



BRISC

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND

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I started by buying a small Robinson trap, widely recognised as the most efficient at retaining moths, with a bright mercury vapour bulb as an attractor. The moths fly round the bulb, bump into the surrounding case and drop unharmed through a funnel into the body of the trap, where they settle down in the egg-boxes that are an essential part of any light trap. While I found this to be an excellent trap, its brightness was an imposition on my neighbours, and I soon replaced it with a Skinner design that uses a low power actinic strip light.



Skinner moth trap

In my youth, I would have killed and pinned many of the moths caught and would have grown a substantial collection. However, while I accept that a specimen must sometimes be taken to confirm identification, I am happier now to release the catch unharmed. I photograph some of the specimens before release, sometimes to aid identification, but also to keep as a permanent record. I use a digital Nikon Coolpix 4300 that can focus as close as 4cm, which is essential for insect photography, but there are other makes and models available with similar capabilities.

Once moths started coming to my trap I should have been lost without a decent identification guide. The best at that time was *The Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles*, by Bernard Skinner, which shows all of the approximately 900 British macro-moths pinned in the classic spread-eagled position. The photographs along with descriptive text and notes on distribution, flight time and

MOTH TRAPPING – A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

By Duncan Davidson

As a child I was fascinated by a cabinet of exotic butterflies, collected by one of my uncles while he served in North Africa and India during the Second World War. As a result I started a collection of my own, gathering moths from lighted windows and digging for pupae round the bases of trees. However, as I grew older I followed a different path, and it was only after a gap of some 35 years that my interest in moths was resurrected.

inferior wildlife habitats and were typically converted into productive agricultural land or improved visually for landscape reasons. Occasionally this species is found in larger water bodies, such as swampy drainage dykes and permanent ponds, while in central France this species can also be found in small streams and rivers.

Most populations are found on uncultivated land with acidic, sandy or gravelly soils, such as heaths and commons or other unimproved grasslands. In southern Yorkshire, the habitat tends to be either swampy surface ditches or temporary pools.

O. glabra is usually the only species of snail present, but sometimes it is found where a few other species also occur, which can cope with occasional drying out of the habitat: typically the moss bladder snail (*Aplexa hypnorum*) and occasionally the button ramshorn snail (*Anisus leucostoma*). Other molluscs that have been found in habitat suitable for *O. glabra* include the red-cruled pea mussel (*Pisidium personatum*), *Pisidium casertanum* and the dwarf pond snail (*Galba truncatula*). *O. glabra* is never found where there is a high diversity of snails.

Historically, this species was widespread throughout acidic lowland areas of England and Wales. Although possibly under-recorded, it is thought that this species has undergone a marked decline and is now nationally scarce. It remains fairly common on a localised basis in southern Yorkshire and parts of south-western England, with colonies recorded on eight scattered Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In Eire, it has always been rare - the only population found in the last fifty years (Shelmaliere Commons, Co. Wexford) was destroyed by farm drainage in 1980.



Mud snails - from the Ephemeroptera website (see end of article)

There are Scottish records from fourteen 10km², however the majority of these records date from the late 19th/early 20th century. Modern records (post-1970) have been reported from East Dunbartonshire (2002 and 2005), North Lanarkshire (1995 and 2005) and the Scottish Borders (1973 and 1988). Additional sites have recently been reported from Falkirk (1993), West Lothian (2000) and Clackmannanshire (2004).

Funding from Scottish Natural Heritage, Falkirk Council and West Lothian allowed a Scottish Action Plan for this species to be published in 2005. The Mud Snail Study Group was formed in 2005 to promote the conservation of the mud snail in Scotland and to support the conservation work of Local Biodiversity Partnerships and other conservation organisations.

The aim of the Mud Snail Study Group is to maintain sustainable populations of mud snails in Scotland. This will be achieved by undertaking and promoting study and research on mud snails; promoting the sound management of land and water to maintain and enhance the distribution of mud snails in Scotland and promoting education and publicising mud snails and their conservation.

The Mud Snail Study Group successfully applied to the Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme (BAGS) for funds to facilitate the implementation of the action plan. These funds will enable the group to:

- a) review all records of the mud snail from Scotland
- b) undertake surveys at all known mud snail sites
- c) prepare risk assessments for all extant populations
- d) investigate the cause of extinction at historical sites
- e) establish and maintain a site register of all mud snail populations, including extinct, translocated and captive breeding populations
- f) provide advice and guidance on the conservation of the mud snail in Scotland
- g) develop an education programme
- h) develop a captive breeding programme for Scottish mud snail populations

Membership of the Mud Snail Study Group is informal and open to all interested parties, particularly mollusc enthusiasts and LBAP officers. If you would like more information on the Mud Snail Study Group please visit our website: www.ephemeroptera.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/mssg or contact: Craig Macadam, Bradan Aquasurveys Ltd., PO Box 21659, LARBERT, FK5 4WX. Email: mssg@bradan-aquasurveys.co.uk Tel: 07786 631369.



Ripe conkers on ground - photo Margaret Barton copyright Woodland Trust Picture Library

WILL AUTUMN COLOURS COME EARLY?

By Andrew Fairbairn

In order further to increase the number of people actively participating in the Phenology Network, which is run in partnership between The Woodland Trust and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, The Trust has teamed up with the BBC's Autumnwatch survey and 'Wild Autumn' TV programme to monitor events as they unfold. Phenology is the study of the timing of natural events, especially in relation to

climate, and the focus is to look for certain first signs of autumn. The chosen signs to record are

- **Changes in oak leaves colour** (>10% of leaves should have changed colour)
- **Timing of ripening blackberries**
- **Migrating swifts** (last date)
- **Ripening hawthorn berries**
- **First falling conkers** (on the ground)
- **Flowering of ivy** (the yellow/greenish flowers should be fully out)

With the Scottish weather having been relatively dry and warm over the summer, an earlier change than normal in the autumn colours is possible. If rainfall remains at average levels and early autumn temperatures are warm with lots of sunshine, then we may see some dazzling colours.

