



All the latest news
from around the
LRC community

WELCOME TO ALERC'S NEWSLETTER

Defra Fund for Biological Recording in the Voluntary Sector Update

Andrew Thompson - Project Manager Biodiversity Recording Fund , Natural England

The Defra fund for biological recording in the voluntary sector (DBRVS) is now underway and attracting a significant amount of interest. The Defra fund is part of a funding programme established to deliver part of the published Government commitment in the Natural Environment White Paper to support the voluntary sector's role in engaging with the natural environment and contributing to our understanding of its state and trends. The DBRVS part of the programme totals £398,000 over a three year period 2011 – 14 and consists of a series of projects, two of which have now been let.

The first of these projects was advertised in June and pilots structured surveillance of species recording in collaboration between Local Record Centres (LRCs) and National Schemes and Societies (NSSs). Natural England received 7 bids in response to its invitation to tender, of which 2 were successful.

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Welcome to ALERC News

Gary Lewis – Chair, ALERC Directors

Welcome to the first ALERC newsletter. One of the areas the Directors have recognised we need to improve is to communicate with our membership and we hope this, as well as the website, will go a long way to achieving that.

In a short time ALERC has moved forward and its ability to represent the membership has significantly increased. This is due, in no short measure, to the successful appointment of Tom Hunt as the ALERC National Coordinator. For the organisation to have a paid full time post has enabled those embryonic ideas held by volunteer Directors to be progressed and we are already seeing results. In particular Tom has had meetings with Richard Benyon (Minister for Natural Environment & Fisheries) and with highly influential people within DEFRA and Natural England and these meetings have raised the profile of the LRC community to a wider audience.

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The post has been widely welcomed by external organisations who are already approaching Tom to provide ALERC representation on a variety of committees.

The other area where there has been progress is with the launch of accreditation; there has already been a number of LRCs showing an interest and there should be a first round of assessments either later this year or early in 2013.

I hope the content of this newsletter will better explain the wide range of activity ALERC is involved with and will show you how we are trying to strengthen the position of the LRC community. I hope to meet as many of you as possible at the conference later this year.

Consultants' Attitudes to LRCs and Biodiversity Data: Summary of Survey Results

Tom Hunt, ALERC National Coordinator

IEEM and the Association of Local Environmental Record Centres (ALERC) have collaborated on a survey of ecological consultants. The survey had a special focus on LRCs and data sharing. It received a good number of respondents (473) and produced interesting results, some of which were expected and some of which were more surprising. The overall result of survey was to show that satisfaction with the data received from LRCs varies greatly. Attitudes to sharing data also vary, although generally people seem willing to share data if a limited number of obstacles can be overcome.

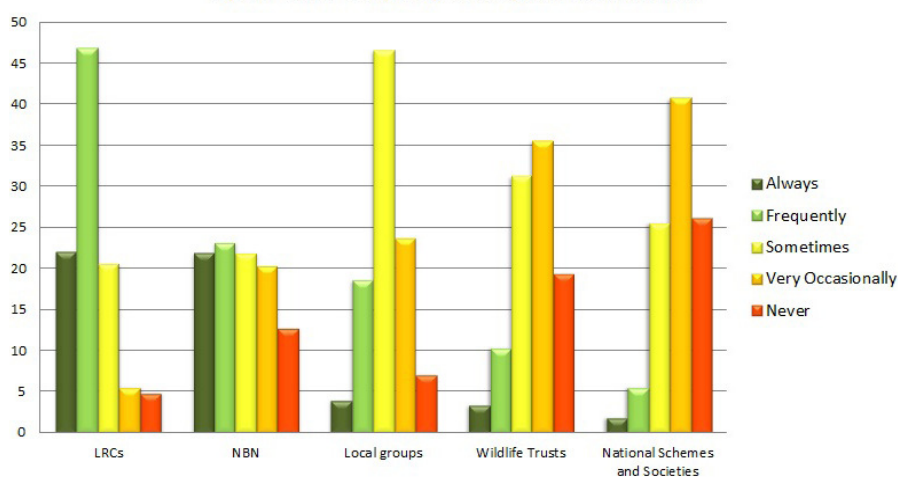
It is important to ascertain how widely ecological consultants use various sources of biodiversity data. The results clearly show that the two main sources of data are local records centres and the NBN Gateway. 69% of respondents said that they use data from LRCs either for every job, or for most jobs and 45.1% of respondents

said the same about data from the NBN Gateway (see fig.1). There are also several other sources of data used by professional ecologists, although these are usually only used occasionally. This result demonstrates how important data from LRCs and the NBN are to consultants.

Further questions were aimed at finding out why some people only use LRC data infrequently and what could be done to improve the way in which LRC data is provided. Cost of data provision was cited as a reason for not using LRC data by 57.9% of the 133 people who classed themselves as "seldom users". This was also reflected in the comments left on the survey, with many respondents choosing to single out the LRCs who they thought were well priced, and those they thought were over-priced. It is perhaps unsurprising that cost is cited as an issue surrounding the paid-for service from LRCs in times of economic difficulty. Judging by the comments left on the survey, it is the LRCs around the south east of England for whom cost is the biggest issue. Again, this is perhaps not a surprise as the cost of many services increases in this part of the country. However, it is also important to consider the potential for sampling bias, as it is likely that there are a higher proportion of respondents working around the south east of England.

