

NBN Gateway News

Data Licensing

We are pleased to report that since we announced the review of data licensing on the NBN Gateway in the last BRISC news, between September and early November 2015, 54 datasets have been assigned a license on the NBN Gateway. The NBN Secretariat would like to thank all those organisations who are actively working towards open data, and increased clarity around the use of their data.

There is no obligation to assign a data license to your datasets, though following the recent questionnaire on Improving Access to NBN Data and Products it is clear that there is an appetite within the Network to do this. If you wish to make any of your datasets available under one of the four licensing options then follow the process as outlined on the NBN website <http://nbn.org.uk/News/Latest-news/Data-Licensing-on-the-NBN-Gateway.aspx>

Did you know?

More users for the Consultants Portal

Momentum and support for the Consultants Portal is continuing as we move into winter. Almost 20,000 biological records have been submitted so far and we now have nearly 160 registered users.

As the Consultants Portal development phase draws to an end, we are entering a training and support phase. Successful training sessions have been run with Tyler Grange Consultants and FPCR Consultants, and we are looking forward to running training sessions with the EnviroCentre, STRI and a series of workshops in association with CIEEM's Scottish groups in the coming months.

If you are interested in arranging free training sessions for your consultancy, please contact:

consultantsportal@nbn.org.uk

GBIF country reports

During GBIF's 2014 governing board meeting, network participants voiced interest in receiving regular updates on the mobilisation, use and impact of data served through GBIF.org at a country level.

The proposed reports serve several overlapping purposes, including:

- Tracking progress toward national-level commitments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Targets
- Providing regular at-a-glance communication with national stakeholders
- Highlighting the network's value to countries not yet participating in GBIF

After soliciting feedback on an initial prototype created in the spring, the GBIF Secretariat has produced initial versions of the reports for all countries, islands and territories for the 12-month period ending 30 June 2015. Introduced at GBIF's annual governing board meeting in October, this 'review draft' of the reports will enable national participants to conduct a final check of its content before the updated year-end versions are released early in 2016.

You can find out more and download the UK country report here: <http://nbn.org.uk/News/Latest-news/GBIF-country-reports.aspx>



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Recorder News

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Recording Bryophytes in Talla & Gameshope

David Long and Liz Kungu

In July 1907 Symers Macvicar, one of the greatest past Scottish bryologists, and author of the *Student's Handbook of British Hepatics*, visited Talla Linns and discovered that some of the oceanic liverworts common in his home territory on the west coast of Scotland, could also be found in the Southern Uplands. With Talla and Gameshope (T&G) lying on the far western edge of the Scottish Borders and with the average annual rainfall in Tweedsmuir

at 1135 mm, it is not really surprising that such species could be found. Talla Linns, just outside the area purchased by Borders Forest Trust (BFT), has very high humidity due to good tree cover, whereas in T&G practically all the woody vegetation has been lost by centuries of grazing by sheep, and it was thought unlikely that such delicate leafy liverworts would have been able to survive such drastic deforestation. That was the big question facing our survey – could any oceanic liverworts have survived in T&G? A second question was the possibility that a number of alpine species could also be found on the rock outcrops and montane flushes at high elevation.

Since October 2013 we have spent a total of 11 recording days in T&G, including a visit by the Scottish Borders Bryophyte Group, and have recorded a total of 254 different mosses and liverworts. The welcome news is that both the above questions have a positive outcome, in that all of Macvicar's oceanic discoveries from Talla Linns survive in the cleughs and crags of T&G, with some additional finds, and a good range of alpine

species have also turned up on the higher ground. Perhaps the biggest surprise was not of a bryophyte at all but that the diminutive oceanic Wilson's Filmy Fern, *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*, only known before in Peeblesshire from Talla Linns, is growing happily in four north-facing gullies on Garelet Hill and in the wonderful ravine of March Sike in Gameshope.



Hymenophyllum wilsonii in March Sike

Of the oceanic liverworts, most welcome is the discovery that Orkney Notchwort *Anastrepta orcadensis* is found on Talla Craigs, Garelet Hill and quite abundantly in March Sike. Other oceanic liverworts are Lesser Whipwort *Bazzania tricrenata*, Western Frostwort *Gymnomitrium crenulatum*, Pearl Pouncewort *Lejeunea patens*, Pearson's Fingerwort *Lepidozia pearsonii*, Taylors Flapwort *Mylia taylorii*, Prickly Featherwort *Plagiochila spinulosa* and Western Earwort *Scapania gracilis*.



