



BRISC
BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND

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Recorder News

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Everyone is preoccupied with the changes, real or imagined, that may appear. It is also a period of change for BRISC and for recording across Scotland. There are many new activities, now more than ever based on good 'recording' principles, well I hope so. This edition of Recorder News is a bit thinner than I would have liked but it gives information about what we - recorders - are getting up to across Scotland.

We still cannot be confident that, in every case, data finds its way into a proper functioning Local Biological Records Centre. As a new one appears on the horizon, others seem to fade into the background. BRISC has been going for twenty-five years so we are obliged now to think on an appropriate timescale. Years pass in a flash, decades exceed our impatience levels, centuries exceed our human mindset, millennia - well what can you say! They put everything into perspective. Let us hope that in the first few years of the first decade of the next century the Local Biological Records Centre will come to flower.

Dave Mellor

Chairs report

By the time you read this, we will be writing 2000, and I wish all members a very happy New Year and especially lots of time for recording wildlife. Why not try to get into a new group this year and extend your expertise? *The Source Book for Biological Recording in Scotland*, which BRISC published in September 1999, is full of information about groups you can join and how to set about it. One of the great things about starting with a new group is that 'lifers' are wonderfully easy to get.

Editorial

This newsletter has been produced over the transition period between decades, centuries and millennia.

Talking about the Source Book, this has had a very positive reception so far. To quote one person – “it is really excellent – every naturalist ought to have a copy”. Every member of BRISC is entitled to one free copy, so if you have not got yours yet, you could arrange to pick one up at the conference in February and thus save the £2 postage. You just need to get in touch with me beforehand, so I know how many to bring.

As you will see from the enclosed conference programme, this promises to be a most exciting event in a splendid location and with lots of interesting speakers and topics. Please make sure that you book early to secure a place – deadline is 18th February. We have tried to keep the cost as low as possible and have therefore come up with two levels of booking fees – with and without lunch. We hope this will fit everyone’s pocket. Please also give the poster to a friend.

Two important national atlases are due for publication in 2000: the new Botanical Atlas and the Butterflies for the New Millennium. I expect most members have been taking part in recording for either or both, and Bill Brackenridge’s analysis elsewhere in this newsletter shows that it is primarily the interest in recording wildlife that brings us all together. BRISC activities therefore need to reflect this, but how? BRISC has not run a national survey since we reconstituted back in 1998, because it was felt that national surveys often cut across the interests of the Local Records Centres, who have their own priorities. It might be timely to take a fresh look. One possibility would be to consult all LRCs to come up with a species or group that everyone would like surveyed – a survey form could be prepared by BRISC, if desired, for those LRCs who did not want to design their own forms. Contact should also be made with the relevant national recording scheme. This would obviously have to be researched and organised at least a year in advance. One survey possibility springs instantly to mind: at the National Federation for Biological Recording’s annual conference in Belfast recently, Mike Edwards of BWARS (Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society) told me that there are woefully few records of bumblebees in Scotland. Could we not organise something up here to fill this gap? What do members think? I should like to hear from both LRCs and from individual recorders.

Finally, I wish to draw readers attention to a consultation paper called ‘An open Scotland’ published end of November 1999 by the Scottish Executive concerning the Freedom of Information Bill. Those of us who attended BRISC’s workshop for record centre managers in June 1998 were told of some of the preliminary thinking concerning this Bill,

and it has implications for all data holders. The bill includes a statutory right of public access to information, but allows for withholding some sensitive information through a ‘harm test of substantial prejudice’. An independent Scottish Information Commissioner will have the power to order the release of information and override the ‘harm test’ if this is deemed to be in the public interest. For those with access to the Internet, the consultation paper can be view at the Scottish Parliament’s website

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library2/doc07/opsc-00.htm> .

Hard copies are available at £9.70, from Freedom of Information Unit, Scottish Executive, Room 045, St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG, tel. 0131-224 4615 or 4613. Replies should be in by 15 March.

Anne-Marie Smout



FIFE LBAP AND FIFE NATURE

Fife Nature, the local records centre for Fife, is the envy of a huge number of people in conservation circles. It is long established and its quality of work is beyond doubt. It was instrumental in setting up the biodiversity process from the start and is in a key position to lead the way on many initiatives.