A lot of data have been collected over the years which show that spring is starting earlier and earlier each year, but there is not as good a picture of how climate change is affecting autumn.

According to figures released by the Met Office, Scotland this year experienced its driest July for almost fifty years, and third driest since the First World War. Amazingly, average temperatures have risen by 1° centigrade over the last century, with 0.7° over just the last ten years.

Observations should be submitted by going online to: www.bbc.co.uk/autumnwatch or by calling 0800 083 7497. The results of this public survey will be revealed in a one-off programme in October on BBC2 called 'Wild Autumn', presented by Bill Oddie.

Average Scotland dates for 6 species from last 5 years:

- Bramble fruit ripe – 12/09/00, 19/09/01, 13/09/02, 26/08/03, 01/09/04
- Hawthorn fruit ripe – 13/09/00, 01/10/01, 23/09/02, 09/09/03, 14/09/04
- Horsechestnut, conkers falling – 26/09/00, 29/09/01, 25/09/02, 20/09/03, 18/09/04
- Swift last seen – 28/08/00, 30/08/01, 16/08/02, 20/08/03, 18/08/04
- Ivy flowering – 06/10/00, 19/10/01, 20/10/02, 10/10/03, 14/10/04
- Oak leaf first tint - 01/10/00, 06/10/01, 09/10/02, 26/09/03, 02/10/04

Why do leaves change colour?

Early in the year, when there is plenty of daylight, new leaves produce chlorophyll, which gives them their green colour. The leaves use the chlorophyll to convert sunlight into energy, which the leaves store as sugar. Other pigments are also present in the leaves, but these are covered by the chlorophyll in the leaf, making it appear green. As the amount of available light and temperatures drop towards the end of the summer, the leaves stop making chlorophyll and the remaining chlorophyll starts to break down, revealing the colours of the other pigments underneath.

Beech and maple, which have more anthocyanin pigment, show red leaves in the autumn, while hazel and birch, which have more carotene pigment, have yellow autumn leaves. The

intensity of the colour in the leaves is controlled by how concentrated the stored sugar is: the more concentrated the sugar, the better the colour.

For more information on the Phenology Network and to obtain a simple recording form, visit www.phenology.org.uk

GLOWWORM UPDATE

By Jonathan Willet

This summer has been a great year for the Loch Ard colony with 16 glowing larvae seen late in July. There have been two previous counts that month, both in double figures. These are the largest numbers recorded on this site since it was re-discovered three years ago.



Interestingly all the glowers were larvae. This can be ascertained easily as they have a weaker light than the females and have a habit

of switching on and off. This can make you doubt that you have actually seen one.

I have recently moved jobs and during the move I lost all the emails (CD burning catastrophe) from folk who sent me glowworm records. **If you have sent me records or have any new records then could you get in touch with me at jonathan.willet@highland.gov.uk.**

I hope to have a Scottish Glowworm website and dedicated email on-line by the end of the year. After that, all I have to do is try and find a colony near Inverness for next year's watching.

A NEW DRAGONFLY IN CENTRAL SCOTLAND!

Jonathan Willet

After a conversation on 22 August with Chris Waddell, Stirling's Biodiversity Officer, I visited a pond at Pleun Country Park, five miles east of Stirling. Seemingly a large dragonfly that was predominantly green was flying round the pond, coming close up to people, which had not been seen in previous years. On hearing all this I got a bit excited: could this dragonfly be the southern hawkler *Aeshna cyanea*?

The distribution of this dragonfly in Scotland is somewhat discontinuous. It has been recorded in Argyll, where new sites have been found over the last few years. Then there is a colony in the Culbin Forest by Nairn and at least two in Strathglass, near Inverness. Going south the nearest colonies are in Cumbria (this area having been recently colonized) but in 2003 a male was seen patrolling ponds in Canonbie, Dumfriesshire. So it seems to be moving north.

Well, I got to the ponds and, of course, none to be seen, only common darters *Sympetrum striolatum*, and common hawkers

Aeshna juncea, but then after ten minutes there was the southern hawker! I got seriously excited. This species is unlike the common hawker in that it will come very close and hover, as if giving you a good once over. So I managed to see clearly the three blue bands at the end of the abdomen and the blue lateral and ventral colouration on a black background. The colour on the dorsal surface is green, apart from the three blue bands.

Interestingly there were at least two, possibly three males patrolling and one female ovipositing on rocks and moss at the edge of the pond. I looked for larvae too, but only found those of common hawker.

So, where did they come from? With a few present at the pond it does not seem likely that they all arrived independently this year. Is there another colony nearby? Has there been a mass migration north? Did they come up in the roots of aquatic plants planted in a nearby pond? (I checked that there had been no new planting in the pond). Did a lone female fly north to this site and lay eggs last year and these are the offspring? Whatever the answer, an interesting addition to the Central Scotland dragonfly fauna has arrived



Southern hawker *Aeshna cyanea*
by David Kitching 2005¹

[Another sighting of this species was reported by Paul Kirkland at the pond within the BTCV's grounds in Stirling, early in the morning of 31 August. This potentially indicates that there may have been a small influx of the species to the area - ed]

WILDLIFE COUNTS PROJECT

by Anne-Marie Smout

Background to the project

Readers will be aware that BRISC has been working on putting this project together since autumn 2004. The project focuses on attracting new recorders, something which is central to BRISC's objectives. Three local authorities in Central Scotland were chosen to provide the playing field, Falkirk, Midlothian and North Lanarkshire, and Alan Cameron, then BRISC Development Officer, spent a lot of time and effort designing the project. In November 2004 the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage were approached for funding, as well as the three local authority areas, where the project would be carried out. In April/May 2005 we had the great news that we had been successful, both with HLF and SNH, but a

¹ This photograph was downloaded from Google Images, via the Natural History Museum's website and Nature Navigator - ed

considerable setback was then encountered when Midlothian did not feel able to support the project financially. A quick change had to be sought to replace Midlothian with a different local authority. Stirling was approached and fortunately came up trumps through the intercession of Stirling Ranger Service, and we were eventually able to advertise the post in July, interview candidates at the end of August, and the following week appointed Claire McSorley to be Project Officer.

Claire's background is with JNCC, initially as UK BAP Information Specialist in Peterborough, followed by taking up the post of Seabird Ecologist at JNCC in Aberdeen. Claire has a PhD in songbird ecology, but she is knowledgeable and interested in many other groups. Her enthusiasm is infectious and she is very keen to work with people and to pass on to them her enthusiasm for wildlife and recording. Claire starts on 17 October and will be based at BTCV in Stirling, in a similar arrangement with BTCV as BRISC had with the Development Officer's post.

The new post is for a fixed period of two years.

Main objectives of the project

The Wildlife Counts Project is designed to address one of the key objectives of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy:

- Increase awareness, understanding and enjoyment of biodiversity
- Engage many more people in conservation and enhancement

The Project will pursue this by targeting local people and help them to understand their local wildlife through learning to identify local plants and animals and thereby build an understanding of the diversity of living things found around the places where they live. The target audience is beginners and non-naturalists with an interest in wildlife but without, or with only limited, recording experience.

It is BRISC's conviction that knowing about species and habitats which occur locally, and how to identify these, is the best foundation for building a deeper knowledge of biodiversity. The Wildlife Counts Project will introduce people to these skills with the aspiration that for some participants this introduction will develop into a lifelong interest.

How the activities will be delivered

The Project will offer hands-on experience in identifying terrestrial and freshwater animals, higher and lower plants, looking at tracks, as well as trails and signs of wildlife. All activities will be concentrated on three distinct areas within each local authority area, and all activities will be tied to local sites which participants may be familiar with already.

No single individual can possess the full range of skills needed for all aspects of this programme, and the Project will enter into contracts and agreements with specialists who can deliver specific parts of it. However, the groups of species covered by the Project will be determined by the chosen sites and hence specific demands for information. The role of the Project Officer will be to co-ordinate the specialist inputs, manage the programme of activities and check that they adhere to high and consistent standards. The Project Officer will also ensure that

participants are made familiar with the principles of biological recording and that suitable supporting materials and equipment are prepared and made available. Ongoing support and advice to participants and the wider community will be provided, and participants encouraged to take part in other biodiversity activities in their area, such as those organised by BTCV, bird clubs or SWT.

A small Management Team, Chaired by BRISC and with representatives from BTCV Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the three local authorities, will oversee the project. The Project Officer will work closely alongside the LBAP officers and others, such as Countryside Rangers and SNH staff. This will ensure that existing community contacts and knowledge are used to best effect, that the Project enjoyed a high profile, and that its outcomes in terms of community engagement and data collection are widely understood and supported.

The demand for biological records

The Project will seek to address real requirements for data and work closely with all the local Biodiversity Officers. Attention will be given to priority species in the local Biodiversity Action Plans. The need for biological recording will be explained to participants as well as how the data are used, e.g. in the planning system, and that recording should be seen as an important activity as well as an enjoyable one.

Sharing data, i.e. the what, the where, then when, and by whom, is a critical part of the Wildlife Counts Project. The data collected will be widely disseminated, particularly within the local communities. At present there are no active LRCs in any of the three local authority areas, and BRISC hopes that the project will help to highlight - and perhaps even bring about a solution to - this very unsatisfactory situation. It should, however, be noted that the records collected by the project are not likely to meet all the immediate requirements as identified by the LBAPs and others: the Project cannot act as a substitute for professional surveys.

Outline of the activity programme

The integrated programme of events will put on a yearly total of nine separate sessions (three in each local authority area), each consisting of two closely connected events: one will be an indoor meeting where participants will learn about the site/s to visit, why recording is important, how to record and be introduced to essential taxa; the other will be a field trip to the selected site/s, where skills in identification will be practised by looking in detail at particular groups of species, such as woodland indicator plants, amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, bumblebees, non-native invasive species, and trees and shrubs.

Sites will include urban parks and greenspaces, such as countryside parks. Participants will be issued with recording forms and other supporting material to enable them to continue recording beyond the two sessions. Local volunteers with existing skills in biological recording will be encouraged to act as mentors to budding recorders, so as to keep up the momentum. During the final year of the Project participants will help to establish a Local Wildlife Recording Forum in each of the local authority areas as a means to sustain the interest in biological recording and promote a sharing of skills and knowledge.



CHAIR'S COLUMN

by Patrick Milne Home

This has been such a wonderful summer from a weather point of view that I have found it well nigh impossible to come inside, and that has resulted in little activity on matters that required any sort of desk work.

BRISC is represented on the Council of the National Federation for Biological Recording (NFBR) and in July I attended their Council Meeting. This was a very informative meeting for me and an opportunity to meet our counterparts down south. Two major topics of the meeting were the long term objectives of the NFBR and progress towards the formation of a Local Records Centre Association. The primary objectives of the LRC Association would be to develop their role within the evolving National Biodiversity Network, to ensure co-ordination between those who use the network, and to bring together representatives of LRCs. I believe this will be discussed at the NFBR LRC conference in Edinburgh on 7/8 November (*see also under LRC News below*).

We had a Committee Meeting on 29 August at which the major topic was further development of our business plan. We made good progress and I hope that it is nearing a stage that we can put a draft to members before final production. It will be important for members to endorse the long term aims of BRISC, so that we can continue to build on the work that has been achieved to date. On that score it is very heartening to know that the Wildlife Counts Project, lead by BRISC, is now about to commence with the recent appointment of its Project Officer, Claire McSorley.

Our financial position is sound at the present time, thanks to the return of subscriptions; a few forms are obviously buried in their owner's in-trays and, if you are one of those owners, it would be much appreciated if you could unearth it! Those paying by standing order have been very good at letting me have cheque for the balance and many thanks for this. From my point of view, even better news is that Duncan Davidson has agreed to take on the role of Membership Secretary. His contact details can be found at the end of this newsletter and on the web site.

We are beginning to think about next year's AGM and to combine it again with a conference and possible excursions, this time probably into the Borders. Ideas and suggestions – are they the same? – could be directed to Jon Mercer² who is doing the initial research on venue and topics.

I had the opportunity of making a presentation to SNH Policy Review on LRCs. This was most useful and enabled me to reinforce our view that every effort should be made to complete the network throughout Scotland. Whilst BRISC can extol the virtues of a national network of records centres it is less easy for us to quantify the financial benefits. However, I believe that the financial advantages, which tend to drive virtually all matters these days, are recognised.

² Dr Jon Mercer, SBBRC, Harestanes Visitors Centre, Ancrum, Jedburgh, Tel 01835 830306, email sbbrc@scotborders.gov.uk

BRISC RECORDERS DAYS

Reports by Jonathan Willet

Glen Gyle 21 May 2005

The first BRISC recorders' day of the season started a little cloudy, but the forecast of rain proved to be incorrect and we were treated to some fine spring sunshine and a gentle breeze. The three recorders: myself, Paul Kirkland and Alan Cameron, were met by Katy Freeman, the Forestry Commission Ranger for the area, who was our guide for the day.

We set off by minibus up to Glen Gyle, parking at the head of the northern limb of Loch Katrine. We followed the Glengyle Water for a mile alongside a line of alders on the bank. The flat ground of the glen was blanket bog with cross-leaved heath and sphagnum mosses dominating. At the river bank there were sparse but widespread bluebells (wild hyacinths).

We encountered a caterpillar of a drinker moth on the way up and on the way down saw plenty of green-veined whites and found the eggs of orange tips on cuckoo flowers. We did encounter a bumblebee feeding on one of the sallow catkins, but failed to identify it even with the book to hand. It had a yellow band on its black abdomen and an orange rump.³

We headed up the western side of Glen Gyle to have a good look at the hanging birchwoods there. On the way we spotted two holly trees growing out of large rocks, the only two that we saw in the area the whole day. The lack of diversity of tree species was a bit of a surprise, the others we found were rowan on the crags and sallow. The bulk of the birches were of similar age, 30-40 years old.

The best places for plants were the burn gorges with primroses, honeysuckle, lady's mantle and meadowsweet, dog violet and blaeberry. The woodland floor was very grassy, quite well drained and somewhat species poor.

Our late lunch stop was very productive with a sighting of a tawny owl flying off from the crag underneath us, a female redstart feeding in a tree, and a grey wagtail flying overhead. As we headed down the hill we found some oak fern and wood horsetail in a cave.

Overall it was a pleasant and worthwhile day out. It was the first time that any biological data had been collected from these woods, so even though our species list was a bit short, it was a start. It will be interesting to see how these woodlands change with the removal of sheep grazing that happened last year. Thanks to Katy and the Forestry Commission for the maps and minibus-ing.

Glen Nant. 13 August 2005

The day began somewhat inauspiciously with torrential rain early in the morning. Would anyone turn up? Thankfully those attending were not easily dissuaded and they were rewarded with a fine dry day and the odd bit of sunshine.

³ *The species could have been a Bombus pratorum or early bumblebee. These bumblebees sometime lack one of the yellow bands.*

Our group consisted of a car load from Cowal: Ben, Jane, Jane, Annette and Tessa. I had been in contact with Ben regarding glowworms, so it was good to put a face to an email address. From nearer by Peter Wormell, the ex-NCC warden for the area, came along as well as Pete, a local moth-er. John Halliday from SNH and Janie Steele from the Forestry Commission helped organise the day and provided maps and risk assessments.

The Glen Nant reserve covers 400 hectares and is the largest forest reserve in Argyll. It consists of oakwoods and conifer plantation, much of the latter being removed to allow the oaks and other broadleaved trees to regenerate. The very existence of the wood stems from its commercial exploitation as a source of charcoal for the iron smelting operations that were taking place in the 17th and 18th centuries a few miles to the north, at Bonawe. Peter and John gave us a great introduction to the reserve.

We started off walking 100 meters along the river to have a look at the moth trap. It contained nearly 40 species of moth, one of these being the square-spotted clay, a UKBAP species with only four known sites in Scotland and a first for the reserve! Lempke's gold spot was another moth we caught that was new to the reserve list.

After an hour and a half of ID'ing, the non-moth-ers headed along the river to have a look for some plants. We got a tree list going and reached the dizzy heights of 10, but we could not turn up an aspen although we tried hard. We helped each other with ID and rapidly reached 30 plant species: bluebell, wild garlic, dog's mercury and woodruff being some. Heading back towards the moth trap the moth-ers were very happy and had finally emptied the trap.

We then headed off into the woods, spotting lots of Scotch argus on the wing, though the quest for the speckled wood was fruitless. It is present on the reserve but there has been no official record (Janie has since sent John a record from this year and made him a happy man). We found the hugest bog asphodel I have ever seen by the path and passed by a few Scottish wood ant nests. We even found some tadpoles in a ditch pool. Ben was in his element with many fungi to identify and many folk directing him to more. Green elf cup or Tunbridge ware (the fungus stains wood emerald green and it was used for decoration) was a more unusual sighting.

Heading back along the forestry track we spied a dragonfly, another first for the reserve! I was vacillating as to the species but have now settled on it being a southern hawkler. The abdomen was green underneath and on the sides, with blue markings on the top. It was not staying very still and was a few meters away so I was not certain until I saw another one a few weeks later (*see article above*).

By the end of the day we had accumulated over 70 plant species (not including grasses or sedges), 13 bird species, nearly 40 moths and other insects. The existing plant list was around 120 so I hope that our visit will add something to it. John and Janie were very pleased by our efforts and we had all enjoyed our day. We also discovered we had a budding lichenologist in our midst, shamefully I can not remember if it was Tessa or Annette (sorry). I pointed her in the direction of

Brian Coppins of RBGE and hopefully she will be an expert of the future.

LOCAL RECORDS CENTRE NEWS

NESBReC (North East Scotland Biological Records Centre) has produced its first newsletter. It is in electronic format and full of interesting articles and information, including updates on fieldwork relating to the new "North East Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas"; an article on the silverground carpet and its distribution; results of an Integrated Habitat System (IHS) survey of Aberdeen City and shire, and some changes taking place at NESBReC, including the centre's move to new premises at:

University of Aberdeen, Room G41/G42,
23 St Machar Drive, Aberdeen, AB24 3RY

To request a copy the newsletter, contact Nick Littlewood at Tel 01224 273633 or email nesbreck@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
See also their website at www.nesbrec.org.uk

SBBRC (Scottish Borders Biological Records Centre) has produced their newsletter issue no 4. This is circulated in hard copy and as usual is full of exciting local news and discoveries, including the find of the nationally scarce wood-bittervetch (*Vicia orobus*) in Tweeddale, and other recording highlights; there is a piece about the worrying arrival of squirrelepox virus, which kills red squirrels but not greys; the results of the 'Borders Backyard Biodiversity survey' and much else. SBBRC's database now holds in excess of 500,000 records. The newsletter is available from

SBBRC, Harestanes Countryside Visitor Centre,
Ancrum, Jedburgh TD8 6UG
Tel 01835 830405 (note new direct telephone line) or
email sbbrc@scotborders.gov.uk
Website www.scotborders.gov.uk/sbbrc

Stop press! *A Provisional Atlas of Scottish Borders Odonata*, compiled by Jon Mercer, has just arrived in the post. Please use above contact details to obtain a copy.

LWIC (Lothian Wildlife Information Centre) has produced another annual report in full colour, with details of the year's (2003-04) achievements, including a special project on 23 candidate paths for West Lothian Council. This commission came out of the duty placed on local authorities by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 to prepare a Core Path Network (CPN).

It should also be noted that since 1 April 2005 LWIC has moved to new premises at

Caretaken's Cottage, Vogrie House,
Vogrie Country Park, Nr Gorebridge,
Midlothian, EH23 4NU,
Tel 01875 825968 or
email info@lothianwildlife.co.uk

FERN (Fife Environment Recording Network) has appointed a second Information Assistant, Shelley McCann, to work alongside Simon Scott at 6/7 Hanover Court, North Street, Glenrothes, Fife KY7 5SB Tel 01592 413550

NOTICE of important LRC Event:

Biodiversity Data – Improving Management and Delivery

A forum for Local Records Centres
7 - 8 November 2005 at Edinburgh Conference Centre,
Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh.

By Sara Hawkswell
Lothian Wildlife Information Centre

Last year the National Federation for Biological Recording (NFBR) held a conference for Local Records Centres to give them a chance to exchange views and discuss technical and strategic developments. Overall the conference was seen as a great success with over sixty delegates attending, although Scottish Local Records Centres were notably absent. The conference venue (Birmingham) may have been a factor. The NFBR decided that the conference should become an annual event and decided that this autumn's conference should be held in Edinburgh – I, for my sins, agreed to help coordinate it.

This one and half day conference will include a series of presentations and workshops covering issues such as data verification, Recorder 2002 and 6, providing on-line access to users, integrating habitat data, the Francis Rose Notebook Project, ensuring data quality, assessing local plan sites and securing long term contracts with users. We have speakers from three different countries (England, Scotland and Wales!). There will also be a discussion about a proposal to establish an Association of Local Records Centres. The conference is an excellent opportunity for those involved in Local Records Centres to meet others in the same business, make new contacts, learn about new innovative projects and get up to date on technical issues.

For more information, booking forms, etc., email me on sara@lothianwildlife.co.uk

[The programme and booking form are now also available from BRISC's website at www.brisc.org.uk ed]

IT CORNER

WEBSITES AND THE NET

Every reader will be only too aware that a huge amount of time can be wasted surfing the Internet. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are large numbers of websites that can be immensely useful to biological recorders, and BRISC tries to alert our members to them where ever we can (thus there are several included in the text above). Here are some more examples which the editor visits quite regularly.

Most biodiversity orientated websites depend in some way or another on fellow enthusiasts to make contributions. Some, like the three bird websites listed here, depend on contributors to share their daily records, others are dedicated to the identification of specific taxa, like the new bumblebee website, or the two Lepidoptera websites, where contributions of high quality photographs are asked for. These websites, however,

are not geared up to answer queries about problem IDs: that is left to email groups, which usually are also free to join.

Then one should not forget the more general websites, such as ARKive [<http://www.arkive.org/species>] or the website of the Natural History Museum listed here below, which focuses on the research and conservation aspect of all groups, but also include a whole range of photographs of individual species along the way, provide links to other relevant websites, or offer web searches, e.g. Google data.

REQUEST from the editor:

There will be many more websites relating to the recording or identification of species and habitats, which biological recorders will find it worth while visiting, or discussion group where problems can be aired. As the editor of BRISC Recorder News I would be most grateful if readers would alert me to such useful sites. This can be the start of BRISC extending the usefulness of our website to members and others by providing electronic links to at least some of these. Thank you in advance for your assistance. Ed

<http://www.birdtrack.net>

BirdTrack is an online recording scheme to increase the personal, local and national value of sightings. The project is organised by British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) on behalf of BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland. It is necessary but free to register to contribute, and contributors' records are plotted on weekly species maps. It is not necessary to be registered to see the maps and follow the migration north of individual species.

<http://www.trektellen.nl>

This is similar to the website above, but aims to be more international and include numbers seen, not just species. It comes from the Netherlands and focuses on 'visible migration' across the UK, Netherlands, Belgium and France, i.e. the observer chooses a good viewing point from where to watch migration regularly (usually early in the morning) and reporting which species and how many are passing. The text (and names of bird species) can be called up in different languages, though the map seems only to show the Netherlands. Observations from Scotland are still fairly few, but they include migration sites on Lewis, Tiree and Islay, and hopefully will shortly include Elie Ness in Fife. Contributors have to register but it is not necessary to be registered to see the lists.

<http://www.birdguides.com>

This is a twitchers' website. It is free to register which allows access to daily maps and weekly newsletters on rarities anywhere in the UK. I know people who use it to plan the day's birdwatching. One can sign up to an instant text message alert about new rarities and various extras, but there is a charge for that.

<http://www.bumblebee.org/key.htm>

This is a useful addition to what BRISC offers on bumblebees on our website. It provides colour illustrations of all the true bumblebee species occurring in the UK, but strangely not of any cuckoo bumblebees. There are a few colour photos but most of the illustrations have been lifted from Prýs Jones and Corbet's classic book on bumblebees (with due acknowledgement). There are useful sections on the lifecycle and conservation of bumblebees.

<http://leps.it>

This is a similar website to the <http://ukmoths.force9.co.uk> mentioned by Duncan Davidson in his article above on moths. It gives extensive taxonomic lists of the species and clicking on a name brings up the relevant photographs. One can then select to see the previous or next species. It is also possible to go through them all, one by one. A facility to search by family, genus, and species (available both for Latin and common names), but I find this a little hit and miss. The site includes butterflies and covers all of Europe and North Africa, but is of limited use with micros.

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk>

This is the site of the Natural History Museum and offers search facilities for individual taxonomic groups. I have searched bumblebees, and there is a colour key to the commoner species; I also tried hoverflies – there is an option to see photos of different groups, linking to Nature Navigator or ARKive (<http://www.arkive.org/species>) The photograph of the southern hawkler on page 5 of this newsletter was located through the NHMs website using Nature Navigator, which then searched and found it via Google Images.

Instant publication is of course a widespread use of the Internet: recently published is *UK Mammals: species status and population trends*. This is the first report by the 'Tracking Mammals Partnership', published by JNCC and available for downloading from www.trackingmammals.org

Also just received Jonathan Hughes's detailed but immensely readable report on *Scottish Wood Ants*, commissioned by SNH. Undoubtedly the report will soon be available from SNH's own website, but in the meantime it can be viewed or downloaded from the SWT's website at

http://www.swt.org.uk/downloads/06_d_Narrow_headed%20Ant_report.pdf

CDs and DVDs

PISCES Conservation / Ray Society are producing electronic copies of a number of out-of-print or difficult to obtain classic works on identification, e.g. Bradley, Tremevan & Smith (1973, 1979). **British Trochicoid Moths Vols I & II**, or E H Eason (1964). Centipedes of the British Isles. For a complete list and more information on their e-books visit

<http://www.pisces-conservation.com>

REVIEW

Stace, C.A. (Meijden, R. van der & Kort, I de, eds)
Interactive Flora of the British Isles: a digital encyclopedia DVD-ROM. Expert Centre for Taxonomic Identification (ETI) £29.95 (incl VAT) p&p extra. Order online from Sales@etiis.org

It has clearly been a major undertaking to produce an information source such as the *Interactive Flora of the British Isles*. In addition to data extracted from the two major reference books dealing with the British flora there are several thousand photographs and line drawings.

Installing the programme is a straightforward task provided your computer is up to the job – it needs 32Mb RAM and a

DVD-ROM player. From the initial menu, or Navigator module, access can be made to any section of the system by selecting the appropriate icon. Once in the system finding your way round is fairly intuitive. As with many computer applications this electronic file index provides a number of elegant ways of achieving the basic information available and of adding to it. The following review concentrates on the main elements within the system.

For each of the plant species included in the system there are a number of fields but for most users the 'description' field will be the most consulted. Here there are brief notes on diagnostic features, habitat, distribution and, where relevant, possible hybrids and illustrations. The photographs and illustrations are mostly of good quality but vary from species to species. Some are illustrated by photographs of plants in their habitat and in close-up plus line drawings whilst others only rate a line drawing of part of a plant. Looking at the origin of photographs it seemed strange that for a flora of the British Isles many of those included had been taken in other European countries.

A browse through the species led to a photograph of a plant probably taken when it was last recorded over thirty years ago and where it has not been seen recently. A spelling mistake was also noticed at this point. There is a tendency to assume that digitally presented material contains the most up-to-date data but this aspect needs to be treated with caution.

A computer-aided identification system to families, genera and species consists of a dichotomous key, which is no more appealing than the printed equivalent, and a basic multi-access module which only covers *Cotoneaster*, *Limonium* and *Sorbus*.

An interactive geographic information system has made use of data from the *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* but the resolution is very coarse when viewing the whole of the British Isles. More detailed distribution maps are available using the option to select a part of the country. The grids on the digital maps are kilometres east and north – a system some may be familiar with but not so readily interpreted for those more used to OS style maps. The CD accompanying the *New Atlas* has maps with 10km resolution and additional text which has not been incorporated into the interactive flora, thus anyone expecting the quality of the original will be disappointed. The distribution maps of the interactive flora tend to make uncommon plant species appear much more abundant than they really are.

Other useful sections of this electronic file index include a glossary of botanical terms and a literature section both of which can be accessed by clicking on keywords highlighted in blue text. Of more limited interest are the purely explanatory introductory section and the section that just gives details of those who have contributed photographs.

The cover grandly states that 'This DVD-ROM holds 3.3 gigabytes of information and truly breaks new ground in the field of plant identification and information provision. It is an encyclopedic work of importance to scientists, students and anyone interested in plants.' However, having tried it out, it is not clear who this interactive flora is aimed at. The term 'interactive' has a way of making this type of presentation sound more interesting than it really is, and certainly bringing

information up on the screen at the click of a mouse has novelty value. Most enthusiastic botanists and those with other natural history interests will already have shelves bulging with reference books, and beginners and students should be encouraged to go out into the field and look at plants *in situ*. Most botanists, even quite expert ones, admit to leafing through illustrated books and, whilst not very scientific, it is often the quickest way to identify an unknown plant. In the interactive flora it is not easy to get simultaneous pictures of species for comparison. The DVD-ROM takes up considerably less space on the shelves than the *New Flora of the British Isles* and *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora* but I do not see it replacing those and other well-thumbed books.

