

GWENT RECORDERS' FORUM 2007

The Boardroom, Caerleon Campus, University of Wales
College Newport
Saturday 20th January 2007

Welcome

The day was opened and the Chairman, Martin Anthoney (MA) welcomed everybody to the 7th Gwent Recorders' Forum Meeting. The minutes from the previous Forum were agreed, though it was mentioned that the Toad tunnel installation at Bulmore Road, Caerleon, might have fallen through.

Apologies:

Ade Williams
Adrian & Elsa Wood
Alan Williams
Bill Purvis
Debbie Scott (RSPB)
Graham Harris
Hugh Dixon (Consultant: Halcrow)
Hugh Horrex
Jan Kinchington
Kerry Rogers
Matthew Harris
Michael Cullen
Peter Sturgess (Consultant: Hyder)
Sarah Long
Stephanie Tyler
Shelley Evans

SEWBReC Update (Adam Rowe, SEWBReC)

Changes since last year were highlighted. In particular, Wales now has full LRC coverage, with Cofnod (North Wales) and the West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre (WWBIC) currently in the development stages and due to go live this year. SEWBReC has also reached a new milestone with its 10th Service Level Agreement (SLA), and also now has more than 20 signed data exchange agreements in place.

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LBAP Updates

Monmouthshire (Kate Stinchcombe)

Gave an update on the 2006/7 LBAP compilation. New LBAP habitats will include: "Boundary & linear features"; "Built Environment & Urban Habitats" (will cover barns, industrial estates, housing estates etc); "Heathland & moorland" (to be revised to "Heathland", as there is no moorland outside of the Brecon Beacons National Park); and "Ancient veteran trees & traditional orchards". The new SAPs are likely to include one or two Lepidoptera. Current gaps in SAP group coverage: Fish, Fungi, Invertebrates, Lichens, Liverworts, Mosses, Slime moulds. Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) are only represented by grassland at the moment, so there is a need to include other habitats.

Recorders were encouraged to provide input where possible in suggesting new SINC, letting the Biodiversity Assistant know about any interesting progress / projects to facilitate reporting back to a UK level via the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS), and publicising recording groups through the LBAP summary document. Recorders were also invited to advertise events and recorder news etc on the Monmouthshire Biodiversity Partnership website. <http://www.monmouthshiregreenweb.co.uk/biodiversitypartnership/index.html>

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Newport (Celina Gio-Batta)

Celina is in post whilst Dolores Byrne is on maternity leave. However, as the post is largely taken up with Development Control (c.95%), this leaves only 5% of her time for LBAP activities. This is being put forward to managers; It is now recognized that two posts are needed, so hopefully we can expect to see a change in future.

Current progress has involved working with the Arena Network's Green Dragon Scheme. The new Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 means that all local authorities and other public bodies have a statutory duty to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions from the 1st October 2006. The duty aims to raise the profile of biodiversity across the public sector and ensure that biodiversity becomes a natural consideration in policy and decision-making. The Welsh Assembly is due to come in in March.

Cardiff (Vaughan Grantham)

Talked about the review of SINC under the new regional SINC criteria; 20 new SINC designations have been generated as a result. The Council has produced Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to provide further detail on policies and proposals in development plans, and covers designated sites and protected species. Species Action Plans are being reviewed in line with SMART targets for protected species, which have been disaggregated to a Wales level. Two generic Action Plans are being produced: "Awareness Raising" and "Wildlife Corridors".

Signage has been provided at Heath Park Pond regarding Great Crested Newts, with the aim of getting people to realize the dangers of releasing non-native species (such as goldfish). The Woodland Biodiversity Project has improved the management of some local woodlands. A waxcap survey has added 100 records to the Cardiff database. Finally, it was announced that a dormouse has been found in one of the nest tubes!

Following this, Trevor Evans enquired about accessing the docks for recording. Two Chiding Pink plants and Grayling have been found on the south side of Longships Road, but it has been very difficult to gain access permission from the landowners.

