



## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2002

**Summary** - 2002 was a most positive year for BRISC and it is a great pleasure to present the annual report. Membership was up and stood at the end of the year at 138. The finances are under control and fairly healthy, though we are yet again looking for a new treasurer to replace Mark Simmons. We managed to obtain grants to appoint a full-time Development Officer - initially for three years, and work to implement the BRISC Strategic Plan, agreed by members at the previous AGM, progressed a pace. A fully furnished office with computer, telephone, answering machine, fax and email was set up in close association with BTCV Scotland. The BRISC website was redesigned and brought up to date; the LRC email forum was invigorated, and a number of useful events were organised. I would like to thank all the committee for their most valuable input and various contributions to the year's successes.

**Development Officer's post** - In January we received confirmation from The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation that our grant application towards the post of a three-year Development Officer had been successful, and by March Scottish Natural Heritage agreed to provide matching funding. The post was widely advertised and out of a strong field of applicants Alan Cameron was appointed to take up the post on 10 June. On the recommendation of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, a special arrangement was agreed with BTCV Scotland to act as Alan's employer, to ensure that monthly expenses, such as salary, national insurance and pension, would be paid promptly, thus avoiding any difficulties that could arise for BRISC in being temporarily stretched beyond its limited resources.

**A Management Team** to direct the Development Officer's work programme was formally set up, consisting of three BRISC committee members (Lesley Brown, Paul Kirkland, and BRISC's treasurer (Jon Mercer till he resigned, then Mark Simmons), David Jamieson represents BTCV Scotland, and for SNH Jeanette Hall followed by Geoff Johnson. Anne-Marie Smout was elected chairperson. The Management Team met in July and October, and received reports on work progress.

**Top priority for the Development Officer's work programme** in the first six months was to work closely with Scottish Local Records Centres, resulting in Alan contacting all of them and visiting most LRCs personally to gather information regarding their management, staff, equipment, data holdings and backlog, partnership support, and development priorities. A report based on the consultations: "Summary of Local Records Centres' development priorities in Scotland", including 16 recommendations to further the establishment of a fully functioning LRC network for Scotland, was produced in October and presented to the SNH Natural Heritage Data Unit. Following reorganisation within SNH, BRISC's main contact has moved from the Environmental Audit Unit in Edinburgh, to the newly established Natural Heritage Data Unit based at Battleby. Alan McKirdy heads the Unit, assisted by

Geoff Johnson, newly appointed National Biodiversity Network Officer for SNH. Geoff kindly agreed to be co-opted onto BRISC's committee in place of Jeanette Hall.

**A Workshop for LRC managers and staff** was organised by Alan in September and hosted by Fife Environmental Recording Network (formerly Fife Nature) at Fife House, Glenrothes. A "Report on BRISC LRC workshop" was subsequently circulated to all participants and is available electronically to anyone interested. A paper setting out the functions of a 'standard' LRC (included in the Report), which is based closely on one that has been prepared by the National Federation for Biological Recording for the National Biodiversity Network Trust, was agreed in principle by the LRCs present and subsequently circulated on the discussion forum.

#### **Other events**

- The 2002 Annual Conference held at Dundee University in early March, was well attended with seven interesting and varied speakers on the subject of 'Habitats and Species'.
- Two seminars were held in May on the software *Recorder 2000*, one in Stirling hosted by CARSE, the other in Aberdeen hosted by NESBReC. BRISC had been fortunate in securing the presence of Stuart Ball, who demonstrated a number of helpful new features to be included in the promised update. Stuart advised participants on improvements to be included in the new release Recorder 2002, and also outlined far-reaching technical developments within the National Biodiversity Network Gateway. Our gratitude goes to JNCC for their support in making these seminars a reality.
- Also in May, BRISC assisted Trevor James, National Schemes and Societies Project Officer in organising a NBN seminar at Battleby, Perth, to address issues relating to Biological Recording in Scotland. The morning had speakers from BRISC, Fife Nature, SNH, National Museums of Scotland and the NBN Trust, with the afternoon given over to three workshops on different themes.
- BRISC took a stand in the Biodiversity Tent at the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair at Vane Farm 31/8 – 1/9, and among other things displayed material supplied by LRCs. A number of 'Source Books' were sold and many Grid Reference Readers handed out free. Alan Cameron manned the stand with help from Anne-Marie Smout. This was BRISC's first presence at this event and a great many people came to see us, though only one person joined on the day.
- Finally in December, a visit was arranged to the internationally famous herbarium at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, where a small group was guided by Douglas McKean, Curator of British Flora at the herbarium, who took us through the history of the Garden and the herbarium, and demonstrated how material is collected, identified, preserved and stored, as well as discussing some of the problems involved. All events were covered in more detail in *BRISC Recorder News*.

#### **Publications**

- *BRISC Recorder News* was published quarterly during the year and copies mailed out to all members. Each issue contained one or more major articles on particular taxa or important issues, as well as reviews of books considered to be of interest to members. The newsletter is BRISC's main contact with members and tries to cover relevant news and updates, including information technology. Back issues are available for downloading from the website at [www.brisec.org.uk](http://www.brisec.org.uk)

- A Grid Reference Reader was produced, grant aided by SNH, and included with the July mailing. This was very favourably received and has subsequently been used widely to advertise BRISC and our activities. Members wishing more grid readers should contact Alan Cameron at [brisc@btcv.org.uk](mailto:brisc@btcv.org.uk).
- Work on a directory of “Scottish Natural History Societies and Allied Groups”, to be a companion volume to the ‘Source Book’, was under way throughout 2002. All information had been gathered and the text finalised by the end of October, but because the volume became much bigger than anticipated, printing was delayed until more money could be found. A grant application for £600 has gone to the Russell Trust. If successful, it is hoped to have the final product available for sale at the 2003 Annual Conference and AGM.
- *A Source Book for Biological Recorders in Scotland* is still selling, albeit in small numbers, mainly to people south of the Border, who decry the lack of a similar publication for England. Remaining copies have been reduced to £2.50 each (£2.00 to members), with £2.50 p+p.

**Bumblebee survey** - The text, keys, and illustrations to aid identification were extended and improved with the assistance of Murdo Macdonald, and more than 60 survey packs were sold during the year, most sales following presentations to local groups by Anne-Marie Smout. The keys, illustrations, both drawing and photographs, as well as helpful text, were made available free on BRISC’s website, and a fair amount of activity was reported from this section of the website. Nevertheless, returns from the survey have been slow with only a small percentage returning forms. It is hoped to make a bigger impact in 2003.

**The LRC email forum** became more active, with Alan Cameron and Julie Bett encouraging LRCs to share common problems and promote a climate of mutual help. The Recording and Computer Skills email groups were used only on a couple of occasions, and much more use could be made of these including by individual members.

**Representation** on national bodies is an important part of BRISC’s work. We endeavour to represent the interests of the Scottish recording community as best we can. BRISC has representation on the following bodies:

- **The National Biodiversity Network Local Records Centre (NBN LRC) Steering Group**, which meets four times a year, usually in London, to discuss issues relating to the NBN and LRCs and make recommendations to the NBN Trust. Anne-Marie Smout represents BRISC’s views. Alan Cameron has also attended two workshops run by NBN’s Policy and Projects Advisory Committee to set NBN policy on metadata standards and to draft the NBN's next 5-year Business Plan.
- **The National Federation for Biological Recording** – our sister organisation. BRISC is co-opted to the Council, which meets four times a year, usually in London, to discuss all issues relating to biological recording. Bill Butcher, who chairs NFBR, is also a Trustee of the NBN and consequently well placed to keep Council members up-to-date with developments. Representation is shared by Alan Cameron and Anne-Marie Smout
- **Scottish Biodiversity Forum** – Formerly the Scottish Biodiversity Group, held a consultative 'forum' at Battleby in February 2002, open to any member of BRISC.

A Scottish Biodiversity Strategy was invited by the deputy Environment Minister, Allan Wilson, and a number of workshops were subsequently organised with several BRISC members and committee members attending. BRISC has responded to the first draft Strategy, stressing the need to support monitoring, data collection and better data management.

In addition BRISC is a member of **Scottish Environment LINK** - a partnership of 31 voluntary bodies with an interest in the environment. LINK focuses on how best to influence politics in Scotland to the benefit of the environment. Anne-Marie Smout and Brian Boag attended various meetings and seminars and lent BRISC's support and signature to a number of letters to the Scottish Executive and public statements put forward by LINK. A 'congress' of LINK partners was held at Pitlochry in October attended by Brian Boag and Anne-Marie Smout, to discuss how to exert influence for the forthcoming election to the Scottish Parliament. Brian also attended LINK's Agricultural Task Force meetings.

**BRISC Committee** - David Beaumont (RSPB), Julie Bett (FERN- formerly Fife Nature), and Jon Mercer (Borders BRC) joined the committee as from the AGM. Ann McKillop agreed to join the committee in July. Jeanette Hall (SNH Environmental Audit Unit) stood down from the committee in August, following a change of job within SNH, and Geoff Johnson (SNH Natural Heritage Data Unit) agreed to join the committee instead. Jon Mercer had agreed to take on the post of treasurer, but circumstances outside his control prevented this, and Mark Simmons generously stepped into the breach once more. My personal thanks to all the committee members for their support and for their substantial contributions to making 2002 so successful.

Anne-Marie Smout  
Chair of BRISC