The survey also recorded the specific strengths and weaknesses of LRC data provision. This part of the survey backed up earlier conclusions about the variability of LRC products and services with "sometimes a problem" being recorded against

Fig 1. Data Usage by Ecological Consultants



many of them. One of the areas that attracted a lot of criticism as being “usually a problem”, or “often a problem”, was the area of cost. This is not surprising as the earlier part of the survey suggested that the cost of data supply was putting some people off acquiring it.

One of the more startling findings from the survey was the fact that 16.8% of respondents cited “incentive for consultants to return data to the LRC” as usually being a problem, making this the most significant problem of those listed in the survey. What makes this even more surprising is that 77.7% of respondents claimed to already share data, and 88.8% of those suggested they send it to LRCs (meaning that 67.8% of consultants are already passing data to LRCs). This is a surprise to many LRCs, who suggest anecdotally that data from consultants only makes up a very small proportion of their databases. Some LRCs are known to offer inducements for consultants who are able to share their data. An LRC in Scotland offered consultants a reduction in price of 50% on the next data search if they were able to provide records back to the LRC. Only three out of approximately forty eligible enquiries yielded any consultancy data.

Whatever the figures from this survey, the evidence from LRCs themselves strongly suggests that data collected by consultants is not being used beyond its original purpose. These records could be useful not only to local naturalists, interest groups and conservationists, but also to local authorities,

national policy makers and ecological consultants themselves.

However, it is obvious that this argument is not strong enough in itself to yield consultancy data, even when economic incentives are applied. There are still barriers to overcome. It is clear from the results of the survey, that a lot of people feel that a simple system for submission of records would make them more likely to submit data (over 200 respondents said this). There are also concerns around copyright issues.

The results of the survey should leave people in no doubt that there is a requirement for a simple system that allows consultants to submit data quickly, and that doesn't result in a slow process of reformatting before it becomes available to inform future projects and developments. NBN, IEEM and ALERC are currently working on how such a system might be developed.

The full length version of this article, is available on the ALERC website.

The Benefits of ALERC Membership

- * Representation to national organisations and government
- * Priority for booking places at the annual conference
- * Reduced members fee for the conference
- * Regular newsletter
- * Immediate notification of invitations to tender received by ALERC
- * Eligibility for LRC Accreditation

Dates for your diary

September

20th - Linnean Society meeting on online taxonomy

20th - 21st - BSBI Edinburgh conference

October

14th - BRISC Annual Conference, AGM and Symposium

23rd -24th - IEEM Scottish Conference: Green Networks - From Policy to Reality, Stirling. www.ieem.net/scottish-section-conference

November

5th - IEEM Accessing and Using Biodiversity Data (Beginner), Manchester www.ieem.net/events/294/accessing-and-using-biodiversity-data. 28th London www.ieem.net/events/293/accessing-and-using-biodiversity-data

6th - ALERC Conference

23rd - NBN Conference, London - **NBN Member LRCs can receive 1 free place**

December

7th - 8th IEEM Autumn Conference: Renewable Energy and Biodiversity Impacts, Cardiff. www.ieem.net/2012-autumn-conference

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The successful bids were both led by LRCs: NBIS (Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service) in the East and GMEU (Greater Manchester Ecology Unit) in the North West. Both projects started in August and will pilot the use of online recording to capture multi-taxa volunteer data relating to key habitats via structured surveillance methods. NBIS will cover arable, lowland dry acid and lowland calcareous grassland habitats. GMEU will focus on Ancient Woodland. Both will provide initial reports at the end of 2012 followed by full field trials in 2013. All information gathered as part of this project will be shared with the NBN. The second funded project seeks to develop skills and capacity within the recording community. This was advertised in July and was awarded to the Field Studies Council. Their project will involve a combination of face to face training; short residential courses; iSpot training; active mentoring and provision of recorder support materials. It is aimed at creating sustainable models for capacity building within the volunteer community and will include a focus on under-recorded and s41 species. Work is due to begin early next month and will conclude in March 2014. As with project, 1 all data recorded within the process will be shared with the NBN.

The other two projects are not yet out for tender. These will cover the following:

(i) Support the development and piloting of on-line recording with emphasis on support for validation and verification and migration from existing approaches to on-line recording (Project 3);

(ii) Support capital investment focusing on data capture, improvements to data management, and the adoption of existing tools to deliver ecological data products to users (Project 4).

More information on these projects will be provided in next month's *NBN eNews* publication and future publications of the ALERC newsletter.

News in Brief

LRC Accreditation Launched

LRC Accreditation has been launched, with a handful of LRCs expressing their intention to become accredited. The first LRCs will

be assessed at the beginning of 2013 and there are several more who are yet to set a date for their accreditation, but are currently planning towards it. A fee of £300 has been set in order to cover ALERC's expenses. For more information, please visit <http://www.alerc.org.uk/accreditation.html> or email tom.hunt@alerc.org.uk.

ALERC Conference 2012

Invites have been sent out to ALERC members initially for the 2012 conference, to be held in Birmingham on November 6th. ALERC are hoping that Mark Stevenson of Defra will be able to deliver a keynote speech. Helen Roy of the Biological Records Centre, and the UK Ladybird Survey is a confirmed speaker. There will also be a range of workshops for delegates to choose from as well as the ALERC AGM.

Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum

Scotland is tackling the issues around biodiversity data sharing by initiating the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF). The first workshop was held on the 25th May 2012, where a forum was brought together representing a wide range of stakeholders. LRCs will be represented by Graeme Wilson of The Wildlife Information Centre for the Lothians and Borders. For more information <http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk/>

If you would like to influence the title of future editions of this publication, please click on the link to participate in the poll
<http://doodle.com/ifpydquw9m8c8tct>