Caerphilly (Margaret Iles)

Margaret is in post whilst Melanie Sutherland is seconded to the Local Development Plan (LDP). 17th December saw a Wildlife SOS day at Parc Penallta, with scrub clearance for the Marsh Fritillary. The RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch event will be held at Parc Cwm Darran on 27th January, and another Wildlife SOS will be held on 18th February, clearing invading birch from Caerphilly Common. Surveys for dormice found that they were present in 8 out of 10 squares. Management of Halt Pond at Rudry and creation of satellite ponds for Great Crested Newts has been postponed due to a delay with the planning application and bad weather. The project will be taken up again around September/October time once the area has dried out. They are working with the Highways & Parks Services to better manage hedgerows, verges and woodchip piles for biodiversity. There is a pilot study looking at flailing methods for 15 hedgerows, plans for an audit to find high quality verges, and ideas for ways in which to use woodchip are being discussed, to avoid piles being left to stifle the roadside wildflowers.

Habitat and Species sub-groups meetings and progress were discussed. The Birds Species sub-group, and the Commons Habitat sub-group have good numbers of proactive members, but both the Grasslands and Wildlife Corridors sub-groups are in need of new recruits.

Blaenau Gwent (Deborah Beeson)

Since last year, Blaenau Gwent have set up a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with SEWBReC, and DB encouraged recorders to submit their records to the record centre to ensure that they were picked up during the planning process. An expert panel meeting in Spring will look at the 42 candidate SINC sites which have been put forward. The proposed SINC sites will then be taken to a Council Committee for approval this summer. The Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme (BAGS) is the main mechanism for delivering LBAP targets on habitat creation, restoration & enhancement. 81 site visits have been made, with detailed advice given, and 26 grants have been awarded benefiting LBAP habitats and species across Blaenau Gwent. The scheme will be reprofiled this year to include bigger grants up to £4k, and will continue until June 2008.

“Go Wild!”, which was held at Parc Bryn Bach on 10 June 2006 during Wales Biodiversity Week, was a great success, and will be back in Blaenau Gwent in 2008. In 2007, the event will be held in Caerphilly on June 9th. The “SNAP!” Biodiversity Photographic Competition has also been a great success, with considerably more entries than the previous year, and entries to a very high standard in the age 18+ category. The competition aims to raise awareness of local biodiversity, and additionally generates species records which can be fed back to SEWBReC. The winning picture was a kingfisher by Andrew Roberts..



Biodiversity Assistant Mel Stewart left in November 2006. New Officer Morag Sinton due to start on 19th February 2007. Heads of Valleys Lapwing Conservation Project commenced in September 2006, with a new officer, Lynne Osgathorpe, in post till March 2009 based at BGCBC. They will be creating a sustainable network of lapwing breeding sites with appropriate management. Please send Lynne your lapwing records.

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Torfaen (Kris Roberts)

CCW's Phase 1 survey has been updated with field survey. This information will be incorporated into the Local Development Plan (LDP). They are also involved with advising the Strategic Planning Scheme and putting together Supplementary Planning Guidance. Over 100 Wildlife Sites have been designated. Wildlife Sites will be used to link up SSSIs and LNRs, thus improving wildlife corridors. The Waterways for Life Partnership has been a way to involve the community, and the aim is to link this in with the Living Landmarks Programme. The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal restoration project is underway, with a three year work programme in place. Changes will be made to improve the canal for biodiversity, for example mowing the tow-path less frequently, and reducing weed cover to benefit Daubenton's bats. Recorders were requested to submit records where possible for this area to inform the process, particularly relating to the abandoned southern section connecting where the canal connects with The Usk.

MA expressed thanks to LBAP Officers for their presentations.

KEY-NOTE SPEECH

The State of Biological Recording in Wales: A personal view (Ray Woods [Plantlife])

Talked about the difficulties of recording accurately the diversity of the biological world, including elements like niche/habitat, in order that records can be traced back should a future change in taxonomy occur. He talked about the importance of keeping a herbarium, citing the example of a lichen community in West Wales which has since diminished, yet preserved fruiting material allows us to picture it before the increase in atmospheric pollution. Concerns included how this additional information could be incorporated into electronic databases, so that it isn't forgotten about or inadvertently lost.

He also discussed how records of distribution have informed changes in policy, with the level of protection afforded by SSSIs increasing, and the introduction of the Wildlife & Countryside Act and Agri-Environment Schemes.

The value of checklists was discussed, underlining the need to publish updated lists as frequently as possible (as per the British Bryological Society, which uses the web as a medium to publish frequent updates). If lists are produced only every 5-10 years, as is the case for British Lichen Society, then any species name which is changed and then revoked during the interim will never appear on any checklist and will inevitably cause future problems with interpretation. There is also a need to create "pseudo-species" in Recorder, to enable species to be entered accurately if the records date back to before a species-split occurred. Ray would also like to see Local Record Centres (LRCs) support local flora productions and updates.

