

UK Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group
17th Meeting – 17 June 2008
Victoria Quay, Edinburgh
MINUTES

1. Present

Malcolm Vincent (JNCC, Chair)

Liz Howe (CCW)

Nicola Hutchinson (WCL)

Matt Shardlow (WCL)

Greg Mudge (SNH)

Paul Rose (JNCC)

Ant Maddock (JNCC, Secretariat)

Joanna Drewitt (SG)

Geoff Johnson (NBN)

Sarah Webster (Defra)

Deborah Long (SEL)

Charles Stewart Roper (SG)

Apologies:

Ruth Waters (NE); Richard Weyl (DOENI); Jim Munford (NBN); Bill Somerfield (WAG)

2. Final acceptance of minutes of last meeting

The draft minutes were accepted.

3. Actions from previous BRIG meeting (see attached)

Old Actions 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 – 15 done

Old Action 2: Habitat definitions; the habitat definitions were to be placed on the UK BAP website as soon as possible. It was agreed that the habitat definitions should be considered in two phases; the first phase which should be on the website within the next month, would include all marine, terrestrial and freshwater habitat definitions and indications of which definitions were final and which were definitions in progress (or working definitions). The country habitat groups would then be consulted to get a timetable for all definitions to be finalised.

ACTION 1: All habitat definitions to be placed on the UK BAP website with indications of which are working definitions that require further work

Old Actions 1, 4, 6 & 7: On the agenda

4. Carried over items

National Schemes and Societies

This discussion is a follow on from Richard Alexander's presentation on Local Record Centres at BRIG in September 2007. Where discussion had raised questions about the role of National Schemes and Societies in improving the taxonomic coverage of data recording, the verification of records, and incorporation of data onto the NBN. BRIG had subsequently also considered the role of individual records in surveillance programmes.

Geoff provided the following summarised overview:

NBN provides a system that makes biological data publicly available. NBN has recently set up a Data Access Group with a Data Access Plan in which it has identified a series of quick wins in terms of getting data onto NBN. For the first year, NBN has targeted birds, moths and lichens.

There are a number of issues that relate to the data on NBN.

Although there are nearly 30 million records on NBN, only 1.2 million are of UK BAP species and, of these, 0.8 million have a spatial resolution of 1 km² or smaller. NBN has difficulty in getting recorders to prioritise UK BAP species in their recording and considers this the function of those who have a role in commissioning or supporting recording, e.g. the country agencies.

Data flow: the same record can be sent to NBN from different sources and it is difficult to prevent this from appearing as two separate records rather than one.

Data quality: as a very general rule, schemes and societies are very good at getting the taxonomy of the records right but less good at getting the location of the record right. Conversely, LRCs are better at the locational accuracy but less good at taxonomic accuracy.

Data loading: The current stage of the Data Access Plan may result in potentially 30 million additional bird records onto NBN. If LRC data from Richard Alexander can be obtained, this could yield another 60 million records. Getting these data checked, validated and placed on NBN will be a lot of work and may prove problematic.

Overall, NBN considers that the best way of achieving better engagement with all the recording schemes and societies is through the NBN Data Access Group and Data Access Plan

In discussion, the following issues were considered:

Why were the sources of data on UK BAP species gathered during the reporting rounds not on NBN? Some Lead Partners are unaware if data relating to their species are on NBN and for some species, the recording schemes and societies may not want their data to be made available through NBN. It is important that we try to change this attitude and make as much biological data available on NBN as possible. Data users, NBN and others need to put pressure on data holders to change this attitude.

There are a number of poor records on NBN (for example, within the Invertebrate Site Register data) and it is difficult to distinguish these from the accurate records. This leads to NBN data not being trusted.

The various issues were summarised as:

- the need to try to get volunteer recorders to focus on conservation priorities,
- to encourage more data to be made available through the NBN, and
- to improve data quality or, at least, to make the quality of data more transparent.

It was agreed that this discussion should be brought back to BRIG at the next meeting.