Since the appointment of the biodiversity officer, the liaison between the Fife Biodiversity Group and Fife Nature has, however, been on a fairly ad hoc basis. There has been no actual planning of workload for either organisation, but the process is beginning to expand rapidly, and there is an urgent need to plan ahead and to work more closely together.

A number of habitat working groups are currently being set up, and questions are coming thick and fast from all directions. In hindsight it might have been better first to ask Fife Nature to prepare a habitat analysis document, so that each working group member could have had this to hand from the start. As it is, we have gone to first meetings of groups with examples of UK and other Local Biodiversity Action Plans, but with very little information about Fife itself. However, by asking each group for their needs, we are

now setting about providing this by the second meeting. In future all group members will be furnished with a simple baseline document outlining land cover, National Vegetation Classification (NVC) context and Phase 1 Habitat survey data. There will of course be additional information, but this can be provided as requested.

Fife Nature staff has been involved in all main group and key partner meetings. These are little more than reporting mechanisms and the heart of all future work will be involvement with the working groups. Each of these are proving to be different in structure, but the agricultural working group is the most vibrant and will achieve its farmland habitat action plan (HAP) within a relatively short timeframe. Sub-groups for farmland birds, amphibians & reptiles, and butterflies are all in the process of being set up and will feed specific species action plan (SAP) information back to the relevant working groups.

There is a massive potential by adopting this method. Fife Nature retains an overview of all the SAPs and is inherently central to all of the recording process, providing essential data and, from its own wide experience, advising on the viability of any proposed project. Nor is the method exclusive – absolutely any local specialist or interested individual can be involved in SAP authorship and plan an important part in setting conservation parameters for the future. By encouraging the formation of sub-groups, where they have not previously existed, or by consulting established groups on specific biodiversity issues, knowledge can be shared on all levels and true partnership achieved. The biodiversity officer plays a pivotal role in acting as the central contact for all interested parties so that projects, targets and objectives can be discussed and linked into the wider picture.

The question of what comes first – the species action plan or the habitat action plan – has yet to be answered. We are on line to achieve at least a third of the SAPs at first draft stage by the spring. Many more (of the 100 species listed in Fife's first LBAP) will be at this stage by the summer 2000. By delaying the publication stage, we will be able to review the raw information within each relevant habitat working group. This will, in turn, enable the wider habitat targets to be discussed; taking into consideration the species own needs and targets. Thus, proposed projects can be considered within a wider group, funds possibly found and greater support gained for each project.

To pave the way, the biodiversity officer has been raising awareness of the biodiversity process in a huge variety of ways, particularly on how the general public can be involved. For instance, a basic survey form

was devised to monitor interest in surveying *hirundines*. This was circulated via the Fife Ranger Service to two local natural history organisations willing to pilot the survey, and their comments on the viability of such a survey will be fed back to Fife Nature, so that an official survey may be set up if required. Any information collected will help set targets for one of the SAPs and key into at least two HAPs. More importantly, it may act as a lever to recommend Fife Council's Social & Community Development Committee to officially adopt a Housing Policy for Swifts and House Martin nest site conservation. This could lead to a high-profile project, with Fife Council acting as lead partners to raise awareness of a predominately urban species to residents throughout Fife.

In highlighting such a simple process, all levels of society can be reached and proof of partnership working will be achieved. The latter is difficult to achieve in practice, but it is the lynchpin on which biodiversity will survive in the future. Not for nothing was the title of the first LBAP for Fife: - "In your hands – Fife's natural heritage".

Catherine Lloyd, Fife Biodiversity Officer,

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Planning Service tel. 01592 416498*

A NEW PARTNERSHIP IN LANARKSHIRE

A new partnership of organisations with an interest in the collection and use of biological records has recently been formed in Lanarkshire. The Lanarkshire Biological Recording Forum includes the two Lanarkshire Councils, Scottish Natural Heritage and the local Natural History Society. The Forum has been constituted to "co-ordinate and support biological recording initiatives and develop methodologies for data gathering which are in line with the NBN". The partners are currently drawing up a three-year development plan, which will include a proposal to establish a sustainable and self-financing Local Record Centre.