Anastrepta orcadensis in March Sike

Of the montane bryophytes recorded in T&G about half are found in the flushes which are wet areas where lime-rich water wells up from the underlying Silurian rocks. They are found in many places, but those in the headwaters of Donald's Cleugh are particularly rich and include two Nationally Scarce (NS) mosses, Duval's Thread-moss *Bryum weigeli* and Rugged Collar-moss *Splachnum vasculosum*. Elsewhere, two other NS flush species are Slender Cow-horn Bog-moss *Sphagnum subsecundum* in Crunklie Moss, and River Thyme-moss *Pseudobryum cinclidioides* beside Gameshope Loch at 565 metres. On the high-altitude crags such as Talla Craigs are several local montane species, notably White Frostwort *Gymnomitrium obtusum*, River Thread-moss *Bryum riparium* (NS) and Long-fruited Thread-moss *Pohlia elongata*, while on loose stones in high-level screes are Spruce's Rustwort *Marsupella sprucei*, Bristle-leaf *Brachydontium trichodes* (NS) and Blytt's Fork-moss *Kiaeria blyttii*. A few of the crags have some outcrops rich in

Centre in York for the 15th NBN Conference.

Across the two days 35 speakers covered a broad range of subjects within the subject of global to local. The common themes arising from this wide range of speakers were: Open Data, Collaboration and that recording and partnerships at all scales are invaluable to our collective successes. The presentations can be downloaded from the NBN website

<http://nbn.org.uk/News/Latest-news/NBN-Conference-review.aspx>

UK Awards to celebrate biological recording and information sharing

On the evening of the 19th November, 100 people came together in York to find out the winners of the inaugural UK Awards and to celebrate biological recording and information sharing. The NBN established these national awards, in partnership with the Biological Records Centre and the National Forum for Biological Recording, in order to recognise outstanding contributions to biological recording.

The winners by category were:

- Gilbert White youth award - James McCulloch
- Gilbert White adult award - Ian Evans and the late Pat Evans
- David Robertson youth award - Callum Ullman-Smith
- David Robertson adult award - David Fenwick
- National Biodiversity Network Special Award - Nigel Jee
- John Sawyer NBN Open Data award - The Mammal Society

More information and photographs see <http://nbn.org.uk/News/Latest-news/Award-winners-announced.aspx>

NBN Honorary Membership

During the NBN Conference we were delighted to present Honorary membership of the NBN Trust to Bill (William) Ely. Bill was nominated by Graham Walley, NFBR Chairman and John Newbould, retired NFBR Honorary Secretary.

Although now retired, Bill Ely has been active in biological recording in Rotherham since he joined the Council's museum service in 1975. He later started the Rotherham Biological Records Centre which had by December 2014 submitted a total of 1.6 million records to the NBN Gateway from 11,650 taxa, which is remarkable from a largely urban and semi-urban district. Bill has promoted local recorders and recording, the valuing of local species, and has been influential in delivering training to local people to go out and record.

What was the local museum's database later developed into a separate Local Record Centre which grew through Bill's tireless work with the Rotherham Naturalists' Society, Rotherham Ornithological Society, the Sorby Natural History Society and the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union. He also looked at gaps in recording and quickly became a skilled entomologist studying many groups, but specialising in Hymenoptera Parasitica and he is the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union recorder for that group.

You can read more about Bill on the NBN website <http://nbn.org.uk/News/Latest-news/Bill-Ely-NBN-Honorary-Member-2015.aspx>

December 2015

NBN News

John Sawyer

The National Biodiversity Network is extremely sad to report the untimely death of its CEO, John Sawyer, who died of a heart attack on Friday 6th November 2015. He was at his "spiritual" home, the Isle of Mull, when it happened. Our deepest condolences have been sent to John's family, in particular his partner Karlene, with whom he was expecting their first child.

John had been CEO since May 2014 and in that short time he has had a huge impact on the organisation, with his vision, his enthusiasm and energy as well as his hugely motivational leadership of his team at the Secretariat, his work alongside the Board of Trustees and all colleagues across the NBN. John was making a difference. In 18 months he had started to revolutionise the Network and its way of thinking and working. He was the driving force behind our new Strategy and he was enthusing our partners to be part of the exciting new direction in which we are moving.

John's funeral took place on 25th November in Edinburgh and was followed by a celebration of his life at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

The NBN Trust would like to take the opportunity to thank its members and partners for the amazing support, kind words and offers of help that have been

given. The condolences and sentiments you have all expressed show only too well, how respected, admired and truly liked John was. We will continue John's work with the drive and passion that he has instilled in us all. To see his ideas for the NBN through to fruition is the most fitting tribute we can pay him.