ACTION 2: JNCC to prepare a paper for the next meeting to start a discussion on improving data availability to UK BAP through the NBN

5. Feedback from Sub-groups

5.1 Standing Committee minutes

The following points from the meeting were summarised:

UK Habitat Groups

- Standing Committee stated that the UK should be providing advice to the countries and not instructions as the countries will make their own decisions about implementing conservation action. Advice from the UK should be available to help these decisions if needed.
- It is important that the country habitat groups be established soon because only once the country habitat groups are set up can they send representatives to the UK habitat groups.
- Generic advice on species habitat needs was to be provided at a UK level where possible.

Success criteria

- The conservation community needs to understand BRIG's thinking on conservation success. There was some discussion at BRIG as there is confusion about the difference between targets and success criteria. This was picked up under the item on success criteria later in the meeting.

UK Biodiversity Indicators in your Pocket

- The 2007 indicators were updated electronically in May 2008 and can be found on the JNCC website <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4229>. These will be updated again in March 2009 in hardcopy as part of the UK contribution to the 2010 targets submission.

4th National Report

- The UK had, with three other countries, prepared a draft 4th National Report. The four UK countries will be submitting their reports to Defra in time for a UK report to go to the CBD secretariat by May 2009.

Survey and Monitoring Strategy

- JNCC was congratulated on this work and the strategy was agreed subject to a revision of the paper widening the scope to make stronger links with (a) "core surveillance" – and closely related evidence needs, in particular biological recording /inventories (knowing where things are) and (b) process studies (understanding why things are changing).

ACTION 3: BRIG to be kept aware of the future development of the Terrestrial Surveillance Strategy and to be engaged in an appropriate way in the Surveillance Implementation Group

2010 target

- The UK was involved in influencing the thinking about the update of the 2010 target in time for the CBD COP 10 meeting in Japan in 2010.

UK BAP Partnership Conference

- This would be held in Aberystwyth on 10 and 11 September 2008 with the theme of Biodiversity and Sustainable Development.

ACTION 4: Ant to prepare for next meeting a summary of the Standing Committee decisions regarding the Species and Habitat Review and the Forward Process.

ACTION 5: Ant to update the Forward Process timetable for next meeting (e.g. establishment of country habitat groups *etc.*) to be sent to Standing Committee, outlining more details of the work to be done and suggested deadlines for implementing the Species and Habitat Review

5.2 Species & Habitat Review - what is still needed from BRIG?

Species expertise and Habitat Groups (BRIG170608 Species and HAPs)

BRIG considered Ant's paper on the provision of generic advice on species habitat needs.

BRIG thought that there could be less process and less prescriptive ways of meeting advice needs than those suggestions in the paper. For example, placing the species habitat needs as questions on the UK BAP website for people to answer at will.

It was suggested that volunteers, NGOs and other non-statutory experts should be included in the process at an early stage, though there were some doubts about the ability, or willingness, of such experts to participate at this stage.

BRIG suggested looking at the likely products needed from the process as a first step. There are two types of habitat management advice that should be provided to the habitat groups that will benefit species:

- Broad guidance for general priority habitat condition management that will benefit a wide range of species including UK BAP priority species.
- More specific guidance on habitat management that will address the needs of the UK BAP priority species at the site level.

BRIG agreed that a way of developing good process would be to pilot this work by asking the UK woodlands and UK freshwater habitat groups to develop and recommend cost-effective processes for delivering the required products. We could then look at the outcomes of these pilot exercises to see if they could be rolled out across the habitat groups.

It was likely that broad guidance could be provided in a 'handbook' format that would be used by the Habitat Groups in order, for example, to set quality targets. It was also likely that there would be a need for a repository of habitat management guidance for individual priority species, to which experts could contribute. This would be a valuable tool for delivery bodies. However, the best process for delivering these products needed further thought.

ACTION 6: Ant to invite the UK woodlands and UK freshwater habitat groups to pilot a study to gather information needs for typical species of these habitats and for priority species signposted to these habitats.

ACTION 7: A significant progress report be presented to BRIG on the pilot study of the UK woodlands and UK freshwater habitat groups gathering information needs for typical species of these habitats and for priority species signposted to these habitats.

