

Refreshing the National Biodiversity Network Strategy

Thank you for taking the time to answer the questions relating to the first draft of the NBN Strategy

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Are you completing this with your personal view or on behalf of an organisation: Organisation

If 'organisation', which organisation are you responding on behalf of? National Forum for Biological Recording (NFBR)

Are you currently an NBN member: Y N Don't know:

Questions on the strategy refresh as a whole

1. We have presented a new vision for the NBN – do you support it? We applaud NBN for undertaking this 'refresh' in such an inclusive and transparent manner. We fully support the new vision as presented in this document, although we await with interest the detail to be provided in the five-year action plan to be published later this year.
2. Are you clear what the NBN is, and that you are part of it? Yes, although we are aware that considerable confusion persists in the wider biological recording community about the distinctions between the NBN as a network, the NBNT and the Gateway, as well as the distinction between, and status of, members, partners and supporters.
3. Following the engagement in 2014 do you feel that you have been listened to? Yes. A breakdown by sector (LRC, NSS, individual recorder etc.) of who participated in the consultation, and their collective views, would be instructive.
4. Will you commit to the principles of the NBN strategy and how do you want to be involved in implementation? We fully support the principles of the NBN strategy. NFBR's role is to champion all aspects of wildlife recording from data capture through to data analysis and use, involving a multitude of partners including individuals and organisations, and the value of biodiversity evidence. We are pursuing a multi-partner initiative to identify and address the gaps and challenges in all aspects of biodiversity information and recording: a 'Biological Recording, Information Need, Capacity & Support' project (BRINCS). Our strength lies in our history and reputation, the knowledge and skills of our Trustees and Advisory Council, our independence and the support and knowledge that we have built up through the process of holding bilateral meetings with our partners.

Strategic aim 1; Capture, diversify, enhance and mobilise wildlife data

5. Do you support accelerated data flow through NBN systems? Yes, but (i) this requires a clear set of agreed paths that data can take so they do not 'get lost' before they are combined with other data and can become useful, and (ii) it should not be done in a way that could jeopardise data quality. We share the NBN's concern at the (apparent or real) high incidence of errors in the data that are currently on the Gateway and the low priority that was previously given to sorting this out. We perceive a worrying lack of confidence in the veracity of NBN data in certain parts of the wider biological recording community; we are pleased to see that addressing this issue is regarded by the NBN as an urgent priority.
6. Do you have data (in non-digital formats) that you want to mobilise? NFBR itself does not hold data, although of course our members (individuals, groups and organisations) are custodians of data in a variety of formats, including non-digital, all of whom are keen to see their data mobilised and used to safeguard our natural environment. Many of these stakeholders have significant data holdings that still await digitization. We welcome the recent NBN initiative to develop an inventory of un-digitized datasets. We recognise that there are large amounts of data in digital and non-digital formats that have yet to be made available to the NBN, but there needs to be a clear strategy for tackling this so that scarce resources are employed to best effect as and when they become available. We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of such a strategy.
7. What would you like to see done by the NBN to attract new people to biological recording? We regard training at all levels to be critical in this. We applaud recent initiatives to develop novel training opportunities

(e.g. Opal, NHM scholarship scheme, FSC's Tomorrow's Biodiversity, TCV's Natural Networks and Natural Talent traineeships) and would like to see these extended and made available to the widest possible audience. Engagement with the expanding 'citizen science' community will also be critically important. Also, we are very conscious of the fact that, for many participants, biological recording (and the downstream activities associated with it - data collation, verification, migration etc.) is a voluntary activity, so the demands made on these people's time and expertise must not be too onerous or go unrewarded. Above all, we need to champion, encourage and facilitate the role of amateur naturalists of all ages as the bedrock of all biological recording activities.

8. Do you and your organisation want a role implementing this aim, and if so what might that role be? Yes. NFBR's role is to promote and influence the development of biological recording and the use, management and dissemination of biodiversity information. Our strength lies in bringing together and providing a forum for recorders, schemes and societies, data managers, record centres and data users for knowledge-sharing and discussion of all aspects of biological recording and data management. Since achieving charitable status in 2013, we have held bilateral meetings with twelve key organisations in the biological recording field (including NBNT) to refine our role and clarify our relationship with them.