Analysing the need

A feasibility study has been conducted as the first stage in defining the purpose and scope of the record centre. It was recognised by the Forum that early consultation with the widest possible range of potential partners was essential for raising awareness of the many uses to which biological records are put.

A consultant conducted the study through face-to-face interviews and questionnaires, with representatives

from organisations that use biological information. Analysis of the findings permitted division of activities into a number of themes. By doing this, it was evident that several organisations are involved in work on the same theme and often require very similar information.

The main themes and key potential functions of the proposed LRC are listed below:

- **LBAPs** - to handle large amounts of data and co-ordinate monitoring
- **Land Cover/Habitat Surveys** - to integrate records and monitor change
- **Site Evaluation Surveys** - to integrate data and provide contextual information
- **Farm Plans and Woodland Planting Schemes** - to integrate information for grant applications, evaluation and overall regulation
- **Fisheries, Wetlands, Flood Control and Water Quality** - to co-ordinate surveys and promote data sharing
- **Nature Reserve Identification and Monitoring** - to promote collaboration and the integration of datasets

As a consequence of this analysis of users' needs, the case for an LRC became clear.

Defining LRC functions and activities

The study concluded that there is a need to:

- integrate GIS systems to avoid wasteful duplication of effort and promote data exchange and collaboration
- increase the ease and speed of access to all information
- organise monitoring strategies
- facilitate better and quicker site assessments
- provide expert advice and guidance
- promote higher standards
- permit more balanced local site evaluations
- co-ordinate surveys
- produce publications

The next step

The Forum is now finalising the feasibility study and considering how best to proceed. It is proposed that funds be sought for a project officer to draw up a development plan describing the functions, management, relationships and resourcing of a Local Record Centre for Lanarkshire. For further information about the Lanarkshire partnership, contact me.

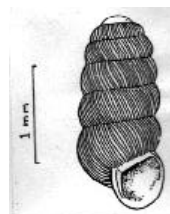
Alan Cameron, LRC Support Officer.

If you have any experiences or news about the establishment, development or running of an LRC that may be of interest to others, please contact Rachel Hackett.

MICROSNAILS AND MEGADIVERSITY

How often do we hear 10km or 1km species maps dismissed as showing the distribution of recorders, not of the species? True up to a point, but nevertheless a lot can be learned of species distribution by comparing the maps of common and rare species. The production of species lists of invertebrates from particular sites – reserves or Wildlife Sites etc. – raises even more severe problems when comparing sites: the length of the list is primarily a measure of effort, rather than of actual biodiversity. Nevertheless, inverts *are* there in huge numbers at all sites and we should make the effort to record them.

Early in 1999, I took on the job of convener of the management group at the newly acquired SWT reserve at Dumbarnie Links on the south coast of Fife. I got stuck into recording invertebrates in as many different ways as I could think of, keeping in mind the severe limitations of my identification skills. Pitfall traps were set; divots sifted; the sweep-net swept; stones, flotsam and tide-line corpses overturned (and of course replaced!). Result so far: just over 250 species, which is still a small fraction of the total for Tentsmuir Point NNR, by far the best recorded site in Fife.



Truncatellina cylindrica
From A E Ellis (1926), *British snails ...*
Oxford, Clarendon Press

While trying to identify some beetles, I came across a reference to a species that has been found mainly in rabbit burrows. Aha! -- a new microhabitat to explore, so next visit I thrust my arm down a burrow and grabbed a handful of sand. It was totally dry and lifeless (except for one lone flea), but when sieved produced four tiny empty snail shells. They turned out to be *Truncatellina cylindrica*, a 'vulnerable' Red Data Book species recorded in only three (English) sites in the past 50 years, but with a few old records for Scotland, including one for north Fife (pre-1840), and from Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh (pre-1930s). Subsequent search, helped by our local snail guru, William Penrice, has produced more empties but still none alive; also an empty shell from another sand-

dune rabbit burrow at Elie Ness, 6km from the first site.