Atlas of Living Scotland – other countries follow Scotland's lead

In the last BRISC newsletter we reported on the launch of the beta version of The Atlas of Living Scotland www.als.scot, a new online biodiversity database built to educate, to inform and to promote Scotland's remarkable natural world. We are now delighted to announce that Wales and Northern Ireland are going to be following suit and there will be separate Atlases for both countries.

We will bring you more news on the Atlas projects throughout 2016, but in the meantime, if you would like to contribute to the Atlas of Living Scotland as a Data Partner or would like more information about the site, please contact us at: info@als.scot. If you want to join the User Testing Group please contact us at support@nbn.org.uk. To give feedback on the site please visit www.als.scot and email the team at: info@als.scot

NBN Conference

"From Global to Local - Building the NBN Partnership"

On 19th and 20th November, just under 180 delegates from biodiversity organisations, local environmental records centres, recording schemes, government bodies, students and individuals all concerned with biodiversity data and biological recording came together at the Lakeside Conference

lime, where a number of calcicolous bryophytes grow, notable being Lesser-Rough Earwort *Scapania aequiloba* (NS) and Upright Brown Grimmiid *Schistidium strictum* on Garelet Hill. In all we have recorded eleven bryophytes new to Peeblesshire, re-found a further six not seen for over 50 years, and found new sites for seven Nationally Scarce species.



Bryum weigellii in Donald's Cleuch

Our recording efforts are still not complete, with several crags and gullies awaiting exploration, but we know enough to say that Talla and Gameshope are a bryological hotspot in the Scottish Borders and contribute a great deal to the high biodiversity of the 'Wild Heart of the Southern Uplands'.

Gratefully reprinted from The Green Shed, newsletter (Dec 2015). BFT celebrates its 20th year in 2016, manages many native woodland areas and now owns three large upland sites which form the core of the 'Wild Heart of the Southern Uplands'. BFT is a fantastically active and productive charity, rooted in the community and taking care of the full suite of habitats and species for which it is responsible.

www.bordersforesttrust.org



Ex-chairman Jonathan Willet's column

In the absence of a new Chairman I am writing this for continuity's sake.

We had a very positive Committee meeting in December and lots of things are happening. The bursaries continue and the number of action points to be actioned have come down; always a good thing. We are still looking for a Treasurer, so if you feel that you can spare a bit of time for BRISC then that time would be most welcome. Please contact anyone on the Committee if you are interested.

At that meeting we decided BRISC should give a gift to Anne-Marie Smout for all her work in keeping BRISC going and helping make it is what it is today. She has been Chairwoman and the long-standing editor of Recorder News (until recently). After much deliberation we decided that a donation to a charity close to her heart would be the gesture that she would most appreciate from us all. So we made a donation to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. The Bumblebee pages on the BRISC website still have a large number of hits even after the BBCT have come into being, so do have a look to see what the fuss is about.

I visited Anne-Marie in October to pick up the last of the BRISC files for archiving. A filing cabinet was recycled

and some extra space was created in the Smout's garage. Now my garage has several boxes and I shall be wading through the files to determine what need to be archived and what can be recycled. There is a history to write about BRISC and hopefully someone might do that in the near future. It is so easy to lose the history one takes for granted, hopefully archiving the BRISC papers will go some way to ameliorate this.

On a sad note I have to mention the untimely death of John Sawyer, the Chief Executive of the NBN. He was a massive driving force with big ideas and the wherewithal to deliver them. Without doubt he was the biggest thing to happen to biological data management in Scotland this century. I sincerely hope his legacy will be that the Atlas of Living Scotland reaches its full potential. My thoughts are with his partner Karlene. The Haka to welcome John's coffin at his funeral is not something I will ever forget.

To end on a positive note the BRISC Conference went really well. The discussion about data hubs, LRCs or whatever you want to call them was very interesting; just hearing so many testimonies about what is happening locally was fascinating. From the discussion it did seem that there are two key issues that need addressed namely: supporting a complete local coverage in Scotland and looking to provide support at the national level for common services that would provide economies of scale and a level

playing field in terms of technology available locally and also technological support.

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COPY DEADLINE

**for the April 2016 issue is
March 21st**

All articles preferably in electronic format. Illustrations welcomed preferably as separate jpegs.

Please send to the editor - Sarah Eno, Edenhope, Yarrowford, Selkirk, TD7 5JY.

