



Annual Report 2020-2021

Introduction

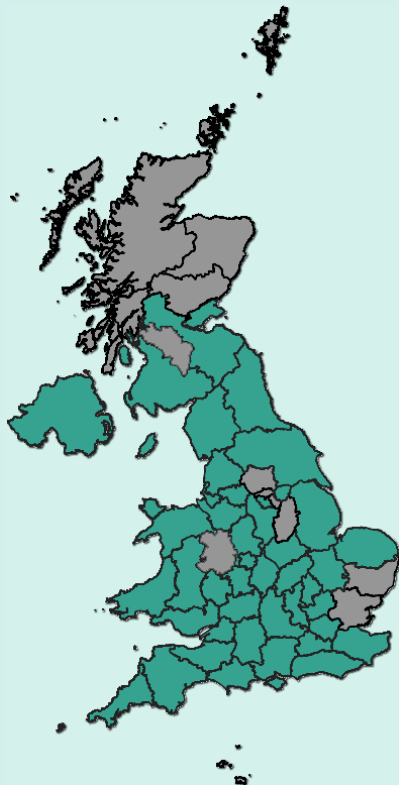
Formed in 2009, ALERC is an association between Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) in Great Britain. The Association aims to provide a central voice for the views and concerns of the Records Centre community, whilst building a support-based network of knowledge and advice to meet the needs of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

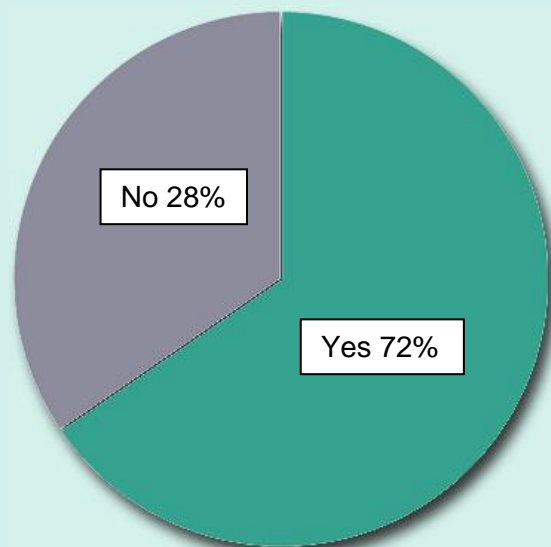
Association Objectives

- To promote and encourage the completion of a UK-wide network of Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs).
- To promote and develop good standards of practice in the collation, management, dissemination and analysis of biological and geological records.
- To promote LERCs 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 LERCs and their staff.
- To encourage and facilitate networking between LERCs to enable exchange of ideas, collaborative working, developing joint tools and sharing good practice.

Membership Report



LERCs as members of ALERC



Chair's Report

The year 2020-21 was one of change, communication, adaption and thinking about future data services. Not only in response to the Pandemic but also anticipating future needs of biodiversity data in the UK.

At the start of the year ALERC's top priority was to assess the impact of the pandemic on the ALERC network. We needed, in particular, to make sure consultants and ecologists got the message that LERCSs were open for business. ALERC did this by collaborating with CIEEM, providing them with statistics on data search numbers which not only acted as a proxy measure as to how their members were faring, but importantly, raised ALERC and members' profiles at a critical time. As IT savvy organisations LERCs were swift to adapt to home working. A benefit of a network of local independent organisations is that they can respond and adapt very quickly to change. This turned out to be especially important as the public and the biological recorder networks, with very little else to do, submitted a high level of records. It was reassuring to see that although there were many difficult challenges and different experiences, our Network remained as strong as ever.

To deliver the 25 Year Environment Plan the UK Government has set out its plans in the Environment Bill. Despite it not being ratified in Parliament much work took place nationally and locally to develop the detail around Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Networks. With different Government Departments and Teams working on different tasks it was often difficult to keep track of what was going on, especially as ALERC itself is a small organisation. However, our networks and partnership working once again came to the fore. Working closely with Wildlife and Countryside Link and the Association of Local Government Ecologists, ALERC was able to keep abreast and input into policy developments. The result of drafting joint papers and statements has enabled ALERC to have a strong voice in representing LERCs and highlight the need for data standards and the importance of local data. ALERC also had a key role in the [Geospatial Commission report that assessed species data in England](#). This advocacy work helps with the wider recognition of the value and benefit of local data and local environmental record centres. Emerging guidance and policy

developments continue to come forward and ALERC will continue to work to represent and highlight the key role members have to play.

All efforts are made to ensure ALERC's work supports members across all nations of the UK. Nevertheless, we are conscious that ALERC's work has had a significant England focus. ALERC's work in raising the profile and increasing the understanding of LERCs and the LERC network has benefits that have a wider, collective reach. Currently, 68% of all UK record centres (or 80% of ALERC members) will be affected by the Nature Recovery element of the Environment Bill. Future income from local authorities and Government Agencies is likely to be underpinned by this new legislation. ALERC felt that it was imperative that time and effort was invested in influencing the process and advocating for the important role LERCs have to play. In some respects, England is "catching up" with the rest of the UK as common standards and improved data sharing have already been addressed in Wales and were thoroughly considered by the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) review. Although Scotland has yet to see the recommendations in their report take shape, the conclusions it drew have influenced the thinking in England.

With the support of our members, ALERC has made itself heard at a national level and as a result there is an acknowledgement that LERCs across the UK are important and have an important role to play in the future.

ALERC National Coordinator Report

The year April 2020 to March 2021 was without question the strangest since I began working as ALERC's National Coordinator. A lot has been written elsewhere about the various difficulties the pandemic has presented, their effect on businesses and how they've been overcome. It is perhaps worth acknowledging or considering that certainly some of the changes we made during the pandemic will become permanent or will at least remain for a very long time. ALERC events are one area that will require further thought and may never be the same as before the pandemic. For example the 2020 conference was entirely online and participated in by more people than ever before. The 2021 conference has been planned as a fully online event as well.

One of the highlights of the year was the event held in conjunction with the WSP consultancy and with input from Natural England, about Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The outputs from this helped update the ALERC prospectus and helped to draft the prospectus. It was originally hoped that this event would be in-person and take place the day after the 2020 conference, but the online (alternative) format may actually have allowed for more people to attend. Use of Zoom was kindly facilitated by WSP.

Another big notable event of the year was the report for the [Geospatial Commission on species data](#). The contract for this was won by the consultancy eftec and ALERC were subcontracted along with another consultancy (eCountability), UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the NBN Trust to provide guidance and organise stakeholder engagement. Several ALERC members, representing the diversity of LERC set ups, were engaged directly through interviews or workshops. The final report described the species data pathway in England, quantified its economic contribution, assessed this against the findings of the SBIF Review and made recommendations for the future.

Other project work has been diverse, including a report compiled for the NBNT on the opportunities and challenges associated with using the Atlas for commercial data services, should a system of controlling access to records be reinstated (at the time of writing, permission to share this report is being sought). There have also been reports written for LERCs that give a brief overview of the database systems used in our sector, for species, habitats and sites information. This reflects the fact that several LERCs are now looking at how they manage their data, especially with new policies coming into effect in England that could change and increase the demands for data services. Another project, specifically around UKHab habitat data, was started in autumn 2020 and is still ongoing. This project, involving several ALERC members, is trialling the collection of data in the field using an app and translating existing data from older classification systems into UKHab.

There have been lots of other noteworthy events this year, including the accreditation of two more LERCs, which are mentioned in the ALERC member services work area reports below.

ALERC Member Services Work Area Reports

LERC Business Development and Accreditation

Business Development Group members: Ian Egerton, Mandy Rudd, Eric Fletcher, Adam Rowe, Simon Pickles, Camilla Burrow, Deb Muscat and Tom Hunt.

Accreditation Group members: Hannah Cook, Camilla Burrow, Mark Wills, Jackie Ulyett, Charlie Barnes and Tom Hunt.

As with last year, this year has seen significant work to get LERCs geared up for Biodiversity Net Gain as well as work to influence elements of the net gain process to take account of LERCs. This included consulting on the British Standard for Net Gain and developing ALERC's own standard for habitat data submitted through net gain projects. With support from the WSP consultancy, we put on a workshop for LERCs to investigate net gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies and find out which services they already provide and which services they can develop to support both policies. The results of the workshop informed the drafting of a prospectus, [LERCs and Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) and informed the update of the existing prospectus, [LERCs and Biodiversity Net Gain](#). ALERC was also consulted on the Net Gain evaluation framework and has had representation on Defra's BNG Implementation Group allowing it to provide feedback on the BNG Plan Reporting Template and recommendations for the development of BNG process guidance. On top of this "routine" work, 2020-21 produced an unprecedented set of circumstances. In response to this, there was collaboration with CIEEM during the first lockdown, providing them with data search statistics to act as a proxy for how their members were faring whilst also raising ALERC and members' profiles

In terms of accreditation, Powys and Brecon Beacons BIS and Cofnod were accredited, meaning that along with SEWBRc, three of the four Welsh LERCs have now achieved accreditation. Norfolk BIS and Doncaster were recredited for a further five years. Work progressed on the submissions for two more LERCs in England. Looking forward, a lack of assessors, especially where the National Coordinator has been employed to assist with the submission, is something that may need to be resolved with members' help.

Communications and Influencing

Group members: Mark Wills, Clare Blencowe, Steve Whitbread, Sam Neal, Chloë Smith and Tom Hunt

October 2020 saw ALERC's first ever online conference. The event attracted around 130 attendees, far more than any previous ALERC conference. The conference allowed LERCs to hear about developing biodiversity policies and technical developments.

The group has also looked to influence Wildlife and Countryside Link's responses to government policy around planning, the environment and the use of data, particularly the planning white paper, proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and the Environment Bill.

We recruited two new members to the Communications and Influencing subgroup, Chloë Smith and Sam Neal. Unfortunately for us, but great for her, Chloë has now taken up a role at Butterfly Conservation and is no longer involved in the group. Members are encouraged to consider whether – as a useful part of their professional development and supporting their own LERC – they could

contribute to the Association's efforts by joining this group to help shape ALERC's communications and steer our influencing work.

Technical Development and Data Standards

Group members: Ian Carle, Wolfgang Ritter, Jennie Mitchel, Sam Neal, Steve Whitbread, Andy Foy and Tom Hunt

This year the group was asked to review a report for Sheffield City Council on the options for species databases.

Other work in this area, but not involving the group directly were the surveys from the BSBI about the relationship between county botanists and LERCs and proposed changes to how BSBI shares plant data. The agreement with BTO to allow LERCs to use BTO data on the NBN Atlas was reviewed and extended for a further two years.

ALERC Board of Directors and Officers (serving during 2020/21)

Name	LERC	Officer Position	Main Work Area and Responsibilities
Clare Blencowe	Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre	Chair	Governance and Administration (group chair), Communications and Influencing
Adam Rowe	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre	Vice-Chair	Technical Developments and Data Standards, NBN Atlas Steering Group ALERC board recruitment
Mandy Rudd	Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC		Business Development
Mark Wills	North & East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre		Communications and Influencing (group chair)
Steve Whitbread	Harrow Council (previously of NBRC)		Technical Developments and Data Standards, Communications and Influencing
Sara Lovell	EcoRecord	Secretary	Governance and Administration (Secretariat)
Ian Carle	Herts Environmental Records Centre		Technical Developments and Data Standards (group chair)
Deb Muscat	Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre		NBN Advisory Group, SBIF advisory Group, Business Development Group
Leon DeBell	Somerset Environmental Records Centre		Technical Developments and Data Standards
Tom Hunt		National Coordinator	ALERC Work programme including conference, membership and accreditation



Treasurer's Report 2020-2021

Expenditure		Income	
National Coordinator post: Employment and hosting	£25,500	Membership payments	£29,160
Meeting Room bookings	£0	Late payments (1)	£955
NBN Trust membership	£350	Conference fees	£1,245
Corporation tax	£0	Contracts	£7,400
Wildlife Link	£412		
Conference expenses	£0		
Accountants fees	£250		
Website hosting	??		
Companies House Annual Return	£0		
Companies House Filing Accounts	£0		
Sub-contracting	£0		
Total	£26,512		£38,760
Surplus / (Loss): (£)	£12,248		

(1) Membership/conference fees received for 2020-2021

Cash at bank

Opening Balance 01/04/2020: £ £15,588.45

Closing Balance 31/03/2021: £ £23,183.85

Net change: £ 7,595.40

A full set of accounts will be available for inspection and will be filed at Companies House by December 2021.

Funding of the ALERC National Coordinator Post for financial year 2020-2021

Costs	Amount	Funding source	Amount
Employment of post: salary, NI, pension, redundancy provision	£30,687	Carry forward from 2019-2020	£0
Travel & subsistence	£0	ALERC – from membership fees	£30,337
Conference fees	£0	Contract work	£2,747
IT Equipment & phone	£297		
Hosting	£2,100		
Total	£33,084	Total	£33,084
		Balance carried forward to 2021-2022	£0

Header image © Tom Hunt/RECORD

With thanks to all those whose Tweets we've used in this report.

Thanks to Andy Slater of EcoRecord for helping with the design of the report.