Although the Lothian Biodiversity Group have it on their list for local Species Action Plans, they have so far failed to re-find it. But we shall all keep on trying!

Amongst terrestrial inverts, snails are one of the better 'indicator groups' for a number of reasons. They (or at least their shells) can be found at all seasons and without special equipment; there is a good field guide in print*; a diverse snail fauna is a good indicator of calcareous conditions which could be reflected in other groups; and because shell collecting was a popular pursuit in the second half of the 19th century, there is a better-than-usual base-line against which to assess our current records.

So the race is on -- who will be the first to find **live** *Truncatellina* in Scotland? (But beware: rabbits also live in rabbit burrows!)

Gordon Corbet
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Determining the Local Status of Species

For conservation/biodiversity purposes it is valuable to be able to state which species are locally rare. The following is a trial method for working this out – I will be interested in any comments you have about it.

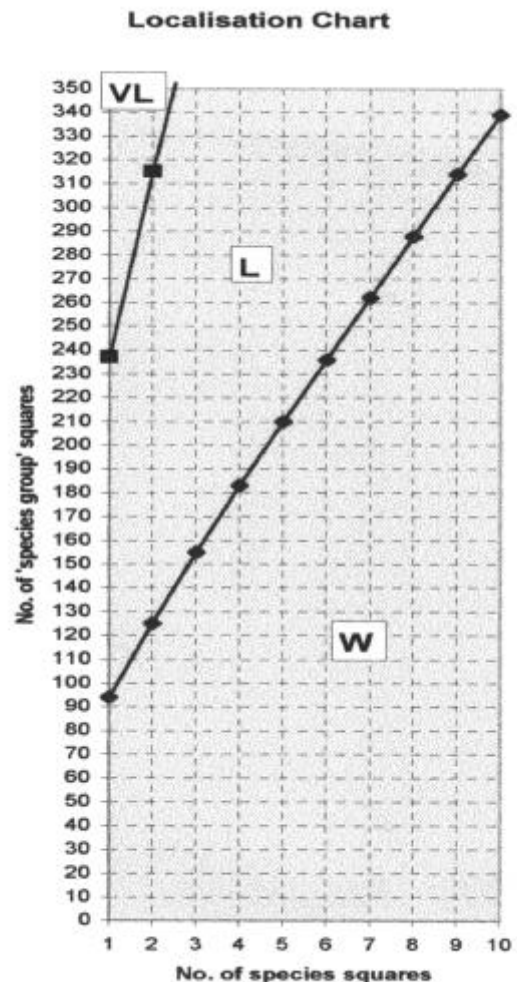
Rarity can be defined in a number of ways – what I am considering here is localisation and the method is used to decide whether a species is Very Local (VL), Local (L), or relatively widespread (W).

The method

The method involves comparing the number of grid squares where a particular species has been found with the number of squares where any species in the 'species group' has been found using the chart. For example, let's assume that a particular spider, *Neon reticulatus*, has been found in 3 kilometre squares and all spider species (the 'species group') have been

* Kerney, M P & Cameron, R A D (1979 and later reprints), *A field guide to the land snails of Britain and north-west Europe*. Collins.

found in 280km squares. These values are then looked up on the chart – this indicates that *Neon reticulatus* is Local in the Lothians.



At this point people usually have a number of questions:

Why use grid squares instead of sites?

There are often problems in deciding what constitutes a site. It is also particularly difficult to try to analyse distribution patterns when there are linear sites. Grid squares are standard units and are consequently more convenient.

What size grid square should be used?

The size of the square you choose will depend on the size of your area – in the Lothians I use 1km squares; for Scotland I would use 10km squares.

Why count the number of squares where the 'species group' has been recorded? - Why not simply use the total number of squares in the area?

One of the considerations when working out the local rarity of species is that the amount of recording effort needs to be taken into account. A species may have only been found in one square but the significance of this is dependent on knowing how many squares it has been searched in. As long as searching has been carried out in a reasonably systematic way, then the number of squares where the species in the 'species group' have been recorded will, to a certain extent, give a measure of search effort. The total number of squares in your area tells you nothing about search effort.

What constitutes a 'species group'?