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We then moved onto the challenging subject of fungal smells. What smells good to some of the group was quite unpleasant to others! The smells ranged from a lovely sweet coconut from *Lactaria glycosmus*, the coconut milkcap, to coal gas from *Tricholoma sulphureum*, the sulphur Knight, but even this pungent smell was not picked up by some. Most confusingly one fungus, *Tricholoma stiparophyllum*, managed to smell very sweet, almost sickly sweet to some people and quite unpleasantly of urine to others!

Fungal shapes and forms were also amazing, we found the white *Helvella crispa* which Beatrix Potter called the candle splutter fungus, looking like molten wax overflowing from a candle,



Cantharellus tubaeformis, the Winter Chanterelle at Inverey Pine Woods

the green earth tongue, *Microglossum viride*, and the orange peel fungus, *Aleuria aurantia*, which really is vividly orange and shaped like peel!

Having a week to work in the lab with an expert tutor was incredibly beneficial and from an uncertain start my confidence grew. Liz Holden, our tutor, explained how to prepare the fungi for microscope work and we had practise finding the key features before moving on to work through the keys, together at first and then if confident on our own but always with help close at hand.



Helvella crispa, the White Saddle at the Birks of Aberfeldy

The future? Well I will continue to practise my identification skills, especially with the microscope. I put records in regularly to our local records centre and will now be able to go further with this getting more fungi to species. I am also looking forward to passing on my identification skills by leading fungal forays for the public, both within my job as a countryside ranger for the National Trust for Scotland in Aberdeenshire and also as a member of Grampian Fungus Group, the confidence and experience you gain in a week really does make such a difference.

information and ideas throughout. Only the weather was against us, being bitterly cold at the beginning of the week though improving later and allowing us to enjoy a couple of action-packed field excursions.

During my time at Kindrogan I learned more than enough to overcome my fears of a 'difficult' group and set me on the road to doing some proper recording in my local area. Here at home I have naturally started with the easier species (the so-called macro - lichens), but I am gradually expanding the list of those I can confidently identify as well as appreciating the diversity of those I don't yet feel sufficiently confident to tackle. I am also equipped to introduce other naturalists living in my area to the interest and beauty of lichens, in accordance with the aims of my local group.

The only downside to the whole business, if I can call it a downside, is that my previous slow bryologist's pace when out and about locally has now slowed down even more, so that if I cover more than a couple of hundred yards in an afternoon I'm doing well. Not so good for my physical fitness, perhaps, but it does mean I'm unlikely ever to get bored.

So thanks again to the BRISC/GNHS Bursary Scheme and to OHBR for making this possible.

Identifying Fungi

Toni Watt

The Identifying Fungi course at Kindrogan was split between field visits to different and quite stunning habitats, old established grasslands, ancient pine woods, and birch woods and microscope work in the lab. A lot of fungi can only be identified to genus in the field so microscope work back in the lab is essential if a bit daunting at first.



Aleuria aurantia, the Orange Peel fungus at Faskally

We started with field characteristics, whether the fungi have gills, pores or teeth under the cap and the attachment of the gills to the stalk or stipe as it is known. Colours and any colour changes of the fungi are also important and whether they exude "milk" from the gills when damaged. Constantly going over the main genus characteristics with a patient and experienced tutor, was very useful and gradually it all began to make sense.



Editor's column

The 100th edition - BRISC has been going for forty years! At the excellent autumn conference, Jonathan gave a brief history of BRISC. This needs writing up! Among

many achievements, including some erudite articles in past editions of the magazine, BRISC has got the SBIF post going. This is pushing the importance of biological data nearer to the top of the political and public agenda.

At the conference AGM there were some changes to the officials - see pg 4. Crucially our much valued and hard working chair, Jonathan stepped down after a long shift. At this time we are still seeking a replacement for this and the treasurer posts. Please send ideas to any BRISC committee member.

The first excursion of the Conference was to Anagach Woods in Speyside. It has an interesting history and a report on this begins on pg. 6. We don't cover the other excursions in such detail but they were much appreciated, all substantially helped by fantastic weather. Very many thanks to Jonathan for organising the whole conference.

