

Feedback from the workshop *Targeting Under-recorded Areas*

This workshop was part of the NFBR 2019 conference held at the Nunnery in Thetford from 9th – 11th May 2019. The 45 minutes workshop took place on Friday 10th May and was attended by around 25 people. The workshop was led by Elaine Wright and Sam Neal.

Introduction

The workshop began with a short presentation on an example project targeting under-recorded areas, the Square of the Month scheme by SEWBReC (South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre). Reference was also made to an earlier conference presentation from 9th May “What roles can LERCs play in encouraging people away from their favoured haunts?” which covered various projects carried out by NBIS (Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service). Both presentations can be viewed on the NFBR website:

<http://www.nfbr.org.uk/?q=2019-presentations>.

Attendees were then posed three questions:

1. Why do we want to fill in gaps
2. What are the barriers to filling in the gaps
3. How can we motivate recorders to visit under recorded areas

The resultant points are listed below.

Why do we want to fill in gaps?

- It depends who you are and what your aims are; in some cases there is nothing wrong with gaps!
- What is a gap?
 - Gaps can simply be a gap in a basic species distribution map on a national level, or at a local level, the lack of any species records at all
 - However there are also temporal gaps; is a species still present if it was last recorded many years ago? At what point in time does a record revert to a gap?
 - Gaps are transient as the landscape changes over time; for example a formerly species rich area may now have been developed, or a brown field site may have improved in biodiversity
 - Gaps can be taxonomic; difficult to identify and uncharismatic species are far more prone to gaps on a species distribution level
 - There are also habitat gaps; for example, if a cave system is undiscovered then it can never be surveyed for species
 - Due to the many factors involved, organisations and schemes should outline what their minimum standard is for a gap. This will depend on what they hope to achieve from gap filling efforts.
- What are the benefits to fewer gaps?
 - For professionals, academics and recording schemes:
 - More robust datasets
 - Better for decision making
 - Can answer questions more effectively
 - Lack of records can result in misleading trends or cast doubt on legitimate records
 - A lack of record / gaps result in the public and government / decision makers assuming a site is uninteresting / lacking in biodiversity value (e.g. colliery spoil sites)
 - For recorders
 - Satisfying personal curiosity
 - Recorders as a group tend to be completists
 - Adds a level of importance and acknowledgement to recording efforts

What are the barriers to filling in the gaps?

- Communication
 - How to inform suitable people what the gaps are (see above) and where they exist
 - Lack of narratives to encourage recording
 - Lack of feedback to recorders and the public after an event or project
 - Lack of acknowledgement for recorder effort and the value of records
 - How to capture and report on negative records
 - “Uncharismatic” species (e.g. earthworms) are harder to sell*
 - “Uncharismatic” sites and habitats (e.g. caves) can be inaccessible or hard to encourage recording efforts*
 - “Uncharismatic” recorders may be difficult to work with, and unwilling to share their data or knowledge with others*
 - Gap filling is for life, not just for projects! It is easier to motivate for short term efforts, e.g. atlases, but ideally needs to be continuous.
 - Species which are “too common to record” get overlooked

**charisma is obviously in the eye of the beholder, and no offence to the very valued cave and worm loving recorders!*

- Resources
 - Lack of guidebooks and modern keys
 - Lack of specialist equipment such as microscopes
 - Lack of taxonomic identification skills
 - Lack of experts to assist with identification and education, creating bottle necks in verification
 - Lack of money and time is problematic for both organisations and individuals
 - Motivation!
- Practicalities
 - Sites inaccessible due to overgrown RoW or other issues
 - Finding landowners to grant access permission
 - Landowners being reluctant to grant access, e.g. in fear of designation
 - Health and safety concerns including lone working
 - Lack of space and money for specimen collection (and data space)
 - Future proofing records – should samples for future DNA barcoding should be encouraged?
 - There are untapped datasets already in existence, but how to gain access, and what resources are there to digitise / reformat for wider use
 - Data flow and data sharing mechanisms – are they the best they can be, how can we improve

How can we motivate recorders to visit under recorded areas?

- Communication
 - Make time to verify and process records after an event or project, and feedback to recorders and the wider public
 - Understand your audience and motivate appropriately. Segment your audience if appropriate.
 - Provide species list and species richness maps to as a motivation tool
 - Set your criteria for a gap and clearly explain why they need filling, particularly temporal gaps, so people understand why they should start and continue to record
 - Share information such as species distribution but make sure this doesn't make the gaps worse by highlighting the more interesting sites (i.e. the honeypots!)
 - Have a clear chain of communication; interpret data and feedback quickly. Explain the dataflow route - what are my records doing and why.
 - Encourage use of social media to share knowledge and encourage word of mouth between recorders to reach a bigger expert audience
 - Set expectations with actual or expected species list
 - Set up Facebook groups for knowledge sharing
- Resources
 - Try and make money available for out of pocket expenses
 - Help recorders find landowners and arrange access, or set up a clear procedure and offer support if asking them to arrange access themselves.
 - Provide equipment e.g. microscopes and bat detectors, for use in situ or short term loans. Create a list of resources and provide training / guidance on use.
 - Offer technical support and a variety of routes for supplying data.
- Events and project plans
 - Run events such as BioBlitzes to remove access issues and encourage interaction between recorders of differing levels of expertise
 - Focus on local recording – asking recorders to travel a lot / cover a wide area is only sustainable in the short term
 - Give people ownership of an area such as a river catchment or piece of woodland
 - Consider using competition as a motivational tool – but make sure it does not encourage poor recording practices
 - Consider an apprenticeship scheme
 - Arrange field and social events to encourage knowledge sharing and support