



Annual Report 2021-2022

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.

Chair's Report

The year April 2021 – March 2022 was very much a year of looking ahead and preparing for a future that at times felt uncertain.

ALERC's strategic plan came to an end in 2020. Due to the continued impact of the pandemic and increased engagement with statutory bodies, both nationally and locally, the Directors agreed to extend the existing plan until 2022. The Board has carried out some preliminary consultation with its members and this is being used to develop a new Strategic Plan. For this year we worked to an action plan with 3 broad objectives:

- **GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP:** *ALERC will be a respected Leader in its field and recognised as a well run organisation, its role and the work of its members fully understood by all.*
- **INFLUENCING AND PROMOTION:** *ALERC will work with a range of organisations to create a national and regional and local context that facilitates local LERC engagement, share data and the capacity to generate income.*
- **SUPPORT AND DEVELOP MEMBERS:** *ALERC will represent a national network of LERCS by listening to their concerns and providing support to enable them to work efficiently locally and maximise their ability to deliver biodiversity data services.*

You will see in this following report that much has been done this year, however, the fruits of our labours will be realised in the next couple of years.

Deb Muscat, Chair

Leadership and Influencing

Following a period of very limited face to face contact due to the pandemic, the year provided an opportunity to resume some degree of contact, with a number of in-person meetings and events taking place where we could continue to represent our members' interests.

A particular highlight in this regard was the Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) conference and AGM, which took place in December 2021. It provided an important opportunity to raise awareness of the role of LERCs in the current national policy context as well as strengthen and develop relationships with people from a range of organisations, including and especially with Wildlife and Countryside Link staff. Link is the largest environment and wildlife coalition in England, bringing together 67 organisations to use their strong joint voice for the protection of nature. During the year ALERC was able to make the most of the opportunities presented by the wider adoption and availability of online meeting resources and organised a number of well attended online events. These included training and information dissemination events, in particular a session for members on Local Nature Recovery Strategies, facilitated by Link and including staff from Natural England.

The ALERC conference took place online, following a poll of the membership on their preferred format. 150 people attended, a higher number compared with a maximum of 90 people which is the usual attendance figure for in-person conference events. The impact of our advocacy work in particular, has been crucial to increasing the wider recognition of the value and benefit of local data and local environmental record centres, especially at a national level.

ALERC's working groups have continued to work on a variety of matters with and on behalf of members. Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies were key subjects, as was the continued support for ALERC member's Accreditation. Projects that benefit members were also delivered during this year, one focusing on Habitat data standards (UKHAB) and another looking at

systems for capturing information on Nature Recovery activity. ALERC continues to represent Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) in many different fora, such as the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and NBN Atlas Steering Group, the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) review as well as keeping up to date and working with Welsh LERC members. ALERC met with a number of national organisations and stakeholders, such as DEFRA and its agencies, particularly Natural England and the Environment Agency, to discuss matters arising from ALERC members.

Support and Development

ALERC's key stakeholders are its members; professionals working in Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs). LERCs are typically partnerships working with organisations at local, regional and national levels including Local Authorities, Government Agencies, Wildlife NGOs/Charities and National Biological Recording Schemes and Societies.

ALERC employs a National Coordinator (ANC) to facilitate collaborative working between local environmental record centres and other partner organisations throughout the UK.

Knowledge sharing

Consultation, communication and knowledge exchange with the membership takes place in a variety of ways including:

- an active online Forum (the Knowledge Hub);
- direct/electronic mailing
- an annual conference and AGM
- regional meetings
- membership engagement in formal projects
- engagement with ALERC working groups
- publishing information (via the ALERC website).

The ALERC conference was again an online only event, following a poll of the ALERC membership which took place via Knowledge Hub. 150 people were in attendance, compared with a maximum of 90 for any in-person conference we've held. It seems as though there is a strong incentive to continue online conferences in the future, even when there is a return to in person events.

The Membership asked ALERC to organise more training and knowledge exchange events. The post pandemic switch to more online events presented ALERC with an opportunity to do this. In early 2022 ALERC ran its first training event. The R (programming language) course proved so popular it ran twice and was attended by over 50 LERC staff. To increase awareness and understanding of Local Nature Recovery in England the ANC also organised online sessions to share the experiences of the 2020 Pilot projects. Further training sessions are being planned to meet the needs of ALERC members.

Plans were also made for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy event early in 2021-22, facilitated by Link and featuring Natural England. The easy to set up and low cost nature of online events means we are able to organise more of these for members responding more quickly to issues when they arise.