Recommendations on success (BRIG170608 What is conservation success)

This paper arose from a Standing Committee action to consider the meaning of conservation success as a prelude to setting success criteria. The discussion considered a number of issues, including:

- the need to have an objective in mind against which to monitor progress, and
- a clear idea of what we considered success, and the relationship of targets to this.

The difference between targets and success criteria was that targets are associated with a time period (e.g. by 2015 the population of x will be y) whereas there is no time associated with success criteria.

It was agreed that a short paper on 'success' be prepared and that this update consider the following:

- the purpose of UK List of Priority Species and Habitats and explaining the aim of having species and habitats on the list
- explain the need for addressing 'conservation measure dependency' where this applied to species
- stating the principle that success should be compliant with the objective of halting the loss of biodiversity
- linking success to the criteria used to select the UK BAP species and habitats, and considering the relationship among the success criteria, targets and the 'desired state' (re, the bird group's delisting threshold from the restoration threshold)
- emphasising that species or habitats should not be removed from the list if they are likely to meet the selection criteria again some time in the not too distant future
- separating the success criteria from targets and the desired state (i.e. the bird group's delisting threshold from the restoration threshold)
- incorporating lessons learned from the Species and Habitat Review

ACTION 8: BRIG to prepare a paper updating BRIG's thinking on 'success' to incorporate the issues brought forward at the June meeting

Progress in making Stage 1 data available

Ant reported that the Stage 1 evidence that was used to select the UK List of Priority Species and Habitats was in the final stages of checking and that these data would be placed on the UK BAP website soon

ACTION 9: Ant to place the Stage 1 evidence that was used to select the UK List of Priority Species and Habitats on the UK BAP website

5.3 BRIG / BRAG Research group (verbal update)

BRAG had proposed that a contractor be used to look at the signposted research actions and to provide pragmatic suggestions to implement the development of research proposals. The contractor should focus on identifying groupings of research needs that could be developed immediately (the other groupings to be developed later). In autumn 2008, these research groupings to be presented by the contractor to a workshop comprising people with ecological and research expertise. The contract would be managed by a steering committee comprising WCL, SEL and JNCC. BRIG approved this process and the development of the contract.

Secretariat note: Since the BRIG meeting a proposal has been verbally approved by BRAG, WCL, SEL and JNCC. A summary of this agreement is appended to the end of these minutes.

ACTION 10: Paul to organise the steering committee and set up the contract

5.4 2008 Reporting Round (BRIG170608 2008 Reporting Round)

The report was accepted.

There was some discussion on the distinction of the 2008 Reporting Round dealing with the “old” UK BAP species and habitats only and the presentation of baseline data for all “new” UK BAP species and habitats. It was agreed that these were separate issues and that JNCC would provide the baseline data for the list of “new” UK BAP priorities once the 2008 Reporting work was completed. This was an action that had been identified in January 2008.

5.5 Communications group (BRIG170608 Communications strategy)

It was agreed the scope of the BRIG communications strategy should include the UK BAP biodiversity work done by BRIG and the Standing Committee.

The countries have communication strategies and there is a need for the BRIG communications working group to align any communications emanating from BRIG onto communications from the countries. It was important to align communications so that common messages would emerge with respect to information such as country level priority actions.

Messages that needed to be communicated from BRIG included:

- The different arrangements, responsibilities and roles of the countries and the UK
- The timetable of work being done by BRIG and BRIG working groups
- Information relating to meetings especially the annual partnership meeting
- Actions being taken and responsibilities for those actions

It was suggested that a Question and Answer section on the UK BAP website may be useful as many people were asking the same questions. For example, “what has happened to the ‘old’ UK BAP list?”

ACTION 11: BRIG members to send Ant any additional ideas on what BRIG needs to communicate and BRIG’s main stakeholders.

6. Standing items

6.1 Country Reports

The England report was accepted, Wales provided a verbal report. Ant has provided summary of the Northern Ireland Report and Scotland would send their report to Ant.

6.2 BARS

The BARS report is appended to these minutes.

