade(s). However, the report only 'offers a way of meeting our Rio commitments' which is no more than a set of recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment and his Ministerial colleagues. A response from Government is expected in 'the spring' which will presumably lead to a third phase in the post-Rio process. I am sure JNCC, the country nature conservation agencies and local authorities are looking forward to that with eager expectation!

Volume 1 is a highly condensed report on the deliberations of the 4 Sub-groups. It consists of 6 chapters:

- 1 The need for change;
- 2 Targets for key species and habitats;
- 3 Information and data;
- 4 Public awareness and involvement;
- 5 Themes and issues;
- 6 The way forward.

It also contains 5 annexes, of which two are useful:

Guidance in developing local biodiversity action plans;
Proposals to increase public awareness and involvement.

All parts of Volume 1 have suffered from the DOE blue pencils in that you will search in vain for much detail about scientific criteria for the selection of Targets, how the proposed UK Biodiversity Database will be set up or operate, or how data for conservation and planning (two inextricably linked activities) will be collated or validated.

And what of the recommendations of the CCBR report? (This is where a response on the implementation of the CCBR report should be sought.) It may seem to some that it took CCBR 3 years to define the blindingly obvious, but do not be surprised that the detail and veracity of the CCBR report have been glossed over here to provide watered-down versions of only a few of the CCBR recommendations. Much of the detailed reasoning in earlier drafts of the chapter on Information and data have been lost in the published version of the Biodiversity Steering Group report.

Three quarters of the overall report (including all of Volume 2) is taken up with identifying Target species and habitats for action or which are considered to be 'globally threatened/declining'. Most of the Targets were first identified in *Biodiversity Challenge 2*, a response to the original *Action Plan* from a group of voluntary bodies, led by RSPB. The lists of Target species and habitats in *Biodiversity Challenge 2*, which were prepared hastily by a few specialists, soon acquired an almost sacred status in the deliberations of the Targets Sub-group and the Steering Group. The selection criteria for the Target lists are heavily biased to select species which were perceived to be declining nationally or globally, sometimes based on scant, and in some cases conflicting, evidence. Inevitably the better worked taxa are most strongly represented in the list: from a total of 1250 species, some 370 are vertebrates, of which 260 are birds. Invertebrates, and marine organisms in general, are particularly poorly represented in the list. At least the criteria for the lists include species and habitats defined in protective legislation; a valid approach because legislation should be implemented and appropriate action taken. The treatment of Target habitats suffered from substantial editorial cuts, thereby reducing the amount of useful information present in earlier drafts. However, all the habitat accounts were prepared and edited in unseemly haste and it shows, despite some late attempts to increase standardisation and breadth of approach.

Are the lists of Target species and habitats only *preliminary*, or are they likely to become the national priority lists for determining future Government policy? The danger lies in the fact that the *Biodiversity Challenge 2* list, although slightly revised, has come through without the rigorous critical appraisal to which other parts of the report have been subjected. As they stand at present, these lists of species and habitats potentially constitute a major shift in conservation policy in future years. If this is the case, the majority of UK's biological diversity could well be left to fend for itself whilst millions of pounds are diverted to work on a few species and some rare habitats. Even worse, the scarce resources for conservation could be diverted towards action on only the species and habitats that the UK is *obliged* to do something about because of legislation, and on species with high public appeal irrespective of their overall ecological significance. The biological diversity of the UK is the product of natural processes, heavily modified by man's use of the environment over the last 5 000 years or more. The conservation of biological diversity requires a holistic approach to the problem of sustainable use of the environment and the development of integrated land-use planning policies. The actions proposed in this report do little more than nibble at the edges of a few issues.

Is this report worth £56 of your or your employers money? Volume 1 falls into the category of *required reading* for all NFBR members. Volume 2 is less immediately essential, unless you want to begin to develop a trendy local conservation policy based on these recommendations. Buy Volume 1 now and wait until the Government response has been issued before committing a further £30 to purchasing Volume 2.

Tom Grant

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

Biological Recording in the United Kingdom. Present Practice and Future Development, CCBR, DoE, 1995

There are three volumes:

Volume 1 Report

The main report containing an executive summary, full presentation of results, discussion of future needs for data and data management and recommendations. (145pp) £12.50

Volume 2 Appendices

Supplementary volume to the main report containing annexes detailing the questionnaire survey, and analysis of legal issues and a full biography. (128pp) £11.50

Summary Report

Summarises the findings and recommendations of the main report. (27pp) £2.50

Copies may be purchased from: Publication Sales Unit, Block 3, Spur 7, Government Buildings, Lime Grove, Eastcote, Ruislip, Middx HA4 8SF. Tel 0181 429 5187 Fax 0181 429 5195.

Prices include postage and packing within the UK. Cheques/postal orders should be made payable to "Department of the Environment".

NRA R & D PUBLICATIONS

Impact of recreation on wildlife NRA Project No. 498 R7D note 408.

Wetland Resource evaluation and the NRA's role in conservation 1. Resource assessment, 2. Classification of British Wetlands. Project No 464 R&D notes 377 & 378.

Faunal richness of headwater streams Stage 2 Catchment studies, Stage 3 Impact of agricultural activities. Project No. 242 R & D notes 221 & 392

Impact of forest felling on stream invertebrates, Project 270, R & D note 362

From:

Foundation for Water Research, Allen House, The Listons, Liston Rd, Marlow, Bucks, SL7 1FD Tel 01628891589 or the British Library.

SOFTWARE

Decorana 1.0/Twinspan 1.0/Tablcom 1.0 Vegetation analysis software

Decorana performs detrended correspondence analysis and ordines multivariate species data.

Twinspan performs two-way indicator species analysis.

Tablecom converts data to Cornell condensed format as used by Decorana and Twinspan.

The programs are available from ITE, Monks Wood, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon, Cambs PE17 2LS
£88.12 inc. p + p and VAT.