



BRISC

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING IN SCOTLAND

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between half-an-hour and an hour, and on average cover more than half the days of the month, most in March, April, May, June and October when the average is 19 days, least in July (12 days) and August (14 days). We have found by experience that observing like this can generate two measures. One is of presence, measured by the percentage of days per month on which we see a species. The other is abundance, measured by the highest counts made in each month.

Seven species of waders come to the bay on a regular basis – oystercatcher, ringed plover, purple sandpiper, dunlin, curlew, redshank and turnstone. Another ten species are annual but less regular – lapwing, golden plover, grey plover, knot, whimbrel, greenshank, common sandpiper, common snipe, ruff, bar-tailed godwit. Six more have occurred, but not on an annual basis – sanderling, curlew sandpiper, little stint, green sandpiper, wood sandpiper and black-tailed godwit.



Purple sandpipers and turnstone at Anstruther spring 1995 – photo A-M Smout

WADERS IN FIFE

By Chris and Anne-Marie Smout

Since 1983, we have been monitoring birds outside our house at Anstruther, Fife. From our windows we can see the outfall of the Dreel burn running into a small bay bounded by the harbour wall, with rocks, sand, pebble, some sandy mud, and seaweed, covered at high tide.

Our monitoring has to fit in with busy lives, so it has not been possible to standardise it to a set time each day or to fit with a particular point of the tide. However, we normally watch for

This note is concerned with three species whose numbers have clearly changed since we started monitoring – purple sandpiper, turnstone and redshank, all in the first group. These are the only ones for which we have yet analysed the data, but we think that we should be able to show a similar decline at least for dunlin, but probably stability or an increase for oystercatcher and ringed plover. Of those dealt with here, purple sandpiper has shown a severe decline, turnstone a marked decline, but redshank a marked increase.

Continue on page 3!



NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

A very short note from me this month. We have had one Committee Meeting but otherwise seem to have been fairly quiet. It is always dangerous to say that, because there always seems too much to do and, having said it, even more will pour in via the electronic contact point. I say pour in because the numbers of emails received seem to increase by the

week. Do you all suffer from this as well?! A lot of it is ghastly spam but a great deal is interesting, although possibly not relevant, and I find my discipline for ignoring all but the 100% relevant is not too good. For saving costs of paper, to the senders benefit, and speed of delivery, it is wonderful. Speed of reply on my part leaves a bit to be desired.

What about the BRISC Website? I must confess to not being a regular user but I do have bursts of remembering it is there and that it has a lot of information readily available. Andy Wakelin puts in a great deal of time maintaining the site on our behalf and produced some very interesting statistics showing that there had been 94,226 hits on the site during the course of the year and 5,954 actual visits. This is probably a very creditable usage but when that is broken down it shows that only 116 visitors went into the Members pages. I do not know what to read into that and any views gratefully received; oh, what a silly suggestion that means more emails. For instance do Members forget it is there; do they not find the Members material useful? Should we have different material there, revamp the site or rethink the strategy?

I attended a meeting of the Wildlife Counts Project in November and was most impressed at the start that Claire McSorley has made in getting this underway. Contacts have been firmly established with our partners in Stirling, North Lanarkshire and Falkirk Council areas. It seems to me that there will be some excellent sites and species to use as introductions to recording in each of the three areas. There are obviously some keen participants too and all of this augers well for building up an interest in recording and a pool of recorders and perhaps developing it further in the future – but that is still a year or two ahead.

Managing our finances is being scrutinized and we are looking to change the Subscription year from April to possibly June or July. This will enable us to discuss subscriptions at the AGM and have time to process any changes before subscriptions are due. Also we are looking into the ease or otherwise of setting up a Direct Debit system, rather than Standing Orders, as the current system is not easy for the Membership Secretary and Treasurer to operate. We increased the subscriptions in 2005 and it is our intention to try and hold them at that level for at least another year.

I fear that I do not have any more to report on the Business Plan other than we continue to work on it and are aiming to get a draft to all Members before the AGM.

Jennifer Davidson, from SNH, has been our acting Secretary, since Alan Cameron's project ended and he went off to join SNH, but Jennifer is now about to take on a new role within SNH and we will be losing her services. We hope that her

successor will continue the close association that SNH has with BRISC, as it is very much appreciated and is most helpful in ensuring that Recording and the benefits of Local Records Centres are kept firmly on the agenda. A big thank you to Jennifer for all her work both on the Committee and liaison work between SNH and BRISC.

With best wishes for 2006,

Patrick Milne Home

EDITORIAL

The present issue presents a slight change in format, in that from now on the 'Notes from the Chair' will always be found on page 2 of the newsletter and also a short 'Editorial'. Page 2 is also where readers will find contact details for BRISC and other administrative details. I hope this is helpful – if not, let me know.

We are now onto issue No 60, and readers are reminded that all newsletters since issue No 36 – including this one - are available on our website at www.brisec.org.uk. Throughout the years there have been many interesting articles, notes and reviews, and in order to help readers locating what they might be looking for, all the contents pages of these have been collated in one file, also available from the web pages. A full index is under construction.

In November, representatives of local records centres from all corners of the UK came together in Edinburgh for a two-day conference. This event was proposed and organised by Sara Hawkswell under the auspices of the National Federation of Biological Recording (NFBR) and readers should note her report on page 8. It was agreed to set up an association of UK LRCs. Some members will recall that such an association was proposed back in the 1990s by former chair of BRISC, David Mellor, but it got insufficient support at that time. Time is now ripe. BRISC has of course worked hard over the years to promote LRCs as the backbone to all volunteer effort in biological recording, and we look forward to working with the new association and wish it a successful and influential future.

The present issue carries as usual several articles on recording efforts. The one on wading birds in Fife highlights the value of personal records, collected systematically over the years, in monitoring change. Readers can catch up with all the impressive work of Butterfly Conservation Scotland, learn something about the history of Scottish birds. The design of *Recorder Web*, a new tool for recorders, is outlined in an article by one of its creators, Charles Cobb.

We warmly welcome Dr Claire McSorley as our new project officer for the Wildlife Counts project. Read more about Claire on page 7.

BRISC's annual conference and AGM takes place on Saturday 8 April. For details about this see page 7. Also enclosed with this mailing is the booking form, or you can download the booking form from the open pages on our website. Please do not forget to book!