He summarized that it was important to record as well as possible in order to ensure informed decision making in future, with reference to the situation at Llanishen Reservoir where the court case against the proposed development has relied upon good site data from more than one recorder over a number of years.

RECORDERS' UPDATES

New Publications: Flora of Monmouthshire & Rare Plants in Gwent (Trevor Evans)

The Flora of Monmouthshire will have descriptions of 1800 species with distribution maps, and TE hopes to include some pictures of the plants as well. It was calculated that the average number of species was 284 per tetrad, or 293 per complete hectad.

Rare Plants in Gwent will include species descriptions & distribution maps, and will cover some 274 plant species under threat in Gwent. These include *Salvia pratensis* (Meadow Clary), which has been reduced from 13 plants to two; *Euphorbia serrulata* (Tintern Spurge), which likes disturbed soils and was seen growing in profusion in 2005 after felling in a forestry plantation; *Sorbus anglica* (a Whitebeam), which was found on a railway cutting in Chepstow; and *Asplenium trichomanes* subsp. *pachyrachis* (Maidenhair Spleenwort), a glaucous form of the fern, with overlapping pinnules.

Gwent Grassland Initiative (Gemma Bode)

Local Wildlife Sites:

- Non-statutory/voluntary designation
- Are the most important places for wildlife outside the network of statutorily protected sites e.g. SSSI's
- Identify areas important for local wildlife
- Identified using The Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales



Specific aims:

1. Identify species-rich grassland Wildlife Sites throughout Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire.
2. Target landowners providing quality advice, encouraging pride and providing support for positive grassland management.
3. Creation/restoration of species-rich meadows to link fragmented sites.
4. Ensure value and vulnerability of grasslands receive full recognition by decision makers and potential funding organizations.

Results expected by 2008:

- To halt further losses of our species-rich grasslands.
- To have at least 300ha of grassland in favourable long term management.
- To have begun species-rich grassland restoration on a further 100ha.

- To have a comprehensive network of grassland Wildlife Sites & a register of landowners.
- Protection of important grasslands through the Wildlife Sites System.
- Education of a wide audience about the importance of grasslands for wildlife.
- Full recognition of the value and vulnerability of grasslands by key organizations.

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Blaenau-Gwent Badger Survey Update (Dave Cooksey)

Wasn't finding any signs of badgers due to the lack of loose soil in the area. Therefore changed his search criteria, looking under rock outcrops. He has now found that there are three specific areas with badgers in Blaenau-Gwent. There seems to be some correlation with re-claimed coaltips. Also these Badgers appeared to be isolated from other colonies and from cattle and merit closer examination to see if they are free from TB.

MA expressed thanks to all recorders and experts working in the Gwent area.

Putting biological data to work: how your records help in the protection and conservation of biodiversity (Adam Rowe, SEWBRcC)

Presentation included:

- Services to consultancies and commercial users with examples of the GIS plots produced
- Linking data use back to the expertise of local recorders, e.g. Monmouthshire Bryophyte records generate a footnote at the end of all relevant reports: "Sam Bosanquet (VCRRecorder) should be contacted for further information on bryophyte protection and conservation issues".
- Services to partner organisations (through SLAs): Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Forestry Commission Wales, WAG Regional Trunk Roads Agencies, Countryside Council for Wales, WAG Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks
- Data Release and Sensitive Data
- Challenges ahead.

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At this point, Alison Jones (AJ) stepped forward to talk about how SEWBRcC was supporting her work: As part of the LDP process 412 sites were put forward, all of which needed assessment. They were able to use SEWBRcC GIS plots and data to guide the process, flagging up important habitats which could be rejected for the LDP.

SEWBRcC also receive Caerphilly BC's (CBC) weekly Planning list. From this, a list is generated of records which lie in or near potential developments, and this is sent back to CBC. If EU protected species are present, they are then able to request surveys are carried out before the planning application can be accepted.

Finally, AJ explained that SEWBRcC's services were useful to LBAP officers; They had used a SEWBRcC data search to map existing records of dormice in order to prepare for a dormouse survey.

Celina Gio-Batta noted that she knew the consultants dealing with the proposed new M4 through the Gwent Levels had spent three days looking at the data generated by SEWBRcC.