ALERC members hold regional meetings and the ANC attended meetings in Scotland, North West England, Yorkshire, Wales, East of England, South East England and Scotland. This national overview of LERC activities, successes and issues is invaluable.

Supporting new ways of working

Habitat data is critical to most LERC income generation and so changes to how data is collected and stored will impact on their operations. During this year ALERC's work with UKHAB reached its conclusion, with the translation of several LERC's existing habitat data in to UKHAB and the trialling of a UKHAB app. A draft End User Licence Agreement between UKHAB and LERCs was received and an ALERC panel set up to review and comment on it. This work will continue through 2022-23.

BRERC UKHab Code Data



Example of Bristol Environmental Record Centre's UKHab data project

Another project carried out by the ANC was funded by Natural England and explored potential systems for capturing information on Nature Recovery. ALERC's role was to assist in the construction of a questionnaire and to gather responses to it, as well as helping to facilitate interviews with ALERC Members. The response rate from LERCs was particularly positive and surpassed any of the other sectors that the project engaged with.

Technical Development

A considerable number of LERCs and Biological Recording Groups that ALERC works alongside use the database Recorder 6 to store species information. The system is outdated and needs replacing. Whilst ALERC is not responsible for the database software and does not contribute directly, ALERC and 4 LERCs are represented on the Recorder 6 steering group. In 2021-22 the group has overseen several updates to the Recorder species dictionary and started the process of investigating and developing a successor system. So far this has resulted in a scoping exercise and the development of a specification for a prototype. It is anticipated that this will be available in 2022-23 for testing.