For the Members Only web pages use

Username	bombus
Password	terrestris

For any matter regarding **membership** please contact our membership secretary [Duncan Davidson](mailto:Duncan.Davidson@dwwd.freemove.co.uk) at 140 Pitcorthie Drive, Dunfermline KY11 8BJ Email Duncan@dwwd.freemove.co.uk

[Patrick Milne Home](mailto:Patrick.MilneHome@brisec.org.uk), Chair of BRISC can be contacted at Craigow, Milnathort, Kinross-shire, KY13 0RP, Tel 01577 863758 or email Patrick@milnehome.org

Otherwise, with [Claire McSorley](mailto:Claire.McSorley@brisec.org.uk), BRISC still has an office at BTCV, Balallan House, Allan Park, Stirling FK8 2QG, Tel 01786 474061 or email brisec-wcp@btcv.org.uk

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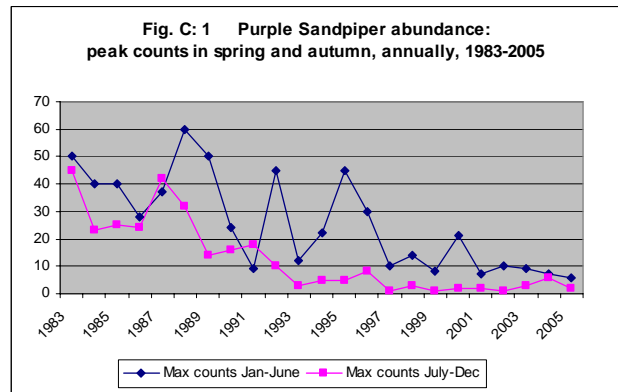
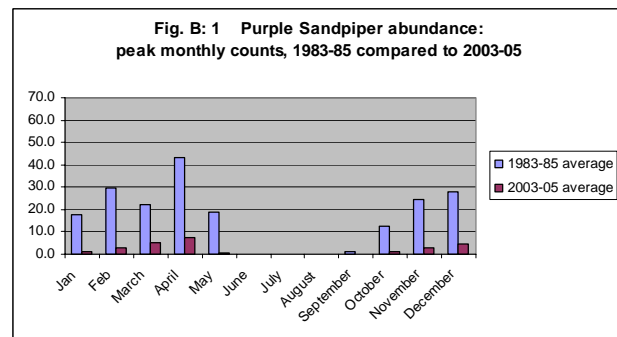
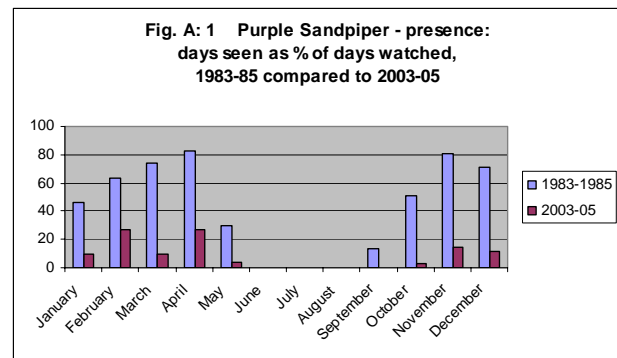
For each species we present three figures:

- Fig. A shows the percentage of days watched in each month in which the relevant species has been seen. In order to iron out eccentricities we have used three-year averages in comparing two sub-periods 20 years apart, 1983-85 and 2003-05. *This measures change in presence.*
- Fig. B shows the average size of the highest monthly counts over the same two three-year sub-periods, which *measures changes in abundance.*
- Fig. C shows two peak counts for each of the 23 years watched. They are the highest counts in: 'spring' and 'autumn' (in fact January-June and July- December). *This chart measures annual changes in abundance* to give a clearer indication of how trends moved over the whole period.



1. Purple Sandpiper. The fall in purple sandpiper numbers is instantly obvious. In the early eighties, despite its cryptic colouration and tendency to stay on the far side of a wave-washed rock, the species could be seen on most days between October and April, with peaks of presence during passage in April and November.

Now it is seen on barely a quarter of the days in February and April, and on 10% or fewer days in the other months. Indications of abundance suggest a fall in the region of 80-90% over twenty years, from a time when peaks of 40-60 occurred during the spring peak and 20-40 during the autumn peak, to the present situation where 5-10 is a big count at any time.



2. Turnstone. The turnstone pattern in several ways resembles that of the previous species, though it has always been more numerous, more obvious in the field, and present over more of the year, June alone being the month when it was unlikely to be found. It still has a presence on

80 percent or more of the days watched in the winter months, only modestly down from the near 100% of days between August and December and again in April of the early eighties. The measures of abundance, however, show that it is not nearly as plentiful as it once was, except in November and December. The peaks of passage have dropped by 50% or more compared to 20 years ago, but when fig. C:2 is inspected it can be seen how there was a clear tendency for spring peaks to rise during the first ten years, increasing from around 60 birds to 140 birds by 1993: peaks are now down to around 25 birds in spring, much as in early winter.

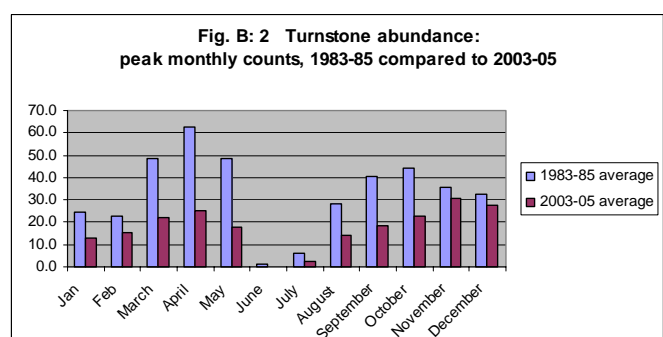
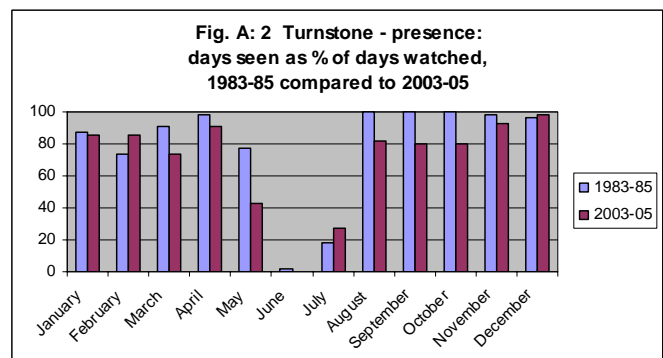
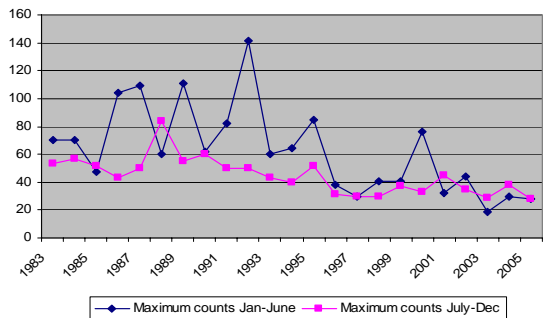


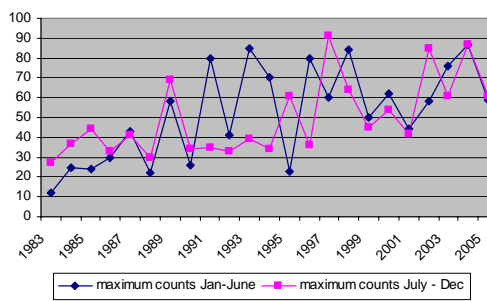
Fig. C: 2 Turnstone abundance: peak counts in spring and autumn, annually, 1983-2005



Redshank. After these rather depressing figures, it is cheering to consider the redshank. The percentage of days measuring presence has not varied very much, which is hardly surprising with such a regular and obvious species that tells you when it is about, i.e. most of the year apart from some weeks in May and June. Even so it is recorded in more days than it once was in

the cold start of the year. The measures of abundance tell a more dramatic story, having increased from a situation where 30 birds was the average maximum in autumn and fewer than 20 in spring, to one where around 60 is regular for eight months of the year. This change was achieved by the mid-nineties with relatively little alteration since.

Fig. C: 3 Redshank abundance: peak counts spring and autumn, annually, 1983-2005



Discussion. How can we best account for these variations? One major local habitat change occurred in 1992-93, when a new sewer outflow was laid in the bay and two older ones closed as part of a general reform of disposal at sea, undertaken by Scottish Water. It has by no means worked perfectly since, as the discharge pipe still leaks an odious brown scum after heavy rain, and then attracts gulls to the pickings, as it regularly used to do. It has, however, made a difference to the average quality of water, and some birds (notably goldeneye) have very much fallen off in numbers at Anstruther as elsewhere along the Fife coast where similar changes have taken place

This change becomes less attractive as an explanation when the C figures are inspected more closely. The increase of redshank was going on for a decade before this happened. The decline in purple sandpipers began at the end of the 1980s. The decline of turnstone comes closest to a correlation with the new pipe, but not very obviously or immediately, and in any case it could not explain an increase in the 1980s.

Alternatively, it could be connected not with a local cause, but with wider changes. The purple sandpipers breed in Scandinavia (we see them depart NE in spring), most of the redshank probably in Iceland (they depart NW), and the turnstone in Greenland or Canada (they also depart NW). We know of no data on these populations which indicate shifting population numbers on the breeding grounds, but such are quite possible.

Finally, climate change could easily be involved in defining the wintering areas. It is believed that far more purple sandpipers overwinter in Norway than used to be the case, and a northward shift from England for Icelandic redshank to bring more of them to our now largely frost-free coast may be similarly involved. It seems somewhat less likely for turnstone, as Greenland and Canada in winter must still be pretty well uninhabitable for them. The latest BTO data suggests a 30% decline on British coasts for turnstone over the last ten years, but stability for redshank.

What we should now do is to compare our data with other data, for example from Tynninghame bay or the Ythan estuary for redshank, with the Lothian and Northumbrian coast for purple sandpipers and turnstone. It is easy to draw the wrong conclusion from one place in isolation, because other sites quite near can show different patterns. We know, for example, that purple sandpipers on the Isle of May six miles away out to sea have an annual peak, usually still of over 100 and sometimes of 200, and this comes in July and August when we have never recorded a single bird. We have a long way to go to understand these patterns of occurrence and change.

Fig A: 3 Redshank presence: days seen as % of days watched, 1983-85 compared to 2003-05

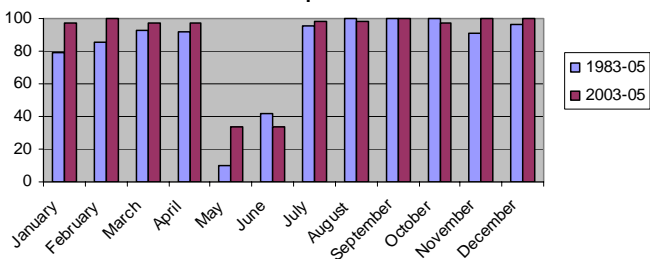
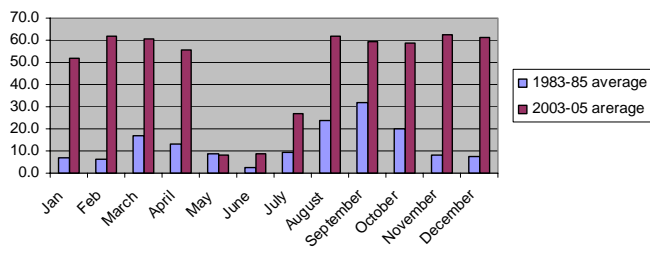


Fig. B: 3 Redshank abundance: peak monthly counts, 1983-85 compared to 2003-05





Butterfly Conservation Scotland 2005 Update

Butterfly Conservation Scotland has focussed on three main projects during 2005. One of their common aims has been to encourage more people to get involved in recording butterflies and moths in Scotland. This article summarises the three projects and some of their recording highlights.

1. Butterflies and Moths mean Business

This project started in September 2004 and runs until December 2005. Its main aim is to raise the profile of butterflies and moths in two areas: Lomond and rural Stirling, and the Cairngorms. A programme of 15 free workshops were held to train volunteers and countryside staff to carry out surveys of both common and rarer species, they were attended by 146 people, occupying 182 places. In addition six workshops were provided for people who work in tourism (e.g. B&B owners, hoteliers, visitor centre staff, countryside rangers, etc.). These gave basic information about local butterflies and where to see them that could readily be passed on to visitors. Other initiatives include producing local butterfly charts, promoting butterfly sites and helping local organisations to develop butterfly trails.

The project is part-financed by the European Community through the Lomond and Rural Stirling, and Cairngorms LEADER+ programmes, the Cairngorms National Park Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage. Until September 2005 this project was managed by Julie Stoneman and subsequently by Hebe Carus. We wish Julie every success in her new job with WWF.

2. Bringing Butterflies, Moths and People together in the Highlands

In April I was appointed on a two-year contract as Highland and Islands Project Officer to implement two new projects. This project comprises around 80% of the workload and is being part-funded by The European Community through the North Highland and WHELK (Lochaber) LEADER+ programmes, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Executive's Biodiversity Action Grants.

The project aims to highlight the importance of butterflies and moths as a significant element of the biodiversity of the Highlands. The Highland region is one of the most under-recorded areas for butterflies and moths, including common species. In its first season the project ran six volunteer workshops aimed at often remote local communities, including Loch Ness, Skye and Lochinver. In addition four demonstration days were hosted for land owners/managers and their advisors, and site advice was delivered to at least 12 sites with key species.

3. Butterflies and Burnet Moths; A Recovery Programme for the Argyll Islands

The Argyll Islands are one of the richest areas for butterflies and moths in the UK, and a stronghold for two UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species, the marsh fritillary and the slender-Scotch burnet. Other key species with important colonies on the

Islands include transparent burnet, narrow-bordered bee hawk moth and argent & sable.

The main aim of this project is to work closely with local communities, farmers, crofters, foresters, landowners and conservation bodies to secure sympathetic land management in order to conserve these important and beautiful insects. To date work has focused on the islands of Lismore and Mull. A successful marsh fritillary day on Lismore focussed on management and the importance of surveying/monitoring for the species to a mixed audience of landowners, advisors and potential butterfly surveyors. A follow up web day and site visits to discuss suitable management at individual sites have also taken place. Whilst on Mull the slender Scotch and transparent burnets have been the focus of attention through targeted survey work and site specific management advice.

This project is part-financed by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund through Nadair 2.

Survey results in 2005

As a result of these projects surveys have focused on the following species; argent & sable, barred tooth-striped, dark bordered beauty, Kentish glory, marsh fritillary, narrow-bordered bee hawk-moth, netted mountain moth, pearl-bordered fritillary, and slender Scotch and transparent burnets. The surveys were designed to provide a better picture of their current distribution and status in Scotland and identify core sites. The highlights of these surveys include:

Argent & Sable *Rheumaptera hastata*¹ There was a further increase in the number of Scottish records in 2005 due to the higher profile that this species has enjoyed over the last two years. Records were received from as far a-field as Sutherland, Inverness-shire and Dumfries and Galloway. We believe argent & sable is fairly widespread in the western half of Scotland but very under-recorded.

Barred-Tooth Striped *Trichopteryx polycommata* Despite increased awareness and targeted fieldwork over the last two years the barred tooth-striped remains elusive in Scotland. It has only been recorded from three sites since 2000 and little is known about its ecology and habitat requirements to help aid discovery of new sites or provide appropriate management advice to improve conditions at currently known sites.

Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth *Hemaris tityus* 2005 was another reasonable year for this species in Scotland with 13 reported sightings mainly from Argyll and Highlands. The highlight is undoubtedly an adult seen in a garden in Melrose, the first record for the Borders since 1911 and another reported from St. Andrews, Fife.

Netted Mountain Moth *Macaria carbonaria* Around 30 people attended a Butterfly Conservation Scotland workshop in Aviemore at the end of April led by Dr Mark Young, focusing in part on netted mountain moth. Sixteen sites were checked and netted mountain moth was found at eleven, including five new, sites. This follows a similar survey conducted last year that discovered four new colonies. It therefore seems even more likely that the remoteness of its habitat combined with visiting lepidopterists visiting only one or two favoured sites has led to this species previously being under-recorded.

Northern Dart *Xestia alpicola* A montane species primarily found at altitudes above 450m. This species was the focus of

¹ See also article in BRISC Recorder News no 53 (April 2004)

National Moth Night 2005 on 9 July but none were reported. However five days later an adult was caught in a light trap south of Tain in Easter Ross and is the first adult recorded for five years and the first 'odd' year record since 1981.

Square-spotted Clay *Xestia rhomboidea* This species was only found at two sites in Scotland in 2005, both in Argyll. This included a new site at Glen Nant as well as Taynish National Nature Reserve, probably Scotland's most regular site. Caterpillar surveys are planned for March 2006 in an attempt to gain an insight into this species' habitat requirements in Scotland.



Damp recorders on Skye

photo Tom Prescott

If you would like to get involved in targeted surveys of Scotland's priority butterflies or moths please get in touch with Dr Tom Prescott,
Highlands and Islands Project Officer
Email: tprescott@butterfly-conservation.org
Tel: 01540 661469

PAST SCOTTISH BIRDS

By W.R.P. Bourne

The past is one of the great unexplored subjects in Scottish ornithology. People have enough difficulty keeping up with current events, where there is a mad race to be first to find all the birds of the world in Scotland, without reading the past literature as well. If one goes back a century, there were a certain number of frauds, leading to a comfortable feeling of superiority and distrust of any old observations. Two centuries ago, people did not know the different plumages of the same species. Three centuries ago only a handful of species called by strange names can be recognised at all. Before that there is not much more than bones. Therefore I have been handed the ungrateful task of dealing with historical matters in the next "Birds of Scotland" (details will be found in the "Archives of Natural History").

The first problem lies in distinguishing when reliable bird records begin. Early classical and mediaeval literate persons (most unlike modern ones) appear to have been scribes who lived indoors, annotating each other's works, and seldom going out of

doors to expose their ignorance to rough practical persons liable to be rude about them. In consequence they produced stories about strange composite beasts, harpies, furies, minotaurs, gryphons, phoenixes, halcyons, unicorns, monsters in lochs and such-like, and got away with it, not least because latterly they usually belonged to the Church, and it was considered blasphemous to doubt them. Few records remain of what more practical people thought of them.

If one knows the background, and goes to more practical people, such as Aristotle in Greece, or Varro in Rome, it may be possible to recognise what they were writing about, but unfortunately no such records remain for Scotland. Here they begin with the introduction of the feudal system, which involved extensive bureaucratic written records of rights and duties, including such things as the protection and provision of hawks for falconry and birds and beasts for the chase and pot, and also romantic literature about birds singing and corbies scavenging corpses, though seldom in useful detail. Details began to accumulate when people started to keep accounts, though unfortunately the accumulations often tend to be inaccessible, unreadable and unmanageable.

Possibly the best example (unearthed by the Smout family) is the domestic accounts for 1525-33 of King James V, whose mother was one of the businesslike Tudors. There is a daily list in dog-Latin of his own estate produce, gifts and purchases. The most spectacular items are many records of "ciconiae", the Latin for storks, though these seem more likely to be herons, which must cast doubt upon the oft-repeated record of storks nesting on St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, in 1416. There are also many records of cranes, formerly dismissed as herons. The prices were erratic, rising before the Christmas and Easter feasts, which may be why a Parliament of his daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, put them in order (by now in Scots) in 1551. Sadly there seem to be no records from James V's voyage around Scotland in 1540.

One wonders how many similar records lie unpublished in the attics and vaults of the stately homes of Scotland. Some which have reached the light of day relate to the horrible slaughter of predators when the sheep-farms that followed the Highland clearances were converted to sporting estates in the nineteenth century. While conservationists have long been outraged by this, less attention has been paid to its marginal effects. Thus as red grouse increased they became infested with parasitic worms, and their chicks infected with bacteria and tick-borne louping-ill virus caught from sheep, not nice things to eat. There was an increase of rabbits and small birds (attributed to reforestation), and seven species of duck, three of grebes, the woodcock and black-tailed godwit bred for the first time in Scotland. Attempts to protect predators may help explain a recent reversal of these trends.

Periodically one also encounters hints of past changes in the old literature that have been ignored. Thus in the late seventeenth century Martin Martin, a good observer for that time who came from Skye, describes hooded crows in Shetland as if they were something remarkable. Can this imply a past change in the distribution of black and grey crows opposite to the present one? And in 1769 Thomas Pennant, with experience in Scandinavia, reported the presence of pine grosbeaks and whimbrel in Upper Deeside. Was this merely a misidentification of crossbills and curlew, or has there been a change in distribution here as well? Unfortunately, like the song the sirens sang, these are no longer open to investigation.

2006 BRISC CONFERENCE – WETLANDS

The next BRISC conference is to be held in the Scottish Borders at the magnificent Tweed Horizons Centre situated at Newtown St Boswells on a terrace overlooking the Tweed. The theme for 2006 is Wetlands. The importance of wetlands is becoming increasingly recognised, not just as a valuable resource for biodiversity but also as a means of land management, for example in flood prevention or control of diffuse pollution. The new payment schemes to farmers under Land Management Contracts offers incentives for the management and creation of wetlands. The conference therefore represents a timely opportunity to learn more about wetland habitats and recording.

Keynote speakers include Stuart Brooks of SWT, and Andrew McBride from SNH who will give an overview of wetlands habitats in Scotland and how these are being monitored. Dave Colvill of SEPA will then explain how rivers and still waters are sampled routinely to indicate water quality. Looking to the future, Andy Tharme from Scottish Borders Council will share some of the early results from the Borders Wetlands Vision project, which aims to provide opportunity mapping to inform a number of wetland projects in the Borders, including habitat creation.

Afternoon speakers will deal with freshwater species and recording to bring a more applied touch to the proceedings.

Delegates then have an opportunity to visit the nationally important wetlands at nearby Whitlaw Mosses NNR, which provide a number of fen, carr and grassland habitats, noted botanically and for their assemblages of water beetles, amongst other things.

All this, including the BRISC AGM and Grand Raffle, can be yours for a very reasonable price of £12 for BRISC members, which includes lunch, thanks to generous sponsorship from Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Natural Heritage.

For those wishing to make a weekend of it, Scottish Borders Biological Recorders' Group will be hosting a freshwater sampling and identification day on Sunday 9 April, open to all. So bring your wellies and get stuck in, and do not forget to mark this weekend in your diary.

Jon Mercer

WILDLIFE COUNTS PROJECT



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The BRISC Wildlife Counts Project is being organised by the recently appointed project officer, Dr Claire McSorley, and is based at BTCV Scotland in Stirling. Claire spent the last four years working as a Seabird Ecologist for the Joint Nature

Conservation Committee (JNCC) in Aberdeen. This job took her to many far-flung UK islands including Rum, Fetlar, Islay, Bardsey, Skomer and Hoy, to survey seabirds from boats, land and even planes! Prior to this Claire did a PhD at Durham University, and spent much of her time battling through Kielder Forest, Northumberland, surveying songbirds. During this time, Claire went to St Kilda and Foula to survey Bonxies (great skuas), where her height, or lack of it, was a great advantage in avoiding being dive-bombed by these aggressive birds! Claire has also carried out work on voles, tawny owls, Trinidadian tree frogs and oak egg moth.

The BRISC Wildlife Counts Project aims to introduce people to observing and studying wildlife. We hope that for some participants this introduction will develop into a lifelong interest. We will offer hands-on experience, tools and information to people in communities throughout central Scotland who have little or no experience of biological recording, but with an interest in wildlife. In an area of high biological diversity, we hope to engage more people in becoming biological recorders, thus helping them to safeguard the future of wildlife in their local area.

The Project will deliver an integrated programme of FREE events, including indoor and outdoor workshops to help participants learn how to identify and record the animals and plants around them. Participants will be encouraged to attend the full programme of events.

The initial plan for this two-year project was to conduct indoor theoretical workshops during the winter and outdoor hands-on events in the spring and summer. However, this remit has changed. The indoor and outdoor events will run close together in time, starting in spring 2006 and running until the end of summer 2007, so that momentum and coherence are maintained.

The project will be carried out in three areas, namely Falkirk, Stirling and North Lanarkshire, with the aspiration that this model may be used across Scotland. Claire has made contact with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Officers in the three local authorities and is liaising closely with other council staff, such as the Ranger service, and also with Scottish Wildlife Trust. We hope to link up with any existing events run by the councils, SWT, SNH and other wildlife groups to ensure we get as large a range of potential participants as possible.

Local experts, with the help of Claire and existing recorders acting as volunteer mentors, will carry out the training. We will provide resources to participants, such as recording equipment, tools, identification guides and also supporting background information, necessary for carrying out biological recording. We will teach participants why and how they record species and habitats, using standard methods and recording forms. The results will be widely disseminated throughout the communities and central Scotland. Once trained to a sufficient standard, the records that participants collect will contribute to national and local recording schemes, such as the National Biodiversity Network (<http://www.searchnbn.net/>) and LBAPs (<http://www.ukbap.org.uk/>). The Project will help to establish three self-sustaining Local Wildlife Recording Forums as a means to continue to support biological recording, promote the sharing of skills and knowledge, and ensure common standards are maintained.

We will assess the three council areas to find the most appropriate sites and communities to carry out this project, including local parks,

greenspaces, wildlife sites and SSSIs. A full list of the sites, communities and dates will be released at a later date on the BRISC website (<http://www.brisec.org.uk/>), so please keep checking it. In the meantime, Claire welcomes any queries from interested people so please do not hesitate to contact her on: brisc-wcp@btcv.org.uk or phone her on 01786 474 061.

The project is supported by The Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage, Falkirk Environment Trust, Falkirk Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council, and BTCV Scotland.

LRC PAGE

Biodiversity Data Improving Management and Delivery



A forum for Local Records Centres 2005

The NFBR's, now annual, conference for LRCs was held in Edinburgh over two days (7-8 November) last autumn. Over 65 people attended with over 30 local records centres represented from across the UK. A third of all delegates came from Scotland and Scottish LRCs were out in force with most Centres represented by someone for at least part of the conference. Representatives from Forestry Commission (Scotland) and SNH also attended. Obviously the conference had a UK feel – and most presentations reflected the 'country of origin'. So although there was no specific Scottish angle to the conference there was plenty to be learnt with around 15 workshops and presentations over the two days as well as plenty of informal time for networking and discussions.

On the technical side of running a Records Centre two related sessions had a considerable impact on delegates. Firstly Philippa Burrell from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) looked at how the Centre had recently developed and documented detailed systems for managing the flow of data through the Centre. This was an impressive piece of work that I know some LRCs in Scotland have yet to get a real handle on. Philippa gave us a rapid run through of how they log all data received, acknowledge receipt with data owners, and monitor the flow of data through data checking, verification, computerisation and filing. Information on TVERC systems can be found on their website at www.tverc.org (look under Local Records Centre).

Bob Saville, Lothian Wildlife Information Centre (LWIC), led a follow-on session looking at the verification of species data, using a newly developed system by LWIC as a starting point for discussion. This system uses local experts to check records and records exactly what checks have been made. The workshop agreed proposals that might be suitable for incorporation in Recorder 6 as standard terminology to enable sharing of information on verification of records.

Looking at the user interface, Jon Mercer, Scottish Borders Biological Records Centre (SBBRC), gave a presentation on the biodiversity risk assessment of local plan sites with a detailed demonstration of a major user-orientated analysis of an LRC's data-holdings. He showed how, providing the Centre has done its background work on collating and validating data, an LRC can become an invaluable tool in helping local authorities be more proactive in taking biodiversity into account in the early stages of planning.

Perhaps the most crucial outcome of the conference was the discussion on the formation of an Association for Local Records Centres. Discussion started in the bar on the Monday night (some of the ideas might have been a little wayward at this point!) but a more formal session on the second day took these ideas forward and came up with an outline structure and priorities for an association that would support and represent LRCs, facilitate their development, encourage networking and provide professional standards for the Centres and their personnel to work to. Effectively the association (in its embryonic form) came into existence at the conference and a committee was established to develop a plan and structure for the new Association - as well as to come up with a good name! There are three Scottish representatives on this committee – myself, Nadine Russell (Orkney BRC) and Alastair Sommerville (LWIC). No doubt we will be in touch as work progresses on this but if you have any ideas do get in touch with one of us.

A full report of the conference will be posted on the NFBR website (www.nfbr.org.uk) in the new year.

Sara Hawkswell
sara@lothianwildlife.co.uk

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE

Nick Littlewood

NESBReC is delighted to announce the appointed Jackie Lawrie as the Project Assistant for 'Promoting Biodiversity in North East Scotland Project'. Jackie, who had been working for the project as a Habitat Surveyor over the summer months, took over the post in October. She replaces Isobel Davidson who has moved on to a post at Aberdeenshire Council in which she retains regular contact with NESBReC. Jackie will co-ordinate the Integrated Habitat Survey project and organise our program of training courses for biological recorders and the annual Recorder's Forum in March. She is a keen all-round naturalist and brings with her a wealth of experience in habitat survey and biological training from a variety of ecological posts including having managed a Scottish Wildlife Trust Biological Survey team for a number of years. When not working or looking after her young family, Jackie is an avid organic gardener.