Meanwhile I am exercised yet again by the latest bout of flooding, probably one of the consequences of climate change and also many decades of poor upland management. So it is somewhat heartening if also worrying, to see the management and control of upland landscapes rising to the top of agendas as various interests wake up! There are a lot of interesting publications including: the Scottish Natural Heritage "National

Peatland Plan" and the Peatland Project which has almost completed restoration work on 8560 ha of peatland www.snh.gov.uk/; the "Effects of moorland burning on the ecohydrology of river basins" research report offers evidence of negative impacts of burning in upland habitats on river ecology www.wateratleeds.org/ember/. Then the well referenced "Intensification of Grouse Moor Management" by Andy Wightman and Dr Ruth Tingay (2015) www.andywightman.com/archives/4342 succinctly updates various aspects of grouse moor management. There are also the rapidly developing arguments on wild land / re-wilding concepts for uplands - just google for these! The Wildlife Estates Scotland www.wildlife-estates.co.uk is promoting improved standards and accreditation in upland management and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) <http://www.scottishgamekeepers.co.uk/> launched "The Future for Moorland in Scotland" (Dec 2015). This is especially but not exclusively concerned with the Holyrood target of 25% woodland cover in Scotland. James Fenton <http://www.james-hc-fenton.eu/> authored this. He has long championed for blanket peat habitats and argued, some say controversially, that these are part of Scotland's historic natural open and *treeless* landscape.

The Review of Sustainable Management of Moorlands" (report to SNH Scientific Advisory Committee October 2015) makes a strong case for "The development of a vision and strategy for moorland management needs to be grounded in a holistic approach at a landscape scale". Many people have been banging on about this and doing good things for decades so it must be slightly galling to see this appear so late on.

BRISC conference excursions

On a beautiful still and sunny Saturday morning, a small group visited Anagach Community Woods which lie adjacent to Grantown-on-Spey. The group was led by Basil Dunlop who, having been a Chartered Forester and the former Estate Chief Forester, was wonderfully well informed on the history of the Wood's management. Basil and the BRISC editor put the following together.

Anagach Woods Trust (400ha)

The Anagach Woods were planted in 1766 with Scots Pine of Abernethy origin (an Old Caledonian pinewood remnant), Birch, and some Oak. It was probably done to shelter New Grantown, to provide firewood and timber.

The site was open heather moor, and has exceptionally well defined landforms – remarkable eskers, bogs

and lochans. There had been a loch - Loch Anagauch but the water is now covered by a skin of sphagnum moss with bog pine.

The Woods are now a mosaic of open glades and Scots Pine with a variety of age classes and stocking densities. The understory is largely Heather, Blaeberry, Cowberry and scattered Rowan and Juniper, with areas of unwooded dry heath, grassland and sphagnum bog.

Now about 56% of the wood is mature and Semi-mature Scots Pine, 20% is Bog Pine, 9% naturally regenerating felled coupes, about 9% is Birch and the rest immature planted pine.

In 1981 the Community Council (CC) became concerned for the future of woods as the Estate proposed clear felling; then in response to community concerns, to fell in staged coupes. Various fund-raising attempts to secure the woods for the local community



Remarkable range of branch habits of the Scots Pine. Drawn by Basil Dunlop

BURSARY REPORTS

Lichens demystified

Tristan ap Rheinallt

In early May, thanks to a bursary from BRISC/GNHS together with financial support from my local recording group (Outer Hebrides Biological Recording, OHBR), I had the good fortune to spend a few days at Kindrogan learning how to identify lichens. Too inexperienced to go straight to the intermediate level, but keen to devote more than just a weekend to the subject, I attended both the beginners' course and the intermediate one that followed on from it.

Our tutor for both was the hugely enthusiastic and knowledgeable Dr Becky Yahr of the Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh.

Having greatly enjoyed a bryophyte course at Kindrogan two years earlier,

I had high hopes for my week, and I was not disappointed. My previous experience of lichens was confined to identifying a few distinctive species using photos on the internet, coupled with very limited success at using the keys in Frank Dobson's book, so I was starting almost from scratch. But there was no need to worry, as all the basic features and identification criteria were explained clearly and in detail. Not only that, but Becky had brought with her a



A roomful of keen students examining their finds, with tutor Becky Yahr on the left



Who would have thought that looking at a dead log could be so much fun?

large reference collection of specimens that we were able to study at our leisure, while 'spot tests' and the UV lamp added an exciting new dimension to the art of identification.

Another major plus point about the course was that all the students were highly motivated and keen to learn, and most of them were already experienced naturalists/biologists, so there was a lively exchange of

Atlas development is continuing, with work ongoing to secure species and environmental datasets, and a launch event is planned for April 2016. It was heartening to hear at the NBN Conference in November that both Wales and Northern Ireland are close to starting work on their Atlases too, following in the footsteps of Scotland.

