

Annual Report 2014-2015

Introduction

Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) in Great Britain. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of its members.

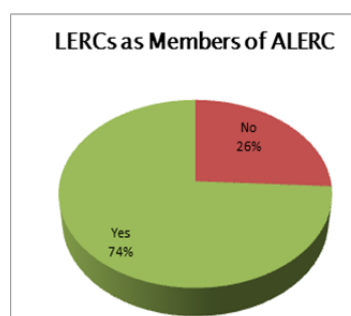
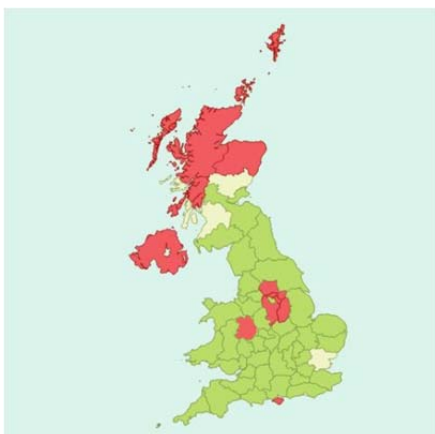
Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) are not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers.

Association Objectives

- To promote and encourage the completion of a UK-wide network of Local biodiversity and geodiversity Records Centres.
- To promote and develop good standards of practice in the collation, management, dissemination and analysis of biological and geological records.
- To promote Local Records Centres regionally, nationally and at a UK level to potential users and suppliers of data.
- To provide full representation of the UK with country specific solutions and equal emphasis on the individual countries requirements.
- To develop and promote accreditation schemes for biodiversity and geodiversity records centres and their staff.
- To encourage and facilitate networking between Centres to enable exchange of ideas, collaborative working, developing joint tools and sharing good practice.

Membership Report

In 2014-15, ALERC gained one more member in the form of Suffolk Biological Records Centre. Work was also completed in Scotland to provide a definitive list of who is and who isn't an LERC, with ongoing work to look at the potential for existing LERCs to expand to fill the gaps. As a result of compiling information on LERCs in Scotland, it is currently possible to say that the total number of LERCs in the UK is 58, of which 43 were members of ALERC during 2014-15



ALERC Board of Directors and Officers (serving during 2014/15)

Name	LERC	Officer Position	Working Groups and Responsibilities
Nicky Court	Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre	Chair of Directors	Consultations
Mark Wills	North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre	Vice chair	Website, accreditation, ALERC forum, conference
Eric Fletcher	RECORD	Treasurer	National Coordinator work management, conference
Darwyn Sumner		Company Secretary	Publicity
Craig Slawson	Staffordshire Ecological Record		Membership and recruitment
Teresa Frost	Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre		NBN Trustee, National Schemes and Societies Liaison/Data Flow
Mandy Rudd	Greenspace Information for Greater London		Business Development
Ian Egerton	Devon Biodiversity Records Centre		ALERC Strategy & Policy
Tim Corner	Bristol Environmental Records Centre		Enquiries
Martin Horlock	Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service		Data Management and Data Systems
Simon Wood	Worcestershire Biological Records Centre		Minutes
Mark Pollitt	Dumfries & Galloway Environmental Records Centre		
Steve Hannah	The (Lothian) Wildlife Information Centre		
Adam Rowe	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre		
Tom Hunt		National Coordinator	ALERC Work programme including conference, membership and accreditation

Chair's Report

It has been a demanding year for ALERC and it mustn't be forgotten that the Directors are incredibly busy running their own environmental records centres in challenging times. The need to diversify and explore new income streams is becoming increasingly important and whilst LERCs already cover far more than just data in/data out (and the processes in between!) it is heartening to see the continuing increase in demand for local data across all sectors, not least from the private sector, to inform development.

