



LRC Matters

Issue 3 - July 2013

All the latest news
from around the
LRC community

LRCs Achieve Accreditation



The NEYEDC team

LRC Accreditation Update

By Tom Hunt (ALERC), Mark Wills (NEYEDC), Tony Kelham (NEYEDC) and Camilla Burrow (TVERC).

North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC), based in York, has become the first Local Records Centre (LRC) to become accredited since the pilot LRCs in 2011. The LRC accreditation system was developed by Bill Butcher of WGB Environmental on behalf of ALERC, with support from Natural England. The system is designed to provide an objective set of criteria against which LRCs are assessed to ensure they are able to demonstrate that they operate the best practices possible. The criteria against which NEYEDC

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Chairman's Thoughts

Gary Lewis, ALERC Chair

A lot has transpired since I last updated the ALERC community and this introduction will be longer than most. I think it is important that you are kept up to date on all manner of issues as and when the board of Directors can. I try and get Tom to post important stuff up onto the Forum and I urge all of you to visit it as regularly as you are able so you are as informed as possible. There are some specific areas of ALERC business that I want to highlight for this edition.

DEFRA MoA

This has not been an easy negotiation and has been complicated by DEFRA wanting a joint MoA covering the diverse requirements of both NE and EA. As we expected there has been a

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were assessed include interacting with local recorders, maintaining adequate data policies and treating all their stakeholders impartially.

By demonstrating that it conforms to best practice, NEYEDC has secured the confidence that people place in it to serve amateur naturalists, professional ecologists, local authorities and national bodies alike. The Director of NEYEDC, Simon Pickles, talked about the effect of accreditation on the centre: "The accreditation system is about more than securing certification, it was an exercise in analysing all that we do as an LRC and seeing if we were doing them as well as we could. We took a list of future development opportunities from the accreditation process and we have incorporated progressing these developments into our programme of work".

NEYEDC were keen to take the opportunity to formally demonstrate their use of best practices, as well as to look in depth at areas that could be improved, and so started the accreditation process back in June 2012, when they announced their intention to work towards standard level accreditation. A highly experienced team, comprising the four NEYEDC trustees, was responsible for overseeing and steering the process. These people have many years' experience in biodiversity and business management, as well as an inside out knowledge of the LRC. The process took approximately six months and involved reviewing the majority of the organisation's processes and policies.

By the time of the assessment, on the 6th of February this year, a file had been prepared that not only details the recent effort put into consolidating the organisation but also summarises the twelve years' worth of working to the highest possible standard. Tony Kelham is the Chair of the NEYEDC Trustees and headed up the accreditation team "I am delighted that, following the pilot exercises, NEYEDC is the first data centre in England and Wales to gain ALERC accreditation. This achievement highlights the superb work of Simon Pickles and the members of his team – and so will come as no surprise to the many people and organisations in North and East Yorkshire already using their services".

In addition to NEYEDC, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) have also achieved accreditation in March this year. Reflecting on this, the Director of TVERC, Camilla Burrow, said "I took up the post of TVERC Director in January 2012, and the ALERC accreditation criteria provided me with useful guidance on what I should be aiming for. The accreditation process itself gave me the opportunity to ensure that the procedures TVERC staff followed were fully documented. Where TVERC didn't fully meet a criterion I was able to seek advice and best practice examples from other LRCs in the London and south-east region which promoted good communication between us all. ALERC accreditation assures our data providers and data users that TVERC is a professional and responsible organisation and is worth investing their time and funding in.

Chairman's thoughts, continued from page 1

move away from core funding of LRCs to a more output driven agenda. Key amongst these is a wish for LRCs to embrace online recording; as I write, English LRCs will be thinking about the way ahead and whether or not they are able to sign this year's MoA. You can rest assured that ALERC had worked hard behind the scenes to make the final document as acceptable to LRCs as possible, but it is understandable that some LRCs may still have difficulty with the content.

ALERC Chair Workload

Over the past year, it has become evident that the calls on my time for ALERC business have begun to impose on my day job and, to a certain extent, time with the family. To this end the Directors have reviewed the work loading and there has been a shift in responsibilities to allocate tasks across the Directors. It is planned to put a list of responsibilities on the website as soon as it has all been agreed so that you know who to approach for specific issues.

Accreditation

Elsewhere in this newsletter is an article on how

NEYEDC and TVERC found the accreditation process having successfully achieved the standard back in February and March. By the time you read this, I hope that Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity and Recording and Monitoring Centre will have been equally as successful. There is still space for other LRCs to undertake the accreditation journey; whilst the preparations do require some additional team effort I believe the benefits your LRC will gain by going through the process will be significant. Contact Tom if you are interested.

Use of Biological Records by Ecological Consultancies – Good News for Wildlife!

Louise Moray, Biodiversity Information Officer, EPR Ltd

Introduction

As an ecological consultancy we regularly commission biological data searches from local record centres and species groups. The purpose of this article is to highlight why we request such data, how we use it and how this use helps us to deliver benefits for flora and fauna.

Who are we?

At Ecological Planning and Research (EPR) in Hampshire we offer sound ecological advice of the highest quality. Whether we're conducting an Ecological Appraisal, protected species survey or Environmental Impact Assessment, our service is professional and impartial and has wildlife protection at its heart. We regularly request biological data from local record centres and species groups in order to inform the ecological surveys we carry out. All data is used in accordance with the issuer's conditions and is invaluable to our work at every stage of the process. When planning surveys it assists in identifying features of ecological value. During surveys it helps us identify potential impacts and develop appropriate mitigation. It can also help plan for the future by identifying potential for benefits and appropriate enhancements to a site.

Identifying ecological value

data. One recent example is a Great Crested Newt (GCN) survey which was carried out on a site containing numerous ponds. First inspection may have concluded that these were not likely to support GCN, particularly with the stream flow, however the presence of local records suggested that they might well be there. The data showed a large population of GCN in ponds upstream of the site. Having access to this data highlighted the ecological value of the site and helped plan effective survey work, as well as ensuring adherence to the law.

Impacts and mitigation

Annex 1 heathland birds were the subject of a recent survey. Data was used to create distribution maps of their breeding territories, with supporting tables in a report to show territory counts. These were used to understand species distribution and to interpret changes in numbers and locations of territories as part of describing the ecological baseline of a site. This data was also used to understand the potential relationship between breeding territories and predicted noise from construction and traffic, thereby helping to inform the design of the scheme and necessary mitigation.

Biodiversity enhancement

Wildlife in general, from highly protected species to the common garden Hedgehog really do benefit from ecological consultancies effective use of biological records. Such records were used to good effect on a residential site recently. The site contained brush piles which looked potentially suitable for Hedgehogs, a priority species listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006), but there were no signs of them being present during any of the site visits. The data search did however return recent records of Hedgehog within close proximity of the site. EPR recommended that a Hedgehog

Date for your diary
ALERC Conference 2013:
Wednesday October 16th,
BVSC - Birmingham

box be included as part of the development as an enhancement, in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the box was located in suitable habitat on the edge of the development site. The records provided enabled us to justify the inclusion of the box, which is highly likely to be of significant benefit to the local Hedgehog population. Without these records it is unlikely that we would have suggested such an enhancement.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

There is also great potential for biodiversity enhancement when data searches identify Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) near a site. Harewood Forest, Andover BOA, shown in Figure 1, is used here as a hypothetical example to illustrate how EPR might design biodiversity enhancements into nearby development proposals using such records.