7. Next meeting

ACTION 12: Ant to trawl for dates for the next meeting sometime during the first week of September 2008

UK Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group

17th Meeting: 17 June 2008

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Northern Ireland Report

This is a summary by the BRIG secretariat of a telephone call between the BRIG secretariat and Richard Weyl.

Northern Ireland Habitat groups

- Habitat groups have been established for about 2 years
- They have work programmes
- They are using BARS
- Their reporting on the targets will be ready by end of November

Species Group

- There is a species group
- Review process and add new species to the =NI list by the end of 2008
- This will include signposting in NI
- Still need to link species needs and habitats

General

- Some species have specific requirements e.g. EU directives
- Some are endemics and other have international responsibility
- They will adapt a different approach for different species
- Some species they will try to stop the decline only others they will try to go further with recovery
- Need to link implementation to habitat conservation
- Implement the Ecosystem Approach rather than gardening

BIODIVERSITY REPORTING AND INFORMATION GROUP ENGLAND COUNTRY REPORT, JUNE 2008

Since the last BRIG meeting on 12 March

EAC Inquiry

On 29 April the EAC announced a new inquiry to assess: the Government's progress towards its 2010 target; the causes of biodiversity loss in the UK; and whether additional responses might be required. The Committee set out 10 specific questions, many of them multi-part. Much of our time as been taken up preparing a Memorandum to the Committee, which paints a picture of significant progress but much remaining to do. It notes that we are on course to meet the 2010 target in some areas, not to meet it in some, and to exceed it in others. It notes that public expenditure on biodiversity has continued to increase in real terms, but recognises that there is still a gap between available resources and the estimated cost of meeting all the UK BAP targets. We expect to be involved in providing further briefing to the Inquiry over the coming weeks.

Marine Bill

The draft Marine Bill announced on 3 April contains integrated proposals to facilitate effective conservation management and improve the management of human activities in the marine environment. The Bill's proposals include Marine Protected Areas as well as provisions for marine planning and licensing, new enforcement powers, and the creation of the Marine Management Organisation and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, all of which will help to improve the management and conservation of marine biodiversity.

Statutory list of habitats and species of principal importance under Section 41 of the NERC Act

The list was published on 22 May (International Biodiversity Day). Most of the species and habitats on the statutory list are on the UK list of priority species and habitats. However, in addition, the Hen Harrier, which is not currently on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, has been included in the statutory list. This is in recognition that the Hen Harrier is England's most seriously threatened bird of prey, and that without continued conservation action it is unlikely that the population will increase from its current low levels in England

Updates to EBS indicators

Also published on 22 May were updates to 10 of the England Biodiversity Strategy indicators which can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/biostrat/indicators/index.htm. The indicators are published on a rolling basis, and the remaining indicators will be published over the next two years.

England Biodiversity Group

Following discussions at Standing Committee and the England Biodiversity Group, Natural England has drawn up and circulated a near-final version of the new framework for the delivery of the England Biodiversity Strategy and BAP in England. The framework proposes 9 Biodiversity Integration Delivery groups, mapping across to reconstituted EBS workstreams (on agriculture, water & wetlands and so on). This was discussed and approved subject to minor amendments at the England Biodiversity Group meeting on 10 June.

Regional representatives are currently being given more time to digest the regionalised subsets of targets produced by Natural England.

Natural England State of the Natural Environment Report

Natural England published its State of the Natural Environment Report on 19 May.

Buglife Case

Buglife, the Invertebrate Conservation Trust, has now lodged an appeal following the judicial review of the decision of Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation to grant planning permission for a Royal Mail distribution centre on land at West Thurrock.

Defra's Biodiversity Programme

In Defra, a Biodiversity Programme is being established to provide an overview of all the Defra-funded projects which contribute to delivering the Intermediate Outcome of "Biodiversity valued, safeguarded and enhanced". The programme will cover work at England, UK and international level, but the emphasis will be on England and international work, with sub-programmes for each of these. The Biodiversity Programme Board has now held four meetings, focussing on two strategic issues at each.