Over the past year the Directors and the ALERC National Co-ordinator (ANC) have:

- Held three Board meetings and one AGM
- Carried out most of its business using the ALERC Directors Google group, generating some 940+ pieces of productive email traffic
- Sought feedback from members on numerous consultations and items of interest using the on-line ALERC forum

- Dealt with membership applications and membership renewals in good time
- Filed the Annual Return and Company Accounts to Companies House in good time
- Provided a Trustee on the NBN Board of Trustee and contributed to the NBN Annual Report
- Ran a successful annual conference well attended by 75 LERC members. See: <http://www.alerc.org.uk/conference-2014.html>
- Drafted an ALERC 5 year Strategy
- Wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs successfully re-instating NE funding to 4 LERCs
- Attended workshops & provided an ALERC response to the NBN Strategy 2015-20
- Attended workshops and provided an ALERC response to the Defra Biodiversity Monitoring and Surveillance Strategy
- Input into the work of the Bat Conservation Trust Planning toolkit project
- Reviewed/streamlined the Accreditation Criteria and accredited 1 LERC
- Provided input into the UK Parliament PostNote on Biodiversity Auditing
- Provided an ALERC stand/presence at the National Ecobuild Exhibition
- Provided input and a watching brief on the NBN-CIEEM Consultants' Portal
- Responded to the EC consultation on EU nature legislation.

Further details on some of these achievements are given in the accounts from the working groups and the ALERC National Co-ordinator. The one item of disappointing news was the unsuccessful bid to the Esmee Fairburn Trust for funding towards the ANC post. A search for other funding sources continues. Meanwhile the draft ALERC 5 year strategy will be examining an increase in membership fees to contribute towards the ANC post.

Nicky Court, ALERC Chair (2013-15)

ALERC National Coordinator Report

Summary of achievements

The year 2014-15 has seen a wide variety work, especially as funding from outside organisations ended in September, and time has since been devoted solely to internal ALERC work, particularly supporting the work of the directors, the ALERC subgroups, the membership, and conference planning

Outside of this work, the main achievements for the year have been:

- Completion of work in conjunction with NBN Trust, including
 - Working with NSSs to provide access to data for LERCs (particularly Odonata).
 - Completing a survey of Welsh LERCs on what they need from ALERC/NBN.
 - Sharing good examples of webservices implementations.
- Working with LERCs and completing data tasks to assist with the biodiversity offsetting decision support tool feasibility study with eCountability Ltd.
- Submitting consultation responses on behalf of ALERC specifically:
 - The Welsh Government's Nature Recovery Plan for Wales
 - Defra's Biodiversity Monitoring and Surveillance Strategy.
- Working with the UK Contractors Group to find a way of allowing consultants to easily share their records.
- Working with LERCs and CIEEM to assist LERCs in providing the most relevant data products to the private sector.
- Continuing to build relationships with National Schemes and Societies.
- Continuing to help ensure the website is kept up to date, including project managing the new 'Find an LERC' map.

Tom Hunt, National Coordinator

ALERC Working Group Reports

Business Development - *Mandy Rudd, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Ian Egerton, Eric Fletcher, Adam Rowe, Simon Pickles, Camilla Burrow and Tom Hunt

The group was set up to advance the reach of the LERC community through the development of guidance and influencing key external organisations that engage with, or ought to engage with our members. During 2014/15, the BDG has engaged with organisations such as the Cabinet Office, UK Contractors Group, and CIEEM to discuss a range of topics including publicly accessible greenspace mapping and mobilisation of private sector data.

The group also led on updating the generic name for member organisations and the brief definition that outlines their core roles. This work involved an introduction at ALERC's national conference in October 2014, the opportunity for members to provide feedback and ideas both at the conference and via ALERC's online forum, and the writing of the new definition based on all the feedback and the BDG's objectives.

Accreditation - *Gary Lewis, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Mark Wills, Jackie Ulyett, Hannah Cook and Charlie Barnes.

The main achievement for FY 2014-15 was the review of the standard 20 accreditation criteria to take account of the feedback from those LERCs that had gone through the process. The revised criteria have been approved by the ALERC board and will be re-issued. LERCs starting the process after the re-issue will work towards accreditation using those criteria. It was also decided that the advanced level of accreditation will be put on hold until the majority of LERCs have achieved the standard level.

