

1 The National Biodiversity Network

Summary

- The NBN aims to increase access to reliable biological information by making it readily available to all those who need it.
- The NBN is a network of data custodians working to common standards.
- The NBN Trust has been established to facilitate the development of the NBN.

1.1 Why do we need a National Biodiversity Network?

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) aims to increase access to reliable biological information, making it readily available to all who need it. The NBN should ensure more sharing of information, which, in turn, should mean an increased transparency in decision-making processes. Instead of debating the value of a site or the distribution of a species, the discussion can turn to what action should be taken on the basis of the information. Obviously of critical importance is the better use of scarce resources; not just money, but, in particular, special skills, such as those held by taxonomic experts and professional data managers. Perhaps most exciting is the prospect of getting more out of existing data sources. By increasing their accessibility and making them more usable, it should be possible to bring data-sets together and to analyse them in new, inventive ways.

1.2 What is the NBN?

When it is fully established, the NBN will be a network of 'data custodians' working together to give a complete picture of the status of the UK's wildlife. Each data custodian will be responsible for managing and disseminating particular data-sets, whether these are focused on a particular species group (in the case of a national recording scheme) or a local area (in the case of a Local Record Centre). By working to common standards, it will be possible to bring data together to give a clear picture of biodiversity at whatever scale is needed. The NBN will provide standards (eg data models, access terms) and tools (eg reference dictionaries, computer software) to allow data custodians to work as part of the NBN. The NBN Gateway will then allow these data sources to be accessed easily, via the internet, and combined to answer a wide range of questions.

1.3 The development of the NBN

The NBN is an evolving network. There are two key components to the development of the NBN: standards and tools that allow the network to function as a network; and links to data custodians, so that there are some data in the network! Work is already under way on developing the following standards and tools: species dictionaries; technical data standards; Recorder 2000; access terms; accreditation schemes; and the NBN Index and Gateway to data held by custodians. Work on linking data custodians mainly falls into three categories: national recording schemes; national bodies (eg SNH, RSPB); and Local Record Centres.

As data custodians develop and adopt these standards and tools, the network will grow.

1.4 The NBN Trust

The National Biodiversity Network Trust is an independent charity, established to facilitate the development of the National Biodiversity Network. The NBN Trust works to promote the principles of the NBN and to ensure projects are undertaken to enable the Network and its various component parts to develop. The NBN Trust will play a variety of different roles to achieve this, including coordinating the work of members and partners, managing projects and seeking funding for projects as appropriate.

The NBN Trust was founded by a group of organisations committed to seeing the principles of the NBN delivered. These were:

- The Joint Nature Conservation Committee
- English Nature
- Countryside Council for Wales
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- The Environment Agency
- The Natural Environment Research Council
- The Natural History Museum
- The Wildlife Trusts
- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The National Federation for Biological Recording (representing biological recorders and national representatives of local authorities)
- The Marine Biological Association of the UK

It is expected that, as the NBN develops, the membership of the NBN Trust will grow.

1.5 Sources of further information

For further information contact:

NBN Secretariat, The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark NG24 1WT
01636 677 711
nbn@nbn.org.uk
www.nbn.org.uk

2 Local Record Centres

Summary

- LRCs should provide professional biodiversity information services for local users and recorders.
- LRCs will form a fundamental part of the NBN, linking local data into the NBN.

2.1 Background to LRCs

A Local Record Centre (LRC) is a system for collating biological data from a wide range of sources (including organisations and individuals), for ensuring that data are properly validated and catalogued, and for providing access to them, thereby acting as a local focus for biological information.

The data within the LRC, along with the policies and procedures that enable the LRC to collate, analyse and disseminate the data, and, perhaps most importantly, the LRC's relationships with its data suppliers and users, are its assets.

The priorities for the LRC (and therefore for data acquisition) must be driven by the need for data—whether for use in assessing the status of priority species throughout the area, for monitoring changes on identified sites or for providing up-to-date information on popular species. The LRC needs to focus its activity to ensure that it is able to respond to its users' needs, is able to provide answers to queries when needed and, of course, has the relevant data available. This means working closely with users to ensure that the LRC is aware of their current and future needs—indeed, the LRC has an important role to play in helping users understand which data they need to carry out their activities.

Data come into an LRC from a variety of sources, including staff of associated organisations, contract work and, most importantly, local recorders and naturalists. Most of the data held and used by LRCs come from volunteers collecting data, either independently or as part of a recording scheme or society. Developing relationships with these recorders is one of the most important jobs for the LRC. As well as encouraging recorders to allow the LRC to use their data and pass them on to third parties, the LRC advises recorders of the need for data, perhaps to fill gaps in data holdings or to support a particular conservation initiative. The LRC may also support recorders by, for example, providing information on designated sites, computer software to help recorders manage their own data or training in recording techniques.

The LRC premises are not the focus for the LRC, although the LRC should have mechanisms for recorders both to enter their own data and to access data. Public access is usually provided through existing contacts with the public, such as through partners' visitor centres, museums and, increasingly, the internet. There is great potential to increase this access.

An LRC does not conserve habitats and species. It provides sound information for others to use, including those who care for our natural heritage.

2.2 LRCs within the NBN

Without LRCs, the NBN will not be able to access vast quantities of information held by local organisations, and there will be no mechanism for focusing volunteer recording effort at the local level. Until the network of LRCs is complete, the NBN is incomplete.

The NBN LRC model has evolved over a number of years, primarily through LRCs emerging in different circumstances in various parts of the country. The lessons of these LRCs show that LRCs have a unique role to play in meeting a wide range of needs for biological information. Specifically, an LRC is able to provide:

- a comprehensive analysis of the needs of the LRC's primary users—this means the LRC can focus on meeting data needs and provide a link between users and recorders
- professional data management services—the LRC ensures quality control and security for data derived from a wide range of sources
- an understanding of the biodiversity of the local area—LRC staff are able to provide an efficient service, using their local knowledge to provide information products from the data they hold
- support for local recorders—the local link is essential, allowing recorders to get to know and trust their LRC. The LRC is on the spot to provide support for recorders (through training, facilities, newsletters etc) and help with networking (through running local recording forums and field days).
- a facility operating at the local level—most decisions needing detailed biological data are taken at a local level (eg planning proposals, site management decisions, site assessment and species recovery programmes)
- a link into the NBN—providing a major contribution of data to the NBN

- a facility to give local communities and the public access to relevant information that they can use to participate in decision-making processes
- management of data close to their source—this lowers the chance of error in passing the data through a long chain, and eases communication between recorders and users

2.3 The Linking LRCs project

The Linking LRCs project was run by The Wildlife Trusts on behalf of the NBN from autumn 1997 until spring 2001. The project was designed to develop, test and demonstrate a framework for LRCs in the UK.

New and existing LRCs have been involved in project work to develop proven ways of establishing and running LRCs. The work has focused on a number of issues, including: preparing development plans for LRCs; developing and documenting policies and procedures; building partnerships; and improving relationships between LRCs and national schemes and societies. This guidance is part of a range of standards and guidance that has been produced, on the basis of this experience and of good practice, for use by other LRCs.

2.4 Future coordination of LRCs

The NBN Trust and its partner organisations have recognised the need for further co-ordination of LRCs, and for more work on developing and implementing a strategic approach to LRC development across the UK. Proposals for how this work can be taken forward are currently being considered, and funding is being sought.

2.5 References and sources of further information

Linking LRCs Project Report. The Wildlife Trusts, 2001.

LRCs within the NBN—A proposal for future development. The Wildlife Trusts, April 2001.

Guidance on Developing a Local Record Centre. National Biodiversity Network, April 1999.

Further information on LRCs can be found at the NBN web site:

www.nbn.org.uk

3 Purpose of this guidance

Summary

- This guidance offers practical advice on running an LRC as part of the NBN for LRC managers and employees, and other partners who want to understand how an LRC works.
- It includes advice on running an LRC as a small business, as well as on the policies and technical procedures specific to LRCs.
- It has mainly been prepared from good practice developed by existing LRCs.

3.1 Introduction

Local Record Centres (LRCs) need to work to common standards if they are to contribute effectively to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). An NBN accreditation scheme (see volume 1, section 10 *Accreditation*) will help ensure that many of these standards are applied. However, although this scheme will set the standards that LRCs should seek to meet, they need advice and guidance in order to do so. This guidance is intended to fulfil that purpose.

Building on best practice developed by existing LRCs, this handbook gives practical advice on running an LRC. It complements the guidance produced in 1999 on *Developing a Local Record Centre*, which gives advice to potential LRC partners on how to go about planning and establishing a new LRC.

The guidance is made up of two volumes: *Volume 1: Business Management* and *Volume 2: Biodiversity Information Management Systems*. The volume on *Business Management* considers how to run an LRC as a small business, covering planning, measuring performance, links with Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) and Wildlife Sites, developing relationships with users of the LRC, and managing staff and volunteers. The second volume, *Biodiversity Information Management Systems*, provides guidance on developing policies and procedures for the full range of an LRC's work. It also advises on IT systems.