Periodic Review of Water Prices (PR09)

The EA has submitted the first version of the National Environment Programme (NEP) under PR09 to water companies to inform their draft business plans. NE has provided advice on the schemes it considers necessary to meet Habitats Directive and SSSI requirements, and has contributed to the BAP programme. The NEP includes elements for biodiversity under Habitats Directive, SSSI PSA and BAP drivers, including 120 schemes for water quality improvements or investigations.

Woodlands and Forestry

FC is currently undertaking a consultation on a new "England Practice Guide - Managing ancient and native woodland"; the consultation closes on 22/08/08

BARS UPDATE

Megan Ellershaw, 16 June 2008

Latest Developments

The most recent phase of development was released in April, this included enhancements to the public pages to improve access to and the range of information as well as further enhancements to the data entry application and custom reports. Feedback on these developments has been positive. A specification with minor updates to the national reporting round facility has been submitted to developers, the link to the reporting round facility will be made available shortly prior to the start of the 2008 reporting round period.

Training & Engagement

Priorities for training over the coming months will focus specifically on the 2008 reporting round, this will include a programme of "train the trainer" events intended to help build capacity for BARS training within the UK.

Uptake of the system remains good, this has been helped in part by an increasing number of organisations and grant schemes (including: Countdown2010 (NE), Aggregates Levy (NE), Species Recovery Fund (NE), SITA, Species Challenge Fund (CCW), GrantScape (considering)) making the use of BARS a condition of their funding. Non-training events have included presentations at COP 9 at which there was significant interest in BARS from the European Commission.

Future Priorities

Once the detail of the framework for BAP delivery in the devolved countries has been agreed, any development required to accommodate reporting of delivery of the new list on BARS will be commissioned. Events such as the forthcoming England LBAP conference and UK BAP conference will provide an opportunity to demonstrate the increased functionality of the system and answer any queries, for example relating to the 2008 reporting round.

BRIG BRAG research process June 2008

There is a need to make urgent progress in implementing some of the more obvious and easy requirements for research survey and monitoring arising out of the actions proposed for the new list of BAP priority species and to start the process necessary to further elaborate some of the less obvious requirements. The UKSC asked the two groups, BRIG and BRAG, to take collective responsibility for the work and both groups have agreed the following process after their last meetings.

In summary, a workshop of circa 30 carefully selected individuals will be organised in the autumn to:

- Identify single species research survey or monitoring requirements that could be taken forward immediately.
- Identify obvious groupings of research survey and monitoring requirements that could be taken forward collectively, now.
- Recommend a process to BRIG/BRAG for further developing remaining research survey and monitoring requirements.

The workshop will be organised by a facilitator who will also make currently available information available to the workshop in an easily digestible form and structure the workshop in a manner most likely to make good progress. The facilitator will be provided with all research, survey and monitoring actions proposed for the new BAP priority list of species, the initial considerations of the research survey and monitoring actions undertaken by JNCC and the BRIG/BRAG sub-group and relevant information from all other stages of the BAP species list review.

The specification for work will be drawn up, and the facilitator managed, by a project group made up of JNCC, Wildlife and Countryside Link and Scottish Environment Link. The already established BRIG/BRAG sub-group will be consulted/informed at obvious milestones in the process e.g. on completion of the specification of work, on the invitation list for the workshop and on the presentation of actions and information for the workshop. The sub/group might also usefully meet after the workshop to consider the recommendations and results from the workshop. This sub-group meeting could:

- Transmit research, survey and monitoring action identified as ready for implementation, to country biodiversity groups, the Defra information gap project to be administered by Natural England and other relevant sources as appropriate.
- Consider generic and grouped research survey and monitoring actions identified by the workshop, in relation to BRAG's work to date and recommend how BRAG can best promote these actions.
- Consider recommendations from the workshop on how to deal with research survey and monitoring actions that require further elaboration, and propose to BRIG and BRAG how to act on these recommendations.

Resources for this initial work to organise, run and prepare for the workshop are being considered by BRIG and BRAG secretariats, Defra and Forestry Commission.

ACTION: JNCC secretariats for BRIