

1. How do you think our science can better contribute to environmental decision-making and to conservation?

Environmental decision making and conservation are becoming increasingly important as greater pressure is applied to threatened species and habitats, as acknowledged by the State of Nature report. This is coupled by developments in the fields of online recording and digital analysis which mean that evidence for decision making can be accessed more quickly and interpreted in a more powerful way. In turn, this means that there is a need and potential for science to inform decision making to a higher degree than ever. However, this potential will only be fulfilled if the links between data recorders, scientists and decision makers are strengthened. In practice this means:

- Effective data exchange between bird recorders and record centres (national and local).
- Maximum use of data modelling and interpretation exercises with robust evaluation.
- Supply of the best of these to local and national decision makers.

Local records centres can play a part in all of this and ALERC can assist by continued dialogue with BTO and other national organisations.

2. How do you think BTO can better represent the value of our science to society?

BTO science plays an important role in helping to understand the dynamics of bird populations. The full range of BTO science work is probably not appreciated and this should be addressed. The reasons for this might be that small space that environmental science is allowed in the media is taken up by a few large organisations. This in itself is not a problem, but it means that when new initiatives are launched, the partnerships behind them should include all appropriate organisations, including BTO and ALERC members. Where valuable contributions to projects are made, these must be acknowledged.

3. Do you think the BTO has a wider role to play in helping society learn about birds and their relationships with the environment and people? If so, how might we develop this role in future?

Yes. BTO is one of the larger national societies and has access to a lot of members as well as some media coverage. This means that it has an opportunity to reach a lot of people that other organisations cannot. In order to maximise this advantage, the BTO should sign post the people it reaches to information about other taxonomic groups and environmental issues. In turn, other organisations should sign post to the BTO as one of the leading scientific organisations in the field of conservation.

4. What would you like to see from BTO that improves your accessibility to our data, information and derived data products?

Access to biodiversity data is a hot topic. There is pressure from a range of sectors and organisations on data custodians to provide access to data for free at the point of delivery. However, data provision comes at a cost which needs to be recovered somehow, otherwise organisations like BTO cannot provide the service they do.

ALERC is currently working with a number of national schemes and societies on the possibilities of exchanging data on a quid pro quo arrangement. The purpose of doing this is to augment both LRCs' and NSSs' access to data at little cost to either set of organisations. ALERC would be happy to discuss this further with BTO. Key to this discussion is how sharing data, knowledge, methodologies, way of working etc. can mean that both LRCs and BTO are able to provide better services to their individual clients.

ALERC and BTO will then both be in a better position to put the case for recording to receive continued funding from a range of funders.

5. What are the key issues to which BTO research should give the highest priority?

BTO research is undoubtedly invaluable to conservationists in making the case to policy and decision makers. Research that shows how policies can affect the population of birds can be invaluable informing policy at all levels, international through to local. It is naturally local level that LRCs have the strongest interest, and ALERC would therefore encourage the BTO to continue to look into the impact of local decisions on birds, e.g. in the case of wind farm planning, non-statutory site designation and agri-environment schemes etc.

The results of this research should be communicated as widely as possible, as not only can it be influential in making better decisions, it also means that data provided by local voluntary recorders becomes even more useful and can actually empower recorders by putting their records into the context of conservation, backed up by rigorous scientific research.

6. How can we best measure the impact of BTO science?

This is hard to answer. It would be hoped that changes in policy would be a result of BTO science, with the subsequent changes in bird populations a measurable outcome. However, the problem with this might be that the eventual outcomes only really show themselves as long term trends, which is a difficult narrative to communicate to people. For example the decline in farmland birds seen over forty years or so cannot be reversed in a couple of years, especially considering climatic variability etc.

One measure of the impact of BTO science, and indeed a measure of the impact that all conservation organisations have could be their effect on decision makers. For example, use of biodiversity data in local planning applications or use of data products in design of agri-environmental schemes could be a good metrics. However, no such formal metrics currently exist and ALERC would be willing to discuss this with BTO further if necessary.

7. What are the key new research areas, including those beyond birds, into which BTO should aim to develop its research over the next five years?

Predictive modelling seems to be developing at the moment as something that can be a powerful tool to inform decisions. It makes biodiversity recording potentially even more powerful and important. BTO, and others, should continue to research this.

As regards topics other than birds, it is important that these are addressed in collaboration with other organisations. The BTO with its experience can bring a lot to other non-bird fields, but it must not be seen to duplicate effort or ignore others as this will damage the sector as a whole.

8. What comments do you have on BTO's international work and are there additional areas where you would like us to be active?

ALERC is restricted to Britain currently and has no current interest in international affairs.

9. How can we best support others, and collectively agree a set of priorities for improving the quality of monitoring data for taxa other than birds?

It is important that large organisations such as BTO are as consultative as possible. Conferences such as the NBN conference are ideal for this, but this is just one event with limited time available so it is worthwhile looking at other meetings and forums, including online ones. It is important to get this right as otherwise effort can be duplicated by people working on overlapping projects, especially in an environment where resources are at a premium.

10. How can BTO best support Bird Clubs and Observatories to ensure the most effective use of birders' observations at local and national scales?

NA

11. Are there other audiences we could support in this way to assist them in contributing to the broad-scale recording of birds or other taxa?

ALERC would be happy to explore strengthening the relationship between the BTO and LRCs. It is worth bearing in mind that many of the people submitting records to LRCs are BTO recorders and members of other groups and societies and that in some localities, the LRC provides a lot of support to local recorders, whilst in others the recorders are able to rely on established societies and groups.

12. How could BTO improve your membership and volunteering experience?

NA

13. Should BTO be giving volunteer data-gatherers more opportunities to engage with their data and undertake science?

NA

14. How should BTO best engage with young people?

NA