WORKSHOPS

The workshop sessions considered the future of the species sub-groups, and of the Recorders' Forum.

- Sam Bosanquet (SB) voiced concerns that if the sub-groups were abandoned, smaller (less furry/feathered) groups might be overlooked.
- Melanie Sutherland (MS) suggested that the sub-groups should continue via the Greater-Gwent Biodiversity Action Group (GGBAG) i.e. outside of this Forum, collecting together to focus on one or two habitat-based projects e.g woodland, at the Forum. MA suggested Post-industrial sites for a joint recording effort, particularly as they are on several LBAPs.
- The Tir Gofal Farmers Association (www.spanglefish.com/TGFA) is keen to promote wildlife recording on Tir Gofal Farms. The chairman, Simon Spencer, (cerisyi@btinternet.com) could be contacted to establish whether any sites have been put forward for this.
- Trevor Evans (TE) expressed concerns that a rare sedge was not protected at Coed Robert. Ian Smith (IS) suggested a SNAP!-style competition to raise the profile of less well-known species like this. Vaughan Grantham (VG) responded saying that the record needs to get to the people who designate SINC. Recorders need to be included in the designation process e.g. a site might qualify because of an unusual species, but the recorder might be aware that this species is not that rare, and just under-recorded.
- MA suggested that SEWBRc could generate a potential list of sites for review, and that these could be discussed in sub-groups. Dave Slade (DS) talked about a recent piece of work which had involved overlaying a map of spoil sites identified in Phase 1 with records of *Cladonia*, *Linum catharticum* (Fairy-flax) & *Carlina vulgaris* (Carlina thistle) to identify potential coal spoil sites for site visits. DS and VG discussed the possibility of identifying potential SINC in this manner, but it was agreed that it would be far too time consuming to be worthwhile. Celina Gio-Batta (CGB) suggested flagging up single qualifying species for SINC on SEWBRc's searches (i.e. at the "Species of Local Conservation Concern" level.) DS agreed to tackle this. **Action: DS**
- VG mentioned that the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Inspector said that sites should be treated as SINC if they qualify, regardless of whether or not they have yet been designated.
- In summary, it was recommended that the future of the sub-groups be put to GGBAG, and that a date and site be fixed for a recorders' blitz.

- Talking about the number of people attending this year's event, IS said that you were only likely to find out about it if you were involved professionally or had been invited previously. Sheila Spence (SS) explained that it was sometimes inaccessible for people not involved with the statutory bodies, as the LBAP information and acronyms etc can become confusing. SS is also involved with the Herefordshire Recorders' day, where invites are sent to the entire membership of all local recording groups. The Forum invitations encourage people to invite any other interested parties, and to advertise within their groups or on their websites where appropriate. SEWBReC's list is compiled from previous events, so in future, group secretaries will be targeted, with the aim of extending the invite to their full membership.

Action: Rebecca Davies

- MS suggested that the Forum moves on to make recording its focus. Bigger, younger audiences could be encouraged to attend a conference-type event. It was suggested that LBAP talks could be replaced by updates on display boards, as the updates are already covered in other meetings. IS recommended the LBAP updates were available in paper format for easier absorption!
- Alison Jones (AJ) suggested a themed event, for example next year focusing on climate change, and how it is affecting recording. CGB recalled a talk from the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (IEEM) recent conference in Cardiff, which would be relevant – could they be booked for a future forum speech? (Climate change impacts on biodiversity and their implications for nature conservation -Clive Walmsley CCW?) VG mentioned the MONARCH project (Modelling Natural Resource Responses to Climate Change). It was suggested that CCW were called in to talk about the Species Challenge Fund.
- Platforms for advertising the event could include Go Wild! Having an internet presence could help reach out to younger people in particular. It was mentioned that the GOS website has opened up recording to the valleys, whereas previously it was focused in the east.
- People are encouraged to make a note of any interesting, relevant talks they hear of over the next year – we could then invite these speakers to talk at the Forum 2008. **Action: all**
- In summary, it was decided that:
 - LBAP update talks be replaced by displays and/or handouts
 - Recording news and information about future projects become the focus of the talks.
 - We should encourage a wider audience of recorders & amateurs
 - Advertising could open up the event to a wider audience.

MA expressed thanks to SEWBReC, and in particular Rebecca Davies, for organising the event, and to Local Authority officers and Recorders for participating in the event.