For this method to work effectively an equal amount of effort needs to be spent in searching for all species in a 'species group', and this fact will dictate what the 'species group' should consist of. For example, the order Lepidoptera would not make a good 'species group' because butterflies are likely to have been much better recorded than moths. In this case there will probably be a need to have three separate 'species groups' – butterflies, macro-moths and micro-moths.

How can search effort be standardised?

This method is based on search effort being to a certain extent standardised. There is a number of sampling considerations that need to be taken into account:

- Geographical coverage (visit all 10km squares)
- Habitat coverage (all habitats should be sampled)
- Microhabitat coverage (as many microhabitats as possible should be sampled)
- Seasonal coverage (recording should be carried out in every month)
- Collecting methods (all appropriate collecting techniques should be used)
- Altitudinal coverage (visits to upland and lowland areas should be made)
- Important site coverage (as many sites of importance to wildlife as possible should be visited)

If these sampling considerations have not been adequately achieved then either more fieldwork or the help of specialists may be required. A specialist with knowledge of which aspects have been poorly sampled and of the requirements of the local species may be able to adjust the status for individual species if necessary.

What is the chart based on?

The definitions of 'Very Local, Local, and Relatively Widespread' are based on the assumption that all squares in the area have been searched:

Very Local (VL): less than 2% of squares
Local (L): between 2% and 5% of squares
Relatively widespread (W): more than 5% of squares

Since the number of squares actually searched is likely to be a lot less than this total number, a statistical method (the Poisson Process) is used to determine the number of squares that need to be searched to be able to give a status within 95% confidence limits. The lines on the chart are determined by the formula for this statistical method.

The chart indicates that a 'species group' needs to have been recorded from at least 94 squares before a species can be classified as 'Local' and from at least 238 squares before a species warrants 'Very Local' status. These values can be used as a goal for recorders to aim at.

*Bob Saville - Manager
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Tel 1031 554 6360*

COMMENTS AND LETTERPAGE

SAVING THE WYCH ELMS OF NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Wych elms are the subject of one of the 3 Local Biodiversity Species Action Plans produced so far in NE Scotland. The principal aim of the plan is to ensure the survival of the Wych elm population of NE Scotland.

Key actions include encouraging the planting of more Wych elms and minimising the impact of Dutch elm disease.

Another proposed action is a survey of the status of the current population. We feel this could involve many people, thus increasing awareness of the species. Advice from members of BRISC on how best to organise the survey would be much appreciated.

The conservation of elms has a knock on effect to several other rare species. It could be argued that it is as much a habitat action plan as a species plan. Several very rare lichens occur on the bark, including the orange-fruited elm lichen. Wych elm seeds provide an important food source for red squirrels and finches.

Nature favours elms here; with our help too we can surely save this valuable species in at least one corner of the country.

*John Malster
Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service*

AYRSHIRE BIOLOGICAL RECORD CENTRE

26th November 1999

Dear **BRISC News**

We do look forward to our BRISC newsletter. Hearing what other LBRCs are doing might be inspiring. Alas, we are finding it difficult enough to keep our own momentum going, the ABRC Newsletter being an early casualty.

One piece of Ayrshire BRC news you might like to pass on is that we have been heavily involved in the steering group of the Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan. We have been lucky to have partners prepared to come together on this. ABRC somehow ended up writing the grassland chapter. I would recommend to any struggling LRC to volunteer for this kind of thing. It has been hard work but has increased our standing with relevant organisations and reminds them of our existence at regular intervals. The great difficulty they experience gathering data about the county emphasised the value of having a Local Record Centre. The concept of monitoring the LBAP always comes up and what better way to tackle that than with a properly funded LBRC ?

Good luck with the Newsletter.

Best Wishes,

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MONITORING

Today, much of the information on which we base our conservation strategies for wildlife is obtained by monitoring. One of the meanings given in the

dictionary of the word 'monitor' is 'to observe or record the condition or performance of a person or thing'.

While we merely observe or record a species this, hopefully, has little effect. However, monitoring can be taken too far in order to achieve results.

When studying birds, for example, should it be acceptable if, when attempting to ascertain clutch size and chick progress, nests are disturbed and therefore open to predation or desertion? Efforts to obtain colony size by flush counts can have the same effect. How, therefore, can a truly accurate picture be obtained?