The previous issue of BRISC announced NESBReC's new address. This is repeated below and should be used for ALL postal correspondence:

NESBReC, University of Aberdeen,
23 St Machar Drive, Aberdeen, AB24 3RY.
Email: nesbrec@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

IT CORNER

The Design Project for Recorder Web

Charles Copp, NFBR Chairman

This paper describes the design work that has been carried out on an exciting extension to *Recorder 6* that will allow people to record and access their records over the Internet via a web browser. The principle behind the design work was to create a flexible set of tools that can be used to create on-line personalised recording cards for a wide range of users including individual specialists, species recording cards for local surveys (e.g. a local flora) and simple graphical recording interfaces for promoting public participation (e.g. with pictures of common species).

observations and specimen collections across the whole range of natural sciences. For example, specimens of fossils, minerals and rocks can be catalogued and their field gathering information also recorded and linked to field gathered data such as measured sections. The new Internet module, currently called *Recorder Web*, adds interactive Internet access to this capability.

Recorder Web is an Internet based extension of *Recorder 6* and is intended to address the following needs:

- The need for a flexible toolkit for organisations seeking to set up a website for data input and reporting linked to *Recorder*. This includes museums or LRCs setting up simple recording front-ends for school age visitors and other members of the public as well as more specialised services for naturalists.
- Meeting the need for an on-line biodiversity data entry system for individuals who do not wish to use or do not have access to the desktop version of *Recorder*.
- Making simple individualised reporting and distribution mapping available for users without any of the complexities of desktop *Recorder*.

The design team comprised Charles Copp, Stuart Ball of JNCC, Alistair McClean of Sheffield Museum, staff from the Luxembourg National Museum of Natural History and staff of Dorset Software Limited (the company responsible for building *Recorder*). The design project was funded by the Luxembourg National Museum of Natural History with contributions in time and travel from JNCC and Sheffield Museums.

Recorder 6 and *Recorder Web* constitute a powerful piece of software that is intended to run on Microsoft SQL Server database. For the web software to run, the server installation also requires Microsoft Internet Information Services and .Net Framework version 1.1.

Recorder Web interfaces to the *Recorder 6* Quick Data Entry system. The Quick Entry system allows the creation and use of data entry templates to enter both specimens and observation data. Data entered in the quick entry system are not posted into the main

database until they have been checked and validated, making it ideal for quarantining data entered on the web. Creation of data entry forms and reviewing of data entered on the web is performed by the system administrator, using the *Recorder* Quick Entry system.

The proposed system is configurable for different types of user. Most users will log in to their own account, which holds only their records, private to them and the system administrator. The user can add or edit records for as long as they like before submitting them. Once submitted, the records are passed through the standard LRC and *Recorder* validation methods and imported into the main