Please do have a look at the Atlas beta site (www.als.scot), explore the interface and submit your thoughts and ideas directly to the Atlas. Please also consider joining the user testing group. Contact details can be found on the website. The Atlas can also be followed on Twitter @AoS Scot.

If you would like more information about the Forum please do get in touch.

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How to make your data safe



That day has come. You switch on your computer and it says "device not available. Insert bootable disc." Perhaps pouring that cup of coffee over it was not a good idea. At the very least, you need a new hard disk. At the worst, a new computer.

While money will sort the hardware, what about all your data. Years of biological records have just disappeared. Hopefully, they have been uploaded to the NBN Gateway, but those recent records that haven't been, have gone.

Of course, there is always that last back-up on a DVD or flash drive but that is a month old. Luckily you have cloud storage that syncs with your computer whenever it is attached to the internet, but did you remember to pay for the extra space you needed?

Having a proper strategy to protect your valuable data (and all the hard work that went into it) is very important. All those methods above will help you sleep at night, but whichever method you choose, you need to make sure that it conforms to some basic principles.

1. The data copy is complete and will allow you to restore everything as it was.
2. The medium used for the copy is resilient to failure over the expected time scale.
3. The copies should be kept geographically remote from the original.
4. If the data is sensitive then consider encrypting it.

The method you choose to safeguard your data will depend on individual circumstances but don't be afraid to ask for advice. BRISC is willing to help out by supporting its members with advice and storage options, so please get in touch.

Andy Wakelin
BRISC Website Manager
Email: webmaster@brisc.org.uk

were unsuccessful but eventually, in 2001, the woods were put on the market by the Estate. By that time the Community Right to Buy legislation had, luckily, been enacted and funds became more readily available to purchase the land.

Purchase

As Highland Regional Council (HRC) local member and former Estate Chief Forester, Basil worked with the CC, and called a public meeting in late 2001 with speakers from HRC, Forestry Commission, SNH, Moray, Badenoch & Strathspey Enterprise and the Cairngorms Partnership to discuss support for a community buyout. At the meeting, 230 people voted unanimously to seek community purchase, and they formed the Steering Committee with Basil as



Beautiful 'Spanish Moss' effect of lichens
Photo -Anne-Marie Smout

Chairman. A huge amount of work followed but finally an offer was accepted in March 2002. The local community raised £83,000 in about two weeks to fund the shortfall –

testament to the huge support for the proposed buy-out. This special area of native Scots Pine woodland was successfully secured for the community and the opening ceremony was 5th June 2002.

Objectives

The Objectives now are primarily to manage the woodland as an exemplar of ancient pine-wood for the benefit of the community and general public, particularly but not exclusively for conservation, restoration and improvement, for education; recreational and charitable schemes for the benefit of the community.

The wood is managed for natural development of the pine-wood ecosystem, through minimum interference natural regeneration, continuous cover and selective felling, retention of deadwood and extension of age classes for the natural life of Scots pine (about 450 years). Most of the woods are designated Special Protection Area because of their Capercaillie.

In line with requirements of access code, responsible public behaviour is also encouraged. There are a number of waymarked paths and mountain biking routes through the woods, including the Speyside Way. Poor compliance with the Access Code which can pose significant threats to the special wildlife.

On Sunday morning BRISC members went to the RSPB Abernethy Reserve

where we were treated to an introduction on recent issues, a visit to the new tree nursery and then a walk until lunchtime. The highlights were



Group at Abernethy - look at that sunshine!

spotting great crested tit and copious pine martin droppings.

The final excursion in the afternoon was to Rothiemurchus Pinewood.

Many more conference photographs and two of the presentations - Dumfries & Galloway and Highland - are on the BRISC website. A summary report about the conference will be produced by SBIF in due course.



Glen Feshie

Scientific Diver Training

Kerry McKay

My affair with SCUBA diving began when I started University. I was instantly captivated and continued challenging myself to improve. My most recent challenge was to complete a week long course in Orkney on scientific diving. The course was run as part of an initiative by NERC to fill skill gaps in recording and taxonomy.

The full name of the scientific diving courses was, 'In situ marine field identification skills', and was a collaboration between Heriot Watt University, MASTS, SAMS, IANTD and NERC. All excellent credentials, so I had high hopes for a fantastic week of learning.