References

Stace, C.A. (1997). *New Flora of the British Isles*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Preston, C.D., Pearman, D.A. & Dines, T. (eds) (2002) *New Atlas of the British & Irish Flora*. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Barbara Hogarth

[*ETI Information Services LTD* have produced CD-ROMs of *Birds of Europe*, *Interactive Guide to Mushrooms and other Fungi*, and *Interactive Guide to Butterflies of Europe*. For a full list of their e-books, visit www.etiis.org.uk ed]

BOOK REVIEW

Averis, A.M., Averis, A.B.G., Birks, H.J.B., Horsfield, D., Thompson, D.B.A & Yeo, M.J.M. (2004). *An Illustrated Guide to British Upland Vegetation*. ISBN 1 86107 553 7 (paperback). 13.7 x 24.8cm, 454pp. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough PE1 1JY, UK. Price £25 (student price £15).

"A traveller", remarked Charles Darwin, "should be a botanist, for on every hand plants form the chiefest vista." The first systematic efforts to describe, classify and map the vegetation of our uplands were begun about a century ago by the Smith brothers in Dundee (Gimingham, 2003) and ended before the Second World War with the publication of Sir Arthur Tansley's monumental work *The British Islands and their Vegetation*. After the war a second phase opened with Duncan Poore's studies in Breadalbane using formalised methods of description and evaluation derived from those developed in continental Europe. This phase culminated with publication of the five volumes of what has become known as the National Vegetation Classification (the NVC).

Now, about a century after the Smiths, we have a third-generation account of our upland vegetation. Of necessity the NVC is a bulky and highly technical work that is by no means easy to assimilate and use. In one admirable volume Averis *et al.* have written an introduction to upland vegetation that both encapsulates and builds upon the NVC.

This is a timely project. Our uplands are currently faced with the heaviest pressure for change since the Forestry

Commission was established in 1919. Atmospheric pollution, global warming, changes in public support for hill farming, the advent of large-scale wind farms, the EU Habitats Directive, expanding demand for out-door recreation, and populations of red deer thought to be larger than at any time in history: all these are affecting the plant cover of the hills and we cannot even document their consequences, still less take mitigating action, unless we are able to describe what it actually is that is changing. And that, in essence, is what this book is about: it is designed as a practical aid to identifying plant communities.

There are three main sections, starting with the Preface and an extended Introduction. These outline the aims and scope of the work (with details given later), which covers all areas with an environment of the upland type regardless of altitude. The main upland areas with their geology and physiography are briefly described. Climatic variables are considered and mapped, followed by an outline of soils. There is a sketch of land-use history, then an account of the effects of pollution concentrating mainly on those mediated by the atmosphere. A general account of British upland vegetation outlines the history of scientific studies, describes the vegetation's characteristics, explains how its various types are recognised at different spatial scales and sets it in the wider context of European plant sociology. The general implications for nature conservation are considered and there are useful tabulations of the NVC's equivalents under Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive and the priority habitats of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The second section comprises a set of dichotomous keys to the vegetation types. Without extensive experience of using these it is difficult to assess their quality. However they feature alternative paths to a particular community name and the contrasts are quite fully drawn, which are helpful aspects and the hallmarks of a well constructed key.

The main part of the book is taken up with descriptions of 99 NVC communities followed by short accounts or allusions to 10 other upland vegetation types and habitats, and a more extensive account of bryophyte and lichen assemblages. The NVC accounts usually begin with a synonymy. There follows a description emphasising the physiognomy of the vegetation (its general appearance at various seasons), its sub-communities and its geographical distribution, illustrated by a dot map. (The dots are small circles which can be difficult to discern especially near the fretted coastlines of Cornwall and the west of Scotland.) There are hints to enable a particular community to be distinguished from others that are related or superficially similar, followed by an outline of the range of environmental conditions in which it is found, with further geographical notes. The nature conservation status and interest of the community is then considered. Finally there is a section on management which often alludes to dynamics: the changes observed over time that may be modified by human cultural activity. Interesting features of these descriptions include aesthetic considerations, sometimes quite poetically expressed; a drawing to show the community's place in the landscape; and information on important features of the animal life that uses the community as a resource. These are welcome features, especially perhaps the landscape drawings. They are reminiscent of the catena concepts used in Scotland's soil and land capability mapping at the 1:250,000 scale (Soil Survey of

Scotland, 1982-84); and they improve greatly upon the vegetation drawings pioneered in the guide by Polunin & Walters (1985).

To an ecologist working in Scotland there is one surprising omission, namely any reference to bioclimates. A method of mapping ecologically meaningful climatic zones was worked out in Finland in the 1960s and was soon extended to Scotland by Birse (1971). At a time when climatic warming caused by cultural activity seems likely to be the major future driver of ecological change it is regrettable that the authors were unable to match a bioclimatic scheme with the distribution of upland vegetation types on a Great-Britain-wide basis. This may, however, be less a criticism of the book than of the laggard state of some of the supporting science.

Indeed the authors are commendably conscious of the limitations of their work. For instance they warn that "...vegetation varies as an immensely complicated continuum...within which recognised vegetation types...are artificially defined nodes or points of reference...A danger of using any system of classification is that it can encourage the recognition only of predetermined patterns. *Other important variation is either not noticed or not considered because it is not dealt with in the classification.*" (Reviewer's italics.)

In the middle of North Wales, centred some four miles north of the village of Cerrigydrudion, lies the plateau of the Mynydd Hiraethog: the "Hills of Longing". This used to be a tract of heather-dominated moorland and wet hollows with an area of about 40km². During the 1970s about half of it was afforested with conifers. The loss of a beautiful and, in those parts, uncommon resource may be judged regrettable or not depending on one's point of view; but the frustration of not having been able to know the exact nature of that resource can hardly be denied. With the publication of this useful and readable account we have at last the tools to mend our ignorance.

References

- Birse, E.L. (1971). *Assessment of Climatic Conditions in Scotland 3: the Bioclimatic Sub-Regions*. Macaulay Institute, Aberdeen. Cont.
- Gimingham, C.H. (2003). The Smith brothers: Scottish pioneers of modern ecology. *Bot. J. Scotl.* **55**, 287-297.
- Polunin, O., & Walters, M. (1985). *A Guide to the Vegetation of Britain and Europe*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Soil Survey of Scotland (1982-84). *Soil and Land Capability for Agriculture, 1:250,000*. (14 Maps, 7 Sheet Memoirs and a Memoir on Organisation and Methods.) Macaulay Institute, Aberdeen.

Hugh A.P. Ingram.

OTHER BOOK NEWS

The Freshwater Biological Association (FBA) has published two new books. They are:

Wood, T. S. & Okamura, E. (2005). *A new Key to the Freshwater Bryozoans of Britain, Ireland and continental Europe, with Notes on their ecology*. FBA's Scientific

Publication No 63. ISBN 0-900386-72-X; ISSN 0367-1887. 113pp. £16.00

Bryozoans are small, filter-feeding animals that live in colonies attached to all kinds of substrata in a variety of habitats. An earlier key by S.P. Mundy (1980) listed 14 species of freshwater bryozoans in the British Isles and Europe. This completely new key recognises 19 species and removes two of the species listed in Mundy's key.

Wilkson, R.S. & Ruse, L.P. (2005). *The guide to the identification of genera of chironomic pupal exuviae occurring in Britain and Ireland (including common genera from Northern Europe) and their use in monitoring lotic and lentic fresh waters.* FBA Special Publication No 13. ISBN 0-0900386-73-8; ISSN 1747-1958. 176 pp £20.00

About 600 species of non-biting or 'dancing' midges occur in Britain and Ireland, with many more on the continent of Europe. They are most noticeable when the adults perform mating flights in swarms along the shores of running water (lentic) and standing or still water (lotic) habitats. The aquatic life-cycle of eggs, larvae and pupae usually last for a year or less. When adult midges emerge from their pupae the empty cast skins or exuviae float on the water-surface and become part of the flotsam accumulating along strand-lines and in backwaters. In such places the pupal exuviae can be scooped up easily with a long-handled pondnet, for subsequent identification under low magnification. This guide provides a series of multiple-choice keys for identifying the pupal exuviae of 145 genera and more than 100 selected species of Chironomidae that have been recorded from Britain and Ireland.

For more information on the above and on other FBA publications, visit their website at www.fba.org.uk or to place an order, contacting the Freshwater Biological Association, The Ferry House, Far Sawrey, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 0LP, Tel 015394 42468 email info@fba.org.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage's "Naturally Scottish" series continues to add new titles to an already very impressive list. These informative, beautifully illustrated and inexpensive booklets deserve a far wider distribution that is currently the case. Some recent additions dealing with individual taxa are:

- *Bumblebees* (Murdo Macdonald)
- *Fungi* – (Roy Watling)
- *Lichens* – (Oliver Gilbert)
- *Mosses and Liverworts* - (Gordon Rothero)
- *River Runners* (*Freshwater pearl mussel, Atlantic salmon and lampreys* – (Iain Sime)

Each booklet costs £4.95 (p+p extra) and is available from Scottish Natural Heritage Design and Publications, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3EW or email pubs@snh.gov.uk

For a full list visit SNH's website at www.snh.org.uk

Deadline for next issue is
16 December 2005

All material to Anne-Marie Smout at
amsmout@aol.com

DATES FOR THE DIARY

27 October 2005 - Scottish Marine science overseas

Scottish Marine Group. Lecture Theatre A4, Cottrell Building Stirling University. Contact Dr Hamish Mair, Tel 0131 451 3314; Email J.M.Mair@hw.ac.uk

7-8 November 2005 - Biodiversity Data –Improving Management and Delivery: A forum for Local Records Centres

- at Edinburgh Conference Centre, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. For more information, booking forms etc. Email sara@lothianwildlife.co.uk or see BRISC website

12 November 2005 - Landscapes by Design – 31st Man and the Landscape Symposium. Forth Naturalist & Historian.

Lecture Theatre A3, Cottrell Building, Stirling University. Booking from M Scott, Pathfoot C4, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA; Tel 01786 467269; Email mbm1@stir.ac.uk

18 November 2005 – Focus on Wildlife: current activities in societies & schemes. Fifth NBN National Schemes and Societies Conference.

The Flett Theatre, Natural History Museum, London. Contact Trevor James at BRC, CEH, Monkswood; Tel 01487 772410; Email tjj@ceh.ac.uk

2-3 December 2005 - First International Recorder Conference: Collating and managing natural science field and collection records in Europe.

Luxembourg Museum. Sustainable development and the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity have been central to all European environmental and economic policy since the signing of the Rio Convention in 1992. Meeting these objectives requires ready access to scientifically valid, reliable and comprehensive wildlife and earth sciences data at local, regional, national and European levels. European-funded projects such as ENHSIN and BioCASE have helped develop techniques and standards for biodiversity data sharing but there is still a great need for software and standards that can capture, manage and integrate the original natural sciences collection and field data. The theme of this meeting is to introduce field biologists, earth scientists and natural science museum curators across Europe to software and standards that can meet this need. For more information, check the homepage of the conference for more information and a download of the 1st circular: <http://www.symposium.lu/recorder>

Visit the BRISC website at www.brisec.org.uk

Note Change of passwords for the Members' Only pages: These are now:

Username bombus
Password terrestris

Access to the private pages is via the 'Membership' page and clicking on 'Members Only'.

BRISC has a new Membership Secretary
Duncan Davidson

140 Pitcorrhie Drive, Dunfermline, KY11 8BJ

Email duncan@dwwd.freereserve.co.uk

Please contact Duncan for all enquiries about membership.