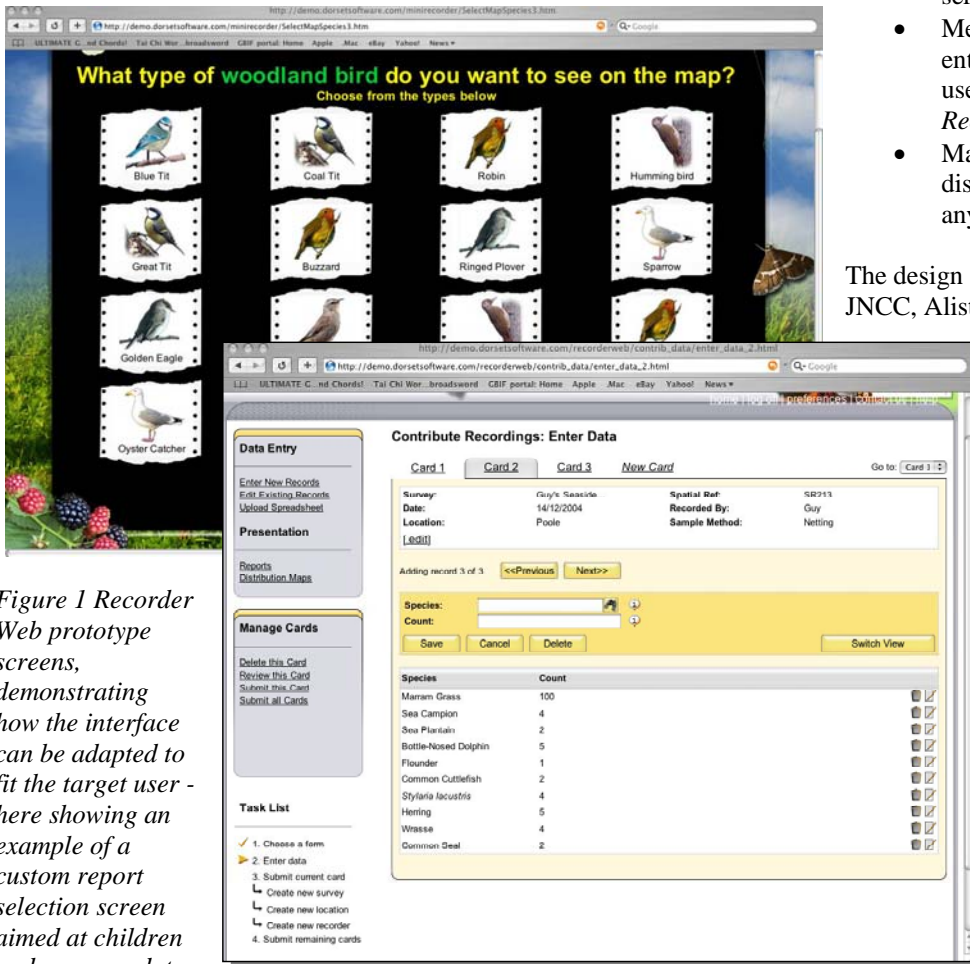


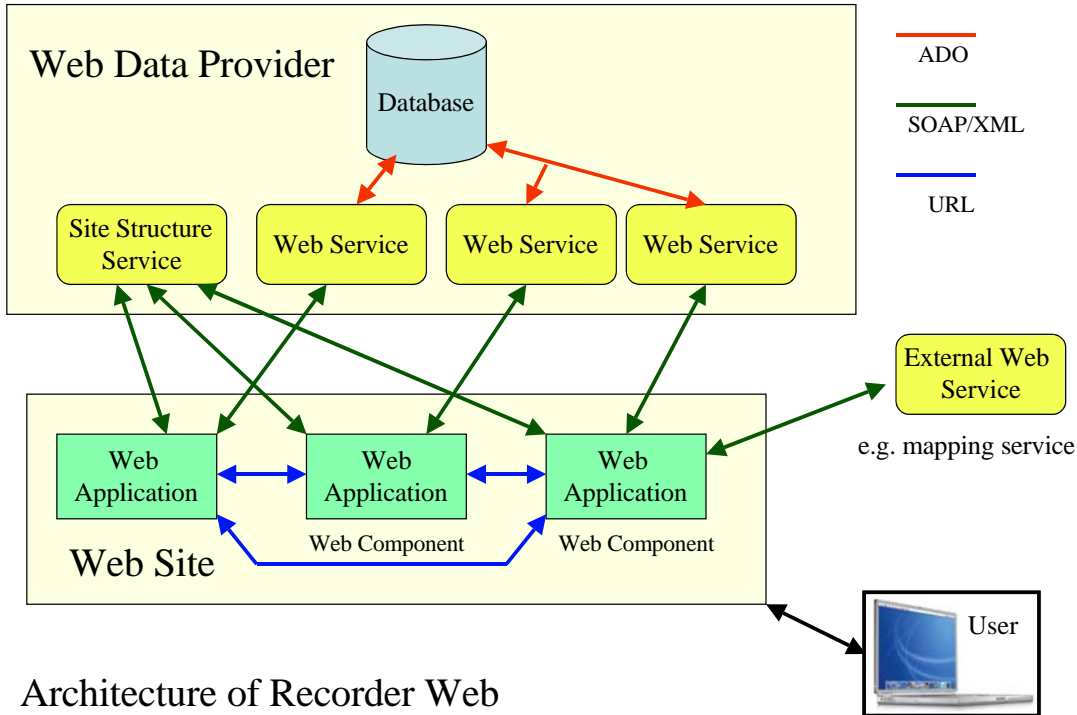
Figure 1 Recorder Web prototype screens, demonstrating how the interface can be adapted to fit the target user - here showing an example of a custom report selection screen aimed at children and a survey data entry card that might be used by naturalists. [Yes, we know the taxonomy is dubious – it was a programmer's prototype!]

Recorder 6 is the latest, more powerful version of *Recorder*, aimed at Local Record Centre and equivalent use. The *Recorder* application supports so-called addins, which are extra modules that extend its functionality. In Luxembourg's National Museum of Natural History, an addin is used to extend Recorder into a powerful collections management tool (the Collections Module), and to enable the recording of earth science field observations. It is now possible to offer a completely integrated system for capturing and managing information from both field

LRC/Museum database. Users can still access submitted records for reporting purposes.

Recorder Web uses a recording card metaphor, that is, each user may be involved in one or more surveys and each survey is represented by a series of cards, displayed on screen as a series of tab headings (see Figure 1). For field records, each card represents one recording event. Record cards can be viewed either in spreadsheet format or as fields on a form. One useful feature is that record cards can be used off-line, which creates a spreadsheet file that can be imported into *Web Recorder* when convenient. This is good for users who do not have broadband access and opens up the potential for entry of records on hand-held computers or PDAs in the field.

To the user, *Recorder Web* appears as a single web site, although technically it is a composite of several web applications, each supported by a number of web services. The following diagram (Figure 2) illustrates how the parts relate to each other. This certainly looks very complicated and is the reason why the cost of building *Recorder Web* will be more than might be expected (people tend to think it entails nothing more than creating a few web forms). It is also the reason why *Recorder Web* will be so powerful and flexible. It will have access to all the validation routines and dictionaries of Recorder but will be very flexible in the way it is set up and used, allowing for unlimited numbers of recording forms designed for different surveys or even individuals and options to link to other outside web services such as different mapping services or other on-line databases.



Architecture of Recorder Web

Figure 2 Recorder Web will be a 'server-side' application, which means the on-line user will not have to have any software loaded on their machine other than a web browser (of their choice). The user communicates with the Recorder quick data entry system and the main database through inter-connected web pages that call programmes (web services) able to send and receive data.

The concept is that an LRC or museum will be able to set its own look and feel to its web site and probably have more than one interface, e.g. one for staff, one for confident specialist recorders and another for simple data gathering from the public or simple surveys. Different jobs are handled by web applications (pages), such as one that handles secure logging in, another that handles recording cards, another for printed reports and another for presenting distribution maps. These applications send messages and data to web services that handle the data or provide responses, e.g. a distribution map of the data that a user has just entered overlain onto a map of what is already on the LRC database and perhaps national data derived from the NBN Gateway. A separate site structure service keeps a tag on all the services that are on the site and which ones are available to the user. The ordinary user sees none of this, only a single web site that is tailored to their needs.

For very simple displays and data gathering exercises, a museum, for instance, might have a touch-screen display with pictures and icons such that visitors will not be aware that they are using a complex database at all. This approach will be piloted in Sheffield Museums in their forthcoming new galleries where visitors will be able to locate places of interest on a map and see what occurs there.

Recorder Web will have simple reporting capabilities built in but specialist reports and analyses can be created, stored, and then linked to specific surveys or types of data. In this way, all users will have access to basic universal reports (e.g. species for a site or sites for a species) but there is the opportunity to develop bespoke products, deliverable over the web (e.g. monthly bird reports, annual butterfly atlas, phenological analyses, etc.). Basic mapping will be included (see Figure 3) with the ability to change base maps and

scales and use of different mapping icons. Because *Recorder Web* uses web services, it will be possible to extend the mapping functionality by calling external web GIS and mapping services to display a whole variety of map types and allowing a degree of on-line GIS analysis of data.

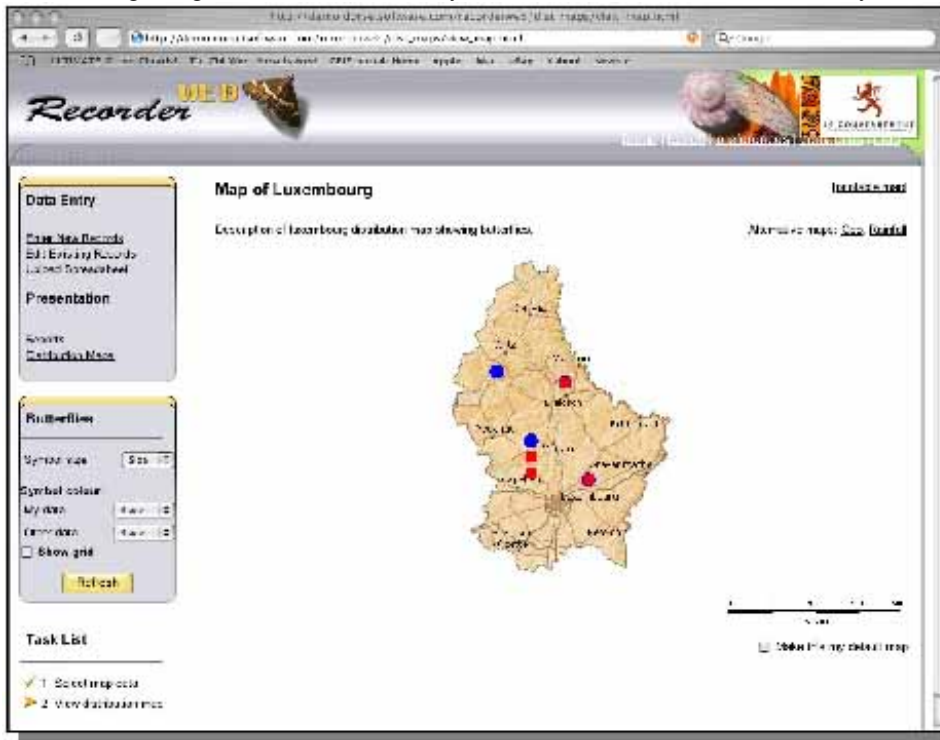


Figure 3 Recorder Web prototype map report showing controls on the left hand side and a zoom-able map on the right. A menu allows the changing of the base map e.g. to a geological one and the user can control size and colour of icons.