The five other students and I boarded on the MV Halton, in Stromness ready for a full-on week. Days were generally 8am to 8pm with a mix of lectures, hands on workshops, and underwater practice. Over the week we learned how to lay a transect line underwater, record on a dive slate, use some very lovely (and expensive) underwater

UPDATE FROM THE SCOTTISH BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION FORUM (SBIF)

Biodiversity Data Flow Pathway

The recent BRISC Conference 'Mind the Gaps - Are Regional Data Hubs the Way Forward' lived up to expectations. The presentations from representatives of the current network of regional groups and records centres were really informative. It is clear that a huge amount of valuable work is carried out by all the organisations, and of all the points that were discussed afterwards, two really came through loud and clear:

1. the importance of local Records Centres and the need for groups and centres to be strongly embedded in their local area, and
2. that many of the issues faced (such as securing a suitable and sustainable IT infrastructure) are common to all the organisations.



It is important that the Forum understands the current strengths and challenges faced by organisations so that the Biodiversity Data Flow Pathway (formerly known as the National Data Flow Pathway) can be implemented effectively. Adding the outputs from the BRISC Conference to those from the SBIF's own Conference in April 2015 will contribute to this happening.

Making the Most of Biodiversity Data - printed booklet

Copies of our case study publication *Making the Most of Biodiversity Data* are still available and it would be good to see them distributed out to as many different organisations as possible. Some organisations give the booklet to their current and new staff and volunteers as a way of explaining the importance of data for wider decision-making purposes, or distribute them at events to interested members of the public. To order copies just send me an email; the booklet is free. Just a reminder that a pdf of the booklet can be downloaded from the SBIF website <http://www.sbif.org.uk/>.

The National Biodiversity Network and the Atlas of Living Scotland

And finally, it was extremely sad to learn of the untimely death of John Sawyer in November. John was a member of the SBIF's Steering Group and he provided very valuable input to the Forum's work. He will be sorely missed. We have been contributing from the outset to one of John's big projects, the *Atlas of Living Scotland*.

The British Dragonfly Society (BDS) has recently established a number of Dragonfly Hotspots across Scotland, which are sites with good access where dragonflies can be seen easily. These are Scotstown Moor Local Nature Reserve in Aberdeen, Trottick Mill Ponds LNR in Dundee, Crombie Country Park near Carnoustie, Morton Lochs near Tayport, Portmoak Moss near Scotlandwell, Gartcosh LNR near Coatbridge and Greenhead Moss near Wishaw. More information about these Hotspots, what species you can see and how to get there can be found at <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/hot-spots-scotland>

If you have been lucky enough to spot any of these magnificent insects this year, please let us know on the recording section of the BDS website <http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/simple-data-entry>

It should only take a few minutes and the information received is invaluable in helping the BDS with its conservation work. *Photos copyright Danielle Muir*



For information - The editor noticed that the article "Trait correlates of distribution trends in the Odonata of Britain and Ireland" Powney GD, Cham SSA, Smallshire D, Isaac NJB.(2015) can be found at:

<https://peerj.com/articles/1410/>

BRISC PROJECTS

The following pages include two reports from recipients of the BRISC bursaries. This highly valued mechanism enables people to learn a new or improve on an existing skill. Training courses are often selected from the Field Studies Council <http://www.field-studies-council.org> who will publish



the 2016 courses available in the Scottish Centres shortly. We only ask that a report is submitted to the journal. We very much appreciate reading about your experiences.

The new round of BRISC Bursaries are now open for applications.

In order to encourage people to take up the serious study of wildlife, Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC) and Glasgow Natural History Society (GNH) are offering seven bursaries to anyone living in Scotland to cover some of the costs of attending a suitable training course in 2016.

For more details see

<http://www.bris.org.uk/Bursaries.php>

cameras to take photos for identification, and how to do a video transect.

Despite my best efforts to write neatly underwater (with big thick gloves on), my writing continued to look very different when I got back to the surface. At least it was still legible...mostly. I also particularly enjoyed the stills photography as it forces you to pay more attention to the smaller details. You also need excellent buoyancy control to stay steady and if all goes well you get a lovely image of the awesome things you can see while diving in Scotland.

We also visited the Orkney recompression chamber and had a 'dry dive'. Diving has its inherent risks such as getting decompression sickness, also