Perhaps we should really look at what is meant by monitoring and ensure that, when carrying it out, we do not jeopardise the species we are trying to conserve. Now, surely, is the time to monitor the monitoring and consider its effects before it is too late?

Chris Booth

[Chris Booth was the Orkney Bird Recorder for 17 years up to 1996, collating bird records for the annual *Orkney Bird Report*. He is currently the Recorder for Bats and Cetaceans and is a co-author of *The Birds of Orkney*. He has contributed many articles and papers to various journals, including work on the distribution and breeding behaviour of the Raven in Orkney].

THE VERIFICATION ROLE OF COUNTY RECORDERS WITHIN ORKNEY BRC

All records entered into Orkney BRC's computerised database are verified beforehand by the appropriate County Recorder. These may be appointed by relevant national schemes or societies or, where none exists for the taxa in question, they are appointed by the Biological Recording Sub-Committee of the Orkney Field Club. (This continues the practise of co-ordinating recording activities, beginning in 1977 with the formation of 'The Research Register'. All current County Recorders are listed in the annual Bulletin published by the Club, which also contains annual reports from most of the recorders).

There are seven County Recorders from national societies (five living in Orkney). These are the BSBI (vascular plants), BBS (mosses & liverworts), BLS (lichens), the Conchological Society (marine and non-marine molluscs), BAS (spiders), SOC (birds) and SeaWatch (cetaceans). There are also ten County

Recorders who forward records to their Area or National Organisers for the following recording schemes; isopods, caddis flies, wasps & bumblebees, dragonflies, butterflies & moths (including micro-moths), hoverflies, grasshoppers, marine and freshwater fish, and bats.

The recent resignation of the mammal County Recorder and departure from Orkney of the fungi Recorder have created significant gaps in recording coverage and highlight the difficulties of training and recruiting successors from within small communities.

*Ross Andrew, Manager
Orkney Biodiversity Recording Centre, Anchor House,
10 Bridge Street, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1HR*

The Linking Local Records Centres Project

The post of Local Record Centre Support Officer for Scotland is integral to the Linking Local Record Centres (LRCs) project team. The objective of the project is the development of LRCs which will act as the local focus for all biodiversity information management and supply within their area and which will constitute key components of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Specifically, the Linking LRCs project is designed to test and demonstrate models for developing this integrated network of Local Record Centres across the UK.

Current project work includes:

- Piloting approaches establishing new LRCs, including in North East Scotland
- Preparing tested guidance on Policies and Procedures for all LRCs, as part of forthcoming guidance on "Running an LRC". This includes working with the Lothians Wildlife Information Centre to develop and document certain aspects of current practice
- Building partnerships with key organisations and agencies, including reviewing service level agreements as a means of developing "service-oriented" approaches
- Improving links between LRCs and national schemes and societies

Part of the output of this work is the provision of written guidance and the setting of standards for other LRCs to use. An important underlying principle is the need for LRCs to meet actual needs for biodiversity information, rather than simply collecting and storing data. It is a primary objective of the project to demonstrate that a co-ordinated approach to data

collection, management and analysis can deliver better services at lower overall costs.

The LRC Support Officer for Scotland has a remit, which also includes contributing to discussions and providing guidance on collecting, managing and using marine data and on working with LBAP partners and the Wildlife Sites system. However, the post does have a clear Scottish focus and carries responsibility for the project's input to the North East pilot LRC and to demonstration work in Tayside, where a particular way of setting up an LRC is being tested. The Support Officer is also responsible for taking forward those parts of the team's work with a Scottish component, including helping SNH to review the benefits of working with LRCs; this draws on experience in England on building partnerships with key organisations and agencies.

The Linking LRCs team is developing a good understanding of current LRC activities and is generating a body of useful material including a handbook which provides guidance on "Developing an LRC" and which is aimed at both new and existing record centres. A further handbook on "Running an LRC" is planned for late 2000. A proportion of the Support Officer's time is allocated to providing support and advice for existing and developing LRCs. Support activities include providing help to users of the guidance handbook, helping with organising workshops, promoting exchanges of ideas and good practice between record centres, and encouraging individuals and organisations to contribute to the development of the NBN.