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BOOK REVIEW

Porley, R. & Hodgetts, N. (2005) Mosses and Liverworts. The New Naturalist Library. Collins (HarperCollins Publishers).

ISBN 0-00-717400-4; pbk £25.00

We need more people to take an interest in our mosses and liverworts. Like many other groups of 'difficult to identify' organisms, mosses and liverworts have a small band of devotees to which there is a very slow recruitment rate and where taxonomic expertise is concentrated in a very few individuals. There has always been a strong amateur element in this coterie but the source of taxonomic expertise in the past was usually the traditional academic system. This is no longer the case as increasingly the universities turn out graduates with little knowledge of whole organisms. On the fieldwork courses I help to run it is not uncommon for the biology teacher bringing the school group to be unable to identify even the most common plants and invertebrates. So the kids have no chance of picking up the knowledge that us older 'children' think of as 'common'. The source of

When will we get it?

The design work is all done and all we have to do now is pay to have it built – not such a small task, as professional programming and testing for applications of this complexity costs many thousands of pounds. Sheffield Museums are

taking a step with the building of a specific public gallery version (which will not include the full tool-kit capability) and Luxembourg National Museum of Natural History has applied for funding for the main work. We are of course, open to offers from anyone who would like to be part of the project. The project is a collaborative one and the more people involved in funding and testing it, the better it will be, and the greater the chance it has of a sustainable future.

I think this piece of software is a very important one. It represents the future for collaborative on-line recording and is where the *Recorder* project needs to be heading. *Recorder 2002* and *Recorder 6* are just too complex and intimidating for ordinary users and its support has been woeful. It is however, the software that serious collators of diverse data (i.e. LRCs and Museums) should be using, because it is based on

NBN standards and was designed for the purpose. *Recorder Web* will link in to all that power but provide users with a simple, personalised interface and it will not even need to be loaded on their machines.

expertise for many 'difficult groups' is now largely outside of the academic system, from those whose initial interest becomes an enthusiasm. And this is where I hope this important book will help, kindling and sustaining this enthusiasm and providing some relief from the struggle with the traditional floras, which up to now have been the only readily available source of information.

We have a wonderful moss and liverwort flora in Scotland and anyone who visits a rocky west coast woodland or the mires of Caithness cannot fail to be impressed by both the sheer biomass of 'moss' and the different colours and textures of the many species involved. Now, at last, we have a book that can put this obvious abundance and diversity into context. Ron Porley and Nick Hodgetts have produced an excellent text that has plugged an obvious gap in the New Naturalist series and in doing so has provided us with the first general account of our moss and liverwort flora in all its glory. It is a big plug too, with some 450 pages of text and some excellent photos; it is probably a book to be dipped into rather than read at one sitting.

The layout of the book is workmanlike with a set of introductory chapters in the first 100 or so pages, giving an overview of what bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts) are, their place in the history of land plants, their ecological roles, how they get about and just why Britain has such a diverse and internationally important bryophyte flora. This is followed by a series of chapters on a range of different habitats that have interesting mosses and liverworts, from the mundane (but important) man-made habitats of streets, walls, fields and reservoir margins, through woodland and mire to our magnificent montane flora. The section on conservation could have been longer and there was an opportunity here to make more people aware, especially policy makers, of the threat posed by invasive *Rhododendron*. In international terms, the most important part of our bryophyte flora is the Atlantic or oceanic element and, setting aside global climatic changes, the single greatest threat to this flora is *Rhododendron*. This is a huge problem both for the bryophytes and for those who seek to deal with the invasion, as the area affected is increasing exponentially.

The text is accessible and readable, not always an easy task when dealing with complex topics and a prodigious amount of information, particularly where descriptions of some habitats involve long lists of Latin names. On this latter topic, the authors have made the sensible decision to stick to scientific names rather than use the recently invented 'common names', many of which are just awful. As is pointed out in the book, Latin names have never been a problem for gardeners. Some of the introductory chapters are pretty heavy going for those seeking a gentle introduction, particularly sections on physiology and on phylogeny, the latter, currently an area of much academic activity, being particularly esoteric. These intimidating bits are quite short and can easily be skimmed through but there are interesting nuggets buried throughout so it is worth persevering. A nice touch is to have this text interspersed, at suitable points, with potted histories of notable bryologists from the past, from the 18th century Johannes Hedwig to the 20th century Alan Crundwell, a familiar figure to many in Scotland from his long tenure at Glasgow University.

The meat of the book is the description of the various habitats and this is extremely thorough and remarkably up to date, a difficult task with a book that has had a long gestation. The tone of the text changes here and it is not difficult to guess that both authors are keen field botanists. Under each habitat there is a wealth of information on the sorts of places to visit and plants that you are likely to see there, both common and rare. The authors had to make some hard choices here about what to include within each section and, probably inevitably for someone immersed in Scottish plants, I feel there is a slight southern bias. I am not sure I would have given equal space to man-made habitats and the mountains!

The photographs are a delight. They are virtually all in colour and mostly show species in close-up, giving a feel for the diversity of form and colour amongst the mosses and

liverworts. A few more shots of typical habitats might have been instructive: there is no picture of an 'Atlantic' ravine, for example. The final picture is a classic of bryologists in action! It is most definitely not an identification book but the habitat accounts may well point you in the right direction and the numerous pictures may assist in the process. This is a good book and one that I hope will enthuse more people to get out to interesting places and begin to recognise some of the beautiful bryophytes that grow there. Do read it.

Gordon Rothero

DIVER SURVEYS – RECORDERS WANTED!

Both black-throated and red-throated divers will be surveyed next year under the SCARRABS programme. Every loch known to have been occupied by black-throats now, recently or historical, will be surveyed during May and June plus a random selection of apparently unoccupied lochs. Red-throats will be surveyed using a randomised selection of 5km squares through the known range, with Orkney and Shetland receiving complete coverage. Obviously North Scotland region will have the greatest coverage, especially for black-throats.

As a result a large number of fieldworkers will be required, possibly as many as 15. Those working on black-throats will be employed for around 2 months and those on red-throats for 3 months. All will be employed as Research Assistants.

Formal applications should be made to Anita McClune at anita.mcclune@rspb.org.uk

Harlequin ladybird survey update

The arrival in UK of this alien invasive species was covered in *BRISC Recorder News* issue no 54 and in more detail in issue no 57.

Please visit www.harlequin-survey.org to learn more about this unwelcome and potentially seriously destructive species and see a map of records showing how far it has spread in 2005. The survey's website also has a link to the UK ladybird-survey site, which offers lots of useful information and photographs of all the UK ladybird species.

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS 17 MARCH 2006

Please send all material – preferably in electronic format to Anne-Marie Smout email amsmout@aol.com or by post to Chesterhill, Shore Road, Anstruther, Fife KY10 3DZ – tel 01333 310330