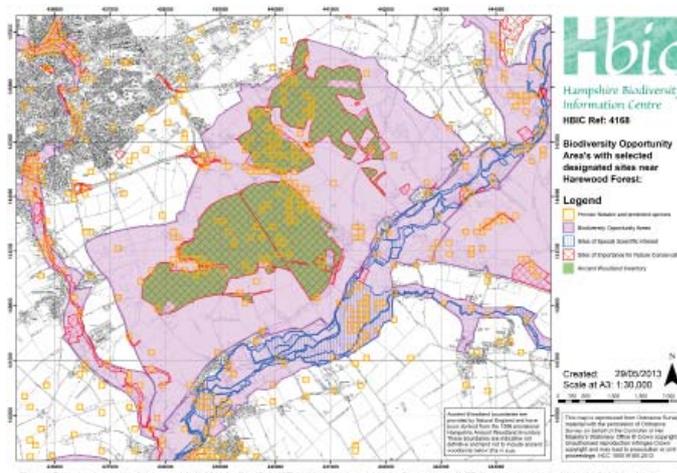
If carrying out ecological work on a proposed development site on the edge of this BOA, for example, we would overlay Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) data with the Harewood Forest BOA map and our own initial ecological scoping fieldwork to give us guidance on the future ecological surveys that might be required at the proposed development site. With knowledge of the adjacent BOA, we could design valuable ecological enhancements into the development proposals. In this example, if fieldwork identified a lack of connectivity to the central woodland and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), we could propose new hedgerow planting, with grassland buffer, to create a new 'wildlife corridor' connecting the proposed development site with the surrounding landscape and BOA. Species records obtained from a data search would be used to target species-specific enhancements within the corridor. For example, Hazel could be planted to benefit Hazel Dormice, and fruit bearing shrubs could be planted to benefit species of bats and birds. Another hypothetical example might be a potential development site on the edge of the river and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). An ecological buffer to the designated site could be proposed, and species records could be used to design habitats within the buffer as well as other species-specific enhancements

such as the installation of wildlife boxes.

EPR record returns

In accordance with IEEM guidelines, here at EPR we carry out our own annual return of data collected from our project work which is in the public domain, thereby contributing to the wider biological records database. Ecological consultancies generate large volumes of data, however not all of this is being returned to record centres as it can be a long-winded and difficult task at the end of a busy survey season. However we feel it is vital to contribute to the central biological records database that we so heavily rely upon. Hopefully plans being considered for a central portal for species record returns will encourage more consultancies to return their data. This will be beneficial to us all when assessing the ecological impacts of proposed development, and whilst designing mitigation and enhancement measures during our ecological assessment work, which ultimately ensures that wildlife continues to directly benefit from the sharing of biological records.

Acknowledgements



Harewood Forest Biodiversity Opportunity Areas

LRC Matters needs input from as many different LRCs as possible. If you would like to contribute an article, please get in touch

LRC Tools and Systems Database

Tom Hunt, ALERC National Coordinator

Last year I embarked on a project to collect information on the tools and systems that LRCs create in order to collect, validate, verify, store and analyse data, as well as to help them in the day to day running of their businesses. The purpose of this was to provide a central database containing details on these tools and systems that LRCs could visit when looking for technological solutions to specific problems. The project captured exactly 100 tools and systems, ranging from small programs for manipulating grid references in a GIS, to entire systems for administering the day to day activities of an LRC.

The resulting database was placed on the ALERC website and is searchable by several fields including the platform (i.e. what software or language the system is based in – visual basic, php etc.), a description of the system and the availability of the system to share with other LRCs. The main objective behind publishing the database this way is to better enable LRCs to share solutions and therefore reduce the amount of times different systems are developed to solve the same problems, and also enable LRCs who can't spare the resources to develop their own solutions to find systems at other LRCs that could help them.

I know several people have shown interest in the database and have searched it. What I don't know at the moment is whether it has led to greater sharing of solutions between LRCs. It would be useful to hear back from LRCs on two fronts; have you approached or been approached about a tool or system, and are you able to look at the database and check that there any new items for your LRC that need adding? The URL is at <http://www.alerc.org.uk/lrc-tools-and-systems.html>. Other comments are also welcome as it is important to keep the database useful and up to date. Don't forget that this database is only part of a service offered to LRCs by ALERC – if you find something on the database that you want to follow up, you can find the contact details of LRCs on the "find an LRC" website pages or you can use the ALERC forum to discuss things with the community as a whole.

Charles David 1948 - 2012

Charles David was a prolific naturalist and recorder on Guernsey and the other Channel Isles, who died in September last year. **Jane Gilmour** of Guernsey Biological Records Centre talks about his life and work.

Charles was born on 11th June 1948 and lived in St Peter Port in Guernsey in a house with a view overlooking the harbour and the other islands. As a young boy, Charles went on his bike exploring the island with his father's cousin, Richard Le Pelley, who was a keen naturalist and would show him many places and teach him much about the natural world. There seemed to be no place on Guernsey Charles did not know of and had not been to at some time. He belonged to La Société Guernesiaise as a child and started collecting insects and other wildlife from a young age.

Whilst at Elizabeth College, Guernsey, Charles was fortunate enough to be taught Biology by Nigel Jee, a keen botanist and member of the BSBI. He kept up with Nigel throughout his life and had a great affection for his former teacher. At University in Reading, Charles studied Zoology, passing out with a First Class Honours degree. He then went to Imperial College to study for a PhD in insect behaviour, specifically, 'Scent and light orientation by foraging *Myrmica scabrinodis* Nyl. (Hymenoptera: Formicidae)'. He then worked at the research station at Silwood Park in Berkshire.

On his arrival back in Guernsey, Charles keenly attended La Société Guernesiaise meetings,



firstly entomological ones, but then nature conservation and botany, and took on the mantle of running the Marine Biology section for a few years. Always out recording and collecting insects and other invertebrates for identification, Charles also looked at a wide range of plants and seashore wildlife. But it was his knowledge of insects (other than moths) that marked him as an exceptional contributor to the island's records. No one else since Luff had collected such a wide range of insects. Charles left the moths to others (as there are several keen Lepidopterists on the island), but each year focused on a particular group – especially when a good new key appeared in print that enabled him to identify them more successfully.

Walks with Charles could sometimes be scary, especially on the cliffs, as he appeared to have no fear of heights or of lethal sheer cliff edges. He might be discussing the last known sighting of a stoat, or taking one to where he last saw Greater Horseshoe bats or rare ants, whilst suddenly commenting on an unusual fly that had caught his attention. He went everywhere in sandals and socks, even the wettest or most vertiginous place, and wore his Guernsey sweater for much of the year- a good form of protection from local weather indeed!

Charles became more and more vital to La Société, holding a variety of officer positions. He was later to become Entomology Section secretary and ran the Scientific Committee from when it was formed in the mid 2000s until his death in 2012. He would review all planning applications that might have a bearing on an important piece of land, liaise with the committee and write an appropriate response. This was vital work in the conservation of the island and his willingness to take the time and effort to do this was such a boon.

In 2003, the Guernsey Biological Records Centre was set up using software developed by Charles. He ran the centre with Bridget Ozanne. Whilst Bridget worked on entering botanical records, Charles continued to enter animal data and modify the develop the computer programming. He reviewed the SNCIs (the local equivalent of SSSIs in the UK, although they do not have the same legal protection) along with Bridget Ozanne and me (as Botany and Nature Conservation

Section secretaries respectively). Charles helped set up the Ramsar site in Guernsey and advised Alderney and Sark on theirs. He provided species identifications for members of the public as well as advising the Environment Department and writing booklets, such as a 'Field Key to the Commonest and Most Conspicuous Species of Guernsey Mosses and Liverworts'.

When Bridget died in 2007, Charles took on the mantle of running the GBRC and also became the BSBI recorder, in addition to sending in records for many insect recording schemes in the UK. He set about becoming even more proficient at plant identification, concentrating on areas such as sedges, lichens, mosses and liverworts which he felt he needed to improve on. He wrote a programme for the pocket PCs, using GPS technology to enable wildlife to be recorded to within 5 metres (provided the machine had located at least 5 satellites!) and then be downloaded onto a computer and imported into the program Distmaps. He ran the GBRC from 2007 until his death on the 28th September 2012.

Charles completed survey work and environmental impact assessments on the various islands, working for Environment Guernsey, and also co-ordinated the habitat survey of Guernsey for the Environment Department. This survey, coming ten years after an original one, did so much to highlight the loss of certain key habitats, such as unimproved grassland. Busy until the end on projects covering many natural history areas and in all the Channel Islands; Charles was working on setting up a records centre in Jersey, co-ordinating the Jersey habitat survey, advising Sark on setting up recording/monitoring programmes there, and providing surveys and advice for Alderney. He encouraged Jersey botanists to have Pocket PCs and went out with them to help with identification as well as carrying out his own recording there, so rapidly building up records. The computer maps of all the islands have records showing where Charles had taken walks; these were often circular routes round lanes and cliff paths.