If you would like to know more about the Linking Local Record Centres project or wish to contribute to the development of a fully functioning National Biodiversity Network then contact *Alan Cameron, Tel 0131 554 9215, e-mail alancameron@cix.co.uk or visit the NBN website (www.nbn.org.uk).*

Analysing Our Members' Needs -

This is an update of the short piece in *Recorder* issue 34. By the time the present item was written, 146 members had joined or re-joined BRISC during 1999. Of these, 79 people ticked their areas of interest and indicated some training requirements.

By far the greatest reason for joining BRISC is because people want to go out and record biodiversity (67 entries). Therefore it is essential for us to keep the information in the (excellent) *Source Book* up to date, and to encourage members and their friends to contact

records centres and recording scheme organisers! Most (44) also appreciate our regular *BRISC Recorder* newsletter, and it is important to note that other publications or information on related organisations may be obtained or borrowed from Anne-Marie - perhaps even the junk-mail sent to us as a charity. Also, many of you may now be on-line and therefore be able to check out publications on the web-sites which almost all agencies now have - thereby helping to save trees! Our site should be working by the time you get this issue.

Committee members already receive the *National Biodiversity Network* bulletins, the *Scottish Environment Link* newsletters and *Parliamentary Briefings*. It may be that some of you (30) who ticked National News will wish to receive copies. However we will need to control postage costs and it is certainly possible for individuals to apply direct to Scottish Environment Link. We hope that some of the 44 people who ticked 'Publications and Newsletters' may be happy to contribute the occasional piece about issues of concern through the letters column or by sending us a short article.

The following table summarises the interest in training topics which BRISC needs to consider in developing events beyond the AGM/Conference in 2000.

TRAINING TOPIC	
<i>Species identification</i>	38
<i>Recorder (and Recorder 2000)</i>	35
<i>G.I.S. links</i>	23
<i>General computer use for biological /wildlife recording</i>	43
<i>Running a local Records Centre</i>	14

Clearly not everyone wants to extend their knowledge of species groups, although almost half of you do! Perhaps we also need to review the increasing number of computer database or mapping packages such as *Levana*, *Adit*, *DMap* - mostly much easier and home-friendly than *Recorder* or possibly the much-awaited *Recorder 2000*. Anyone with experience is welcome to make their contribution or help with training of BRISC members, in small groups. Please contact Anne-Marie in the meantime.

Otherwise please let me or any committee member know of anything specific we can do for you, or help you to do for yourselves!

Bill Brackenridge, North Lanarkshire BRC
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BUGS FOR THE MILLENNIUM -

REPORT FROM NFBR ANNUAL CONFERENCE AT THE ULSTER MUSEUM - BELFAST on 27/28 NOVEMBER 1999

Forty-odd enthusiasts met in the very welcoming surroundings of the Ulster Museum to listen to a series of excellent talks relating to invertebrate recording. The event had been arranged to span from Saturday lunchtime to Sunday lunchtime to accommodate those of us travelling from over-seas

After a warm welcome from the depute director of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland, our first speaker was Brian Nelson, curator of freshwater invertebrates at the Ulster Museum. He highlighted the fact that most site designations, in particular ESAs, are based purely on botanical evidence, but that this does not necessarily coincide with important invertebrate sites, and there is therefore a strong need for developing indicators for good invertebrate sites. He suggested aquatic bugs and water beetles as good candidates for this, backing it up with practical examples from throughout NI. Following on from here was Jervis Good, from Terrascope Environmental Consultancy at Cork, who developed the theme further, exploring ways of identifying and using terrestrial invertebrate indicators. A different approach might be to look at ecological integrity, to focus on ecosystems rather than individual species. Introducing a new term: 'land-care services' (= sustainable management) which is distinct from 'biodiversity', he pointed out how important it is, when working with land managers and land users, to chose terms that they can identify with.