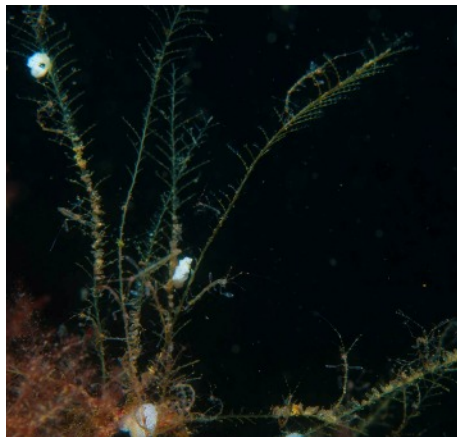
known as 'the bends', which can cause permanent damage or death. A recompression chamber is used in treatment of the bends so it was interesting to see how it all works. Our 'dry dive' simulated the pressure of a dive to 10m. We all had a great laugh breath-

ing the helium gas mix used during treatment and hearing everyone's squeaky voices. What surprised me was the temperature change with the changing pressure and how foggy the chamber got as we were brought back to atmospheric pressure. The 'dry dive' was followed by a presentation on a diving incident in Scapa Flow only two years previously, where two divers disappeared and were later found dead. It was a fascinating talk and highlighted how small problems can build up into a serious accident.

All our training and practice culminated in a group project on our last day. We were given some coordinates and side scan images of what was believed to be wreckage remaining from the SMS Bremse. Our task was to locate the object, then survey it and the surrounding area using the techniques we had learned. We had an evening to create our survey plan and only the morning to complete all our field work, and have our findings processed by 4pm when we were to give a presentation of our work to staff, students, and anyone else who was interested.

The big project day began. After some squiggling around with the scanners, we located an object on the MV Halton's sonar... not quite at the coordinates we were given but it was the biggest lump around. We made a team decision to aim for this since there was nothing noteworthy at the coordinates we had been given, and it was close enough. On the third attempt, we got a shot line deployed close to the lump.

The 6 of us organised ourselves into 3 buddy pairs, each with a specific task and a staff member as a safety diver. The first buddy pair kitted up and headed down the shot to locate the object, and if they found it, began their transect. I was in the second buddy pair and we were to focus on the object. Since the first pair didn't re-surface immediately we assumed they had indeed found the object, so we kitted up and hit the water. We descended into fairly murky water with the bottom of the shot around 15m



Hydroid with skeleton shrimp and nudibranchs living on it photo Kerry MacKay

deep. We found what looked like most of a dinghy/large bath tub right next to the shot line and the first buddy pairs transect line running past the deepest point of this wreckage. So we assumed this to be the wreckage we were looking for and began our surveying. We had only just got started when the safety diver from the first group

appeared and pointed along the transect line and a bit deeper. So we went for a look. A much bigger piece of wreckage soon loomed out the darkness; we'd been about to survey the wrong wreckage! Aware of our lost time we hurried on with surveying the correct wreckage. My buddy did a general sweep round with the video while I took some photos. We took some measurements to get an idea of the scale of the wreckage. My buddy spent the remainder of the dive recording species on her slate, while I took close up photos for identification.

We had a limit of 60 minutes for our maximum dive time and we surfaced on 58 minutes, with a max depth of 18.2m. We sprinted to the campus for one last lecture on Algae.

Two and a half hours later we filed into the lecture room filled with an audience of about 35 people. We presented our research with photos, diagrams, and even a video despite last minute decisions on who did what! We all felt we had done pretty well considering the time constraints, but breathed a massive sigh of relief when we finished.

I would like to thank the staff for their hard work and encouragement throughout the course. I absolutely loved learning how to be a scientific diver and learned a lot from both the staff, and the other students. In an ideal world I would be doing this every day! However, I do wonder what will happen to my new skills given the lack of jobs for me to apply them to? With

climate change and invasive species posing a threat to our environments, how will we know what has changed if we don't know what we had to begin with? The UK has such rich and varied marine habitats, it astounds me how little is known about the distributions and changes occurring in our seas. I do hope this course, and others like it, are the beginning of more cohesive recording efforts.



Four Spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)

Have you spotted any Dragons or Damsels this summer?

Danielle Muir

Unfortunately the summer of 2015 has not been the best for spotting dragonflies and damselflies, which tend to be found flying on warm, sunny days. If you are close to a clean waterbody when the sun is shining though, you should be lucky enough to spot these

beautiful insects zipping around, looking for mates and hunting for food.

But did you know that dragonflies and damselflies spend most of their lives underwater and only survive for a few weeks as an adult? Ideal habitats for dragonflies include ponds, slow running burns, ditches or rivers and small lochs, with wildflower-rich areas close by to attract the insects upon which they feed. Adult dragonflies may feed on midges, mosquitos and wasps – and so help control populations of insects we aren't so keen on – as well as flies, bees and butterflies. Dragonfly nymphs feed on underwater invertebrates such as freshwater shrimps and



Damselflies mating (*Zygoptera*)

water fleas, with larger nymphs being able to catch and eat tadpoles, small fish and even newts!