During FY 2014-15 1 LERC achieved the standard level of accreditation with 3 stating they are working towards accreditation within FY 2015-16."

Website - *Mark Wills, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Teresa Frost, Elaine Wright, Luck Lunla and Charles Roper

As part of the ALERC national Conference held in Birmingham in November 2014, the Website working group ran a discussion session on the ALERC website (www.alerc.org.uk) content, and the publicity and image of ALERC via logos, email/website badges and how to advertise the ALERC message most effectively. The discussion was open to all delegates at the conference representing LERCs from across the UK. This produced some good suggestions on the direction the website should take and suggestions on how ALERC should publicise itself. These were captured in a document by a member of the working group. We intend to take forward the idea of a 'Top task analysis' this year.

The major content achievement of the group in 14/15 was the replacement of a rudimentary map-based facility for finding an LERC depending on location, with a more sophisticated hosted solution developed under contract by one of our members. The map showing the LERC boundaries on the front page acts as a hyperlink to the 'Find an LERC' page which has also been updated.

Data flow group - *Maria Longley, Chair of group.*

Other group members: Catherine Burton, Charlie Barnes, Daniel Marshall, David Slade, Lizzy Peat, Teresa Frost, Martin Horlock, Purgle Linham, Rachael Potter, Gary Hedges, Christine Johnston, Tim Corner and Tony Witts.

ALERC's data flow group was active in the email group discussing all aspects of data flow from national schemes wanting to share data with LERCs to technology in data sharing. The group was also asked to comment on JNCC's stance on Recorder 6 software and its future and discussed the use of LERC data for rarity reviews when not all data is on the NBN Gateway. At the ALERC Conference in October 2014 there was a discussion about the future of this group and John Sawyer from the NBN Trust offered his help in approaching data providers on the NBN Gateway to facilitate better data access for LERCs. In 2015, the terms of reference of the group were agreed and I took over as chair of the group. Huge thanks to Teresa Frost at Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre for setting up the group and to Aisling Carrick from Cofnod, retiring chair of the group.

Conference - Mark Wills, Chair of group.

Other group members: Elaine Wright, Eric Fletcher and Matt Davies

The conference working group planned and delivered a successful National Conference in October 2014. The event included two external (non-LERC) speakers, a number of speakers from within the LERC community and an open-floor discussion session stimulated by short verbal reports from each ALERC working group.

The conference was attended by 78 delegates from 75 member LERCs with 3 other delegates not from within the LERC community.

Strategy Group - Ian Egerton, Chair of group

Other group members: Mark Wills, Tom Hunt and Nicky Court

ALERC has made many advances in the last few years and in late 2014 it was agreed that a five year strategic plan was now required to set a firm course for its future development. The strategic plan would align our priorities with the needs of our members and the resources required to deliver our vision'. Initially developed by the Director of Strategy in Dec - Jan, the draft was reviewed by a small working group during February, with a further draft being reviewed by the directorate in April.

This document is now awaiting final review once consideration has been given to future sustainable funding mechanisms for the ANC post. It will then go out to consultation with the members hip and will hopefully be published during mid 2015.



Treasurer's Report

Expenditure		Income	
ANC Salary/expenses*	£13,460	Membership fees~	£11,690
Conference	£2,373	Conference fees	£2,270
Ecobuild event	£1,552	Bank interest	£49
Company Secretary (2013/14)	£1,543	Accreditation fee	£300
ALERC displays	£1,051		
'Find an LRC' facility	£420		
NBN membership fee	£350		
Companies House fees	£178		
Room hire – Board meetings	£225		
Accountants	£150		
Accreditation costs	£142		
Directors expenses	£25		
Total	£21,469		£14,309
Surplus/Deficit			-£7,160
Balance 1 st April 2014			£26,437
Balance March 2015			£19,274

*Additional funding from Defra paid directly to employing organisation (NEYEDC)

~ Does not include two outstanding membership fees (£400.00)

A full set of accounts are available for inspection and will be filed at Companies House by 31st December 2015.