After tea break, Michael Edwards told us about the humble beginnings of BWARS (Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society) and the difficulties that had been encountered in producing distribution maps, especially of bumblebees. He demonstrated what can be learnt regarding colonisation and subsequent expansion from simple distribution maps, possibly reflecting global warming, and also how much work there is still to be done, especially in Scotland. Alison Hood, communication and liaison officer of MarLIN (Marine Life Information Network for Britain and Ireland) was last speaker of the day and gave a colourful presentation of this important initiative by the Marine

Biological Association with financial support by a whole range of bodies, including SNH. Launched in April 1999, it aims to act as a focus for information to support marine environment management, protection and education, including the encouragement of volunteer recording. Alison reminded us of Britain's vast coastline (20,000km) and that the ca. 15,000 marine species make up ca 20% of our biodiversity. Information is constantly being added to the database through the research efforts of 3 full-time staff and others, and can be viewed via the Internet on their website www.marlin.ac.uk

The business of the day ended with an open discussion and the NFBR AGM. In the evening, we were treated to a most welcome reception, where we mingled with members of the local recording community, both professionals and amateurs, and enjoyed the generous supply of wines and hot food. Accommodation had been arranged for us in the University Senior Common Room, so we could all stay together and chat - and compare notes on the students' disco, which was going on next door till 1am.

Wildlife of course does not respect political borders, and this was also reflected in the conference programme, where several of the speakers hailed from the South. Sunday morning thus started with Liam Lysaght, Wildlife Officer for the Heritage Council, Kilkenny, Ireland, who gave a talk entitled 'The value of invertebrate recording: a heritage policy perspective'. This recently established (1996) statutory but independent body, is involved in most planning issues. Whereas accurate and reliable wildlife data are vital to its work and need to be available prior to planning applications being lodged, very little information is in fact available at present. However, collecting data for the Butterfly Atlas got a lot of people involved, which shows what might be achieved, also in other fields.

Roy Anderson, from the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland then spoke about the practical output from local recording efforts. The Atlas of Ground Beetles in Northern Ireland, due to be published any day, was the result of many years recording efforts. It was to have been launched at the conference, but had unfortunately been delayed because of sub-standard picture reproduction. Many of his quite wonderful slides will appear in it. This is certainly a publication to look out for.

After more tea/coffee Richard Fox spoke about using butterfly data in conservation. He started with a brief update on the atlas - more than 1million records collected in four years - and the effort maps showed quite a good coverage generally (including Ireland). But work does not stop here. A new project is a

European Red Data book, where models are being developed to chart climatic conditions along with changes in distribution. Another project is to look at the flight areas for different species. Many species have quite small total flight areas within any 10km square - quite different to the impression one gets when looking at a distribution map. Using this method, it can be shown that many common species are declining. It might also be used to forecast. Other methods, such as long-term transects give a lot of information, but they are very time-consuming. Monitoring flight periods, however, has shown that these have been extending - as with birds' nesting times. Another indication of global warming?

Final speaker was Stuart Ball, who had already set up a computer in the coffee area with a Beta version of *Recorder 2000* and happily been shown its paces to all and sundry during the various breaks. It was now moved it into the lecture theatre and Stuart started by pointing out that 100,000 man-hours had already been invested in using the old *Recorder* and that these must not be wasted. He then quickly ran through what was new in *Recorder 2000*. The structure had changed. A new essential is to state the 'Survey' i.e. the reason for collecting the record. This becomes important when sharing information. The new *Recorder* allows joining information on biotopes with taxa information. Records can be entered into a site by using a pointer on a map rather than looking up grid references. The NBN is pursuing a better deal with the OS about using maps. He then went on to talk about the cost of giving technical support and asking for ways of financing this and finished by asking for volunteers to Beta test *Recorder 2000*, which I agreed to do on behalf of BRISC. I will let you know how I find it.

The weekend had been memorable, not only because of the conference, but also politically, because this was the day when a meeting and voting yes led to the start of political power being returned to Northern Ireland. I had the opportunity to walk though the streets of Belfast on that Saturday morning, and I was immensely impressed by the city itself - cheery, beautiful, people everywhere out shopping for Christmas, stalls in the streets - altogether a very pleasant place to be. Long may it stay that way!

Anne-Marie Smout.