Strategic aim 2; Make wildlife data and information available to everyone

9. What does NBN have to do to increase the visibility and openness of UK wildlife data? This needs to be tackled using a variety of approaches: for example, by giving presentations at local recording conferences, running workshops, posting on forums and social media, visiting schools and universities, raising awareness of the Gateway and how it can be used wisely. All of these activities, however, need resourcing. Although it is clear that considerable resources have been spent on upgrading the Gateway, it is still regarded by many as quite difficult to extract data from, certainly for novice users. Data users need to be educated on how to evaluate data and metadata critically, how to obtain a dataset that fits their purpose and how to interpret it.
10. What would prevent you sharing data globally? This does not apply to NFBR directly, but we are acutely aware that many of the organisations that we represent, most particularly LRCs, operate with business models that they regard as being threatened by completely open access to biological recording data. These and other organisations in the biological recording field will require careful guidance on how they can adapt their business operations to a fully open access data model.
11. When we use the phrase "Family of projects and systems" do you understand that that includes you and your data management systems? Yes, although we think this terminology will need some clarification for the wider biological recording community.
12. Do you and your organisation want a role implementing this aim, and if so what might that role be? Yes. NFBR will have a major role in promoting access to, and the use of, wildlife information (whether via the new Gateway or other means). We can address this through our wider advocacy and via our proposed BRINCS initiative which will provide information to inform targeted actions. NFBR can contribute its views, derived from its independence and interest in the whole of recording, and would be interested in leading specific projects such as a review of the needs of recorders, users and biological recording in general.

Strategic aim 3; Captivate and engage people about wildlife

13. How can the NBN captivate and engage people about wildlife and biological recording most effectively? Captivating and engaging people is best done by engaging with the media, for example by getting NBN data and maps used in a variety of forms. Additional Gateway functionality could link records to images of species and sites, landscape and other data and information.
14. Do you support the NBN being a one-stop-shop and do you see your data and information as part of this? If this means centralisation of data holdings and access to them, then we are sceptical that such an approach will engage the breadth and diversity of the biological recording community. Data needs are so diverse that it is best if different members of the network (LRCs, NGOs etc) use centrally-provided web services to produce tailored data services for their particular audience. It is always useful to remember that, although strategies can be national, actions in nature conservation are almost always local, requiring local interpretation.
15. Do you and your organisation want a role implementing this aim, and if so what might that role be? We support the aim. The NFBR role would be keen to support initiatives from any organisation to achieve this aim.

Strategic aim 4; Provide the best wildlife information management infrastructure

16. Is your own data capture and storage infrastructure stable and secure? N/A
17. How mature are your data management systems? N/A

18. Will you commit to making your systems interoperable with other NBN family members and to following NBN standards? We fully support the aim of interoperability of biological recording systems to enhance data flow and utilisation.
19. Do you and your organisation want a role implementing this aim, and if so what might that role be? Yes. Developing and promoting support for effective standards and their interoperability is a key part of NFBR's role.

Strategic aim 5; Support the development of the NBN, its Board and the NBN Trust

20. What does the NBN have to do to increase its sustainability? 1) First and foremost, it needs to re-connect with and regain the trust of its grass-roots support (by which we mean individual recorders, recording schemes and other groupings, and LRCs) and receive and consider their needs, concerns and advice. 2) Part of this would be to regain people's confidence in the integrity of the existing data (see Q5 above). 3) NBN needs to accept a more pluralist and dispersed model for collating, analysing and making available biological recording data. 4) Partners within the network need to be given the tools and encouraged to promote the importance of using biodiversity information in relation to underpinning biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and the quality of life. 5) The NBN will need to be dynamically receptive to the rapid evolution of the biological recording field; former configurations of recorders (e.g. local natural history societies) are being replaced by more modern dynamic ones (often based around social media or web-based) and NBN will need to adjust to accommodate this different community of recorders.
21. How would you like us to improve the NBN membership scheme?
22. What membership benefits would make you want to increase your support for NBN?
23. How would you like to influence NBN governance? The NBN Board of Trustees currently has a NFBR-nominated member. We would be keen to continue this link between our organisations.
24. What leadership would you like from the NBN? NFBR would like the NBN to be a strong voice in achieving proper national and local support and resources for funding recording initiatives at all scales. The draft NBN strategy already highlights many of the specific priorities for leadership: improvements to data quality, the development and implementation of standards, the preparation of a financial strategy, a clear and strong position on data openness, accelerated data flow.
25. Do you and your organisation want a role implementing this aim, and if so what might that role be? Yes. NFBR are planning a project to review all the UK's biodiversity data needs (BRINCS) and produce a new UK Biodiversity Information Strategy that identifies gaps in data and structures. We would welcome support from NBN for this initiative.

Finally if there any other things you would like us to take into account please write your thoughts below.

We strongly encourage you to foster stronger relationships with nationally- or regionally-focused recording schemes and societies, especially the small- and medium-sized ones, that provide so much of the grass-roots data to the NBN.