Much of the content of the handbook has been developed through the work of nine demonstration LRCs, which have been working on policies and procedures and developing relationships with local organisations, recorders and national recording schemes. The good practice they have developed and documented forms the basis of much of the guidance that is given. Workshops have also been used to allow participants to discuss the issues, with a view to reaching a consensus on best practice on a national level.

A number of the subjects discussed in the handbook are reliant on ongoing work being carried out as part of the development of the NBN. However, it was felt necessary to publish the handbook at this stage to give guidance to new LRCs and to existing LRCs looking to develop further. The guidance given in this handbook needs to be regularly reviewed, and updates will be produced as necessary, particularly when developments within the NBN result in improved guidance or new standards being available.

3.2 Aims

The aims of the handbook are to:

- give practical advice to LRC managers on a range of issues relating to running an LRC
- help set UK-wide standards for LRCs to meet
- give examples of good practice from existing LRCs
- identify sources of other information relevant to running an LRC as a small business
- help to improve standards in new and developing LRCs and to develop a common approach to running LRCs

3.3 Target audience

This handbook is primarily aimed at people working in LRCs. It should be a source of information not only for LRC managers but also for other members of staff, such as IT officers and biological recording officers. However, it will also be useful to members of staff from organisations who work closely with LRCs and who wish to gain a better understanding of the work of an LRC. It will be particularly useful for those on LRC management boards who want to influence and direct the development of an LRC.

3.4 Format

The aim of the handbook is to give practical, technical advice on running an LRC. The level of detail given varies between sections. Those covering issues not specific to LRCs, where adequate guidance is given elsewhere (eg staff management) simply introduce the topic in relation to LRCs, identify issues in this area fundamental to the operation of an LRC and point the reader to other, more detailed information sources. Many sections of the handbook are illustrated with one or two case studies from existing LRCs (demonstration LRCs and others) to give real-life examples. These examples are designed to show how universal issues can be dealt with in specific situations. As such, they may represent only one of a range of potential solutions to a particular issue.

3.5 How the guidance should be used

The handbook aims to give practical advice. It has therefore been produced in a folder so that sections can be taken out and photocopied if necessary. The content is protected under copyright, but may be used and reproduced as long as the source is acknowledged. However, to address topics successfully in any particular LRC requires a full understanding of the issues discussed in the guidance. The material given here should not be copied verbatim, but related to the LRC's individual circumstances.

Where case studies are given, they may include material which is under copyright to the LRC or other organisation used in the case study. If you wish to use this material directly, you should first contact the organisation to seek its permission.

3.6 References

Guidance on *Developing a Local Record Centre*. National Biodiversity Network, April 1999.

4 Business Management

Summary

- An LRC should be run in a business like fashion, to ensure users' needs are met effectively and efficiently.

4.1 Background

The first volume of guidance on *Running a Local Record Centre* addresses issues affecting the management of an LRC. Effective systems for planning and managing workloads, managing staff, understanding the context of the operation and managing relationships with users are fundamental to running any business, and an LRC is no exception. Even an LRC that is hosted or parented by another organisation needs to be run as a business.

Although an LRC should be a non-profit distributing body, it is essential that it operates cost-effectively. To achieve this, an LRC working within the NBN must be particularly responsive to its users' needs. This requires careful management of priorities and business planning to ensure that the LRC not only provides the services its customers need, but does so at a price they can afford. Although an LRC is often seen as having a monopoly, so that users cannot go elsewhere for the services it provides, if users become sufficiently dissatisfied they could join forces to replace an ineffective or inefficient LRC, or simply cease to fulfil their needs.

4.2 The guidance

This guidance is aimed mainly at the LRC manager. It does not purport to be a management handbook, but primarily acts as a pointer to relevant issues. The guidance identifies the key topics that most LRC managers will need to tackle, and gives suggestions on how to do so. In many instances, the guidance points to further sources of information and advice should they be needed (eg on legal issues).

The volume is divided into four sections:

- *Running the LRC as a business*—which looks at how the LRC operates as an organisation and at its business framework.
- *Links to other initiatives*—addresses some of the key local initiatives whose needs provide a context for running the LRC .
- *Relationships with users*—covers how relationships with all different kinds of users should be handled. In this instance, recorders are also considered to be users of the LRC.
- *Managing the LRC*—covers some of the more day-to-day issues likely to be faced by an LRC manager, such as managing staff and contracts.

As well as being based on work carried out by demonstration LRCs working with the Linking LRCs project, and good practice developed by other LRCs, the guidance in this volume also derives from current good practice in other small businesses, particularly within the voluntary or non-profit distributing sectors.