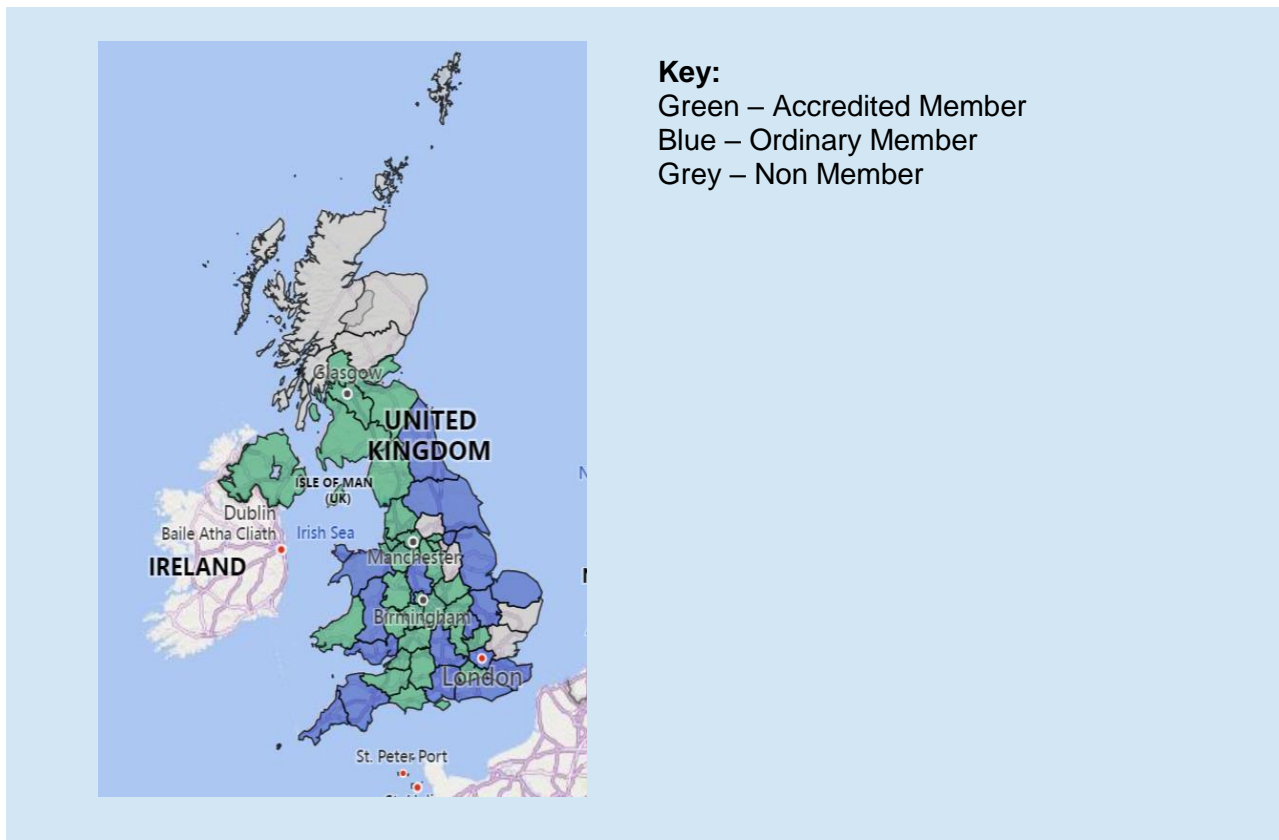
Accreditation

The ALERC Accreditation system is a set of standards against which LERCs can be assessed. The criteria cover organisation structure, principles of continuous improvement, data custodianship and data services. It builds confidence in LERCs as bodies which hold biodiversity information in trust for society and that they manage public resources well, as well as ensuring that data providers and users alike have confidence in LERCs individually and collectively.

January 2021 saw the successful reaccreditation assessment of Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC), bringing the total number of Accredited LERCs to 18. Preparations were made for South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre's (SEWBReC) assessment to take place in early 2022-23 and Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre (CBDC) submitted documentation for the first time which will also be assessed in 2022-23. CBDC secured funding to pay for ANC time to help with the collation of the documents for submission. This not only supported the LERC to work towards accreditation but provided useful project income to LERC.

Our Members

Across the UK and Channel Isles there are 65 LERCs. Of these 42 are part of the ALERC network. In 2021 ALERC welcomed new member Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Record Centre (BMERC).



ALERC Working Group Members

ALERC would like to thank the following LERC staff for their contributions to the working groups.

Business Development

Ian Egerton, Eric Fletcher, Simon Pickles, Camilla Burrow.

Accreditation

Hannah Cook, Jackie Ulyett, Charlie Barnes.

Communications

Sam Neal, Chloë Smith.

Technical Development

Wolfgang Ritter, Jennie Mitchel, Sam Neal, Andy Foy.

ALERC Board of Directors and Officers (serving during 2021/22)

Name	LERC	Main Work Area and Responsibilities
Deb Muscat <i>Chair</i>	Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre	NBN Advisory Group, SBIF advisory Group, Business Development Group
Adam Rowe <i>Vice-Chair</i>	South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre	Technical Developments and Data Standards, NBN Atlas Steering Group ALERC board recruitment
Sara Lovell <i>Secretary</i>	EcoRecord	Governance and Administration (Secretariat)
Clare Blencowe	Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre	Governance and Administration (group chair), Communications and Influencing
Ian Carle	Herts Environmental Records Centre (resigned May 2022)	Technical Developments and Data Standards (group chair)
Leon DeBell	Somerset Environmental Records Centre	Technical Developments and Data Standards
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
Tom Hunt <i>National Coordinator</i>		ALERC Work programme including conference, membership and accreditation



ALERC Annual Accounts 2021-2022

Expenditure		Income	
National Coordinator post: Employment and hosting	£33,765.60	Membership payments	£30,610
Meeting Room bookings		Late payments	£0.00
NBN Trust membership	£350	Conference fees	£1,186.92
Corporation tax		Contracts	£9,439.60
Wildlife Link	£383	Events	£1,778.38
Accountants fees	£315		
Website hosting			
Companies House Annual Return	£13		
Companies House Filing Accounts			
Admin costs (postage etc)	£7.65		
Sub-contracting			
Events	£775		
Total	£35,609.25		£43,014.90
Surplus / (Loss): (£)	£7,405.65		
Total	£35,609.25		£43,014.90

Cash at bank

Opening Balance 01/04/2020: £ £23,183.85

Closing Balance 31/03/2021: £ £23,044.98

Net change: £ (138.87)

A full set of accounts will be available for inspection and will be filed at Companies House by December 2022.

Funding of the ALERC National Coordinator Post for financial year 2021-2022

Costs	Amount	Funding source	Amount
Employment costs – incl. salary, NI, pension, redundancy provision	£31,198.41	ALERC – from membership fees	£27,015.60
Travel & subsistence	£233.43	Contract work	£6,750
Conference fees			
IT Equipment & phone	£233.76		
Hosting	£2,100.00		
Total	£33,765.60	Total	£33,765.60
		Balance carried forward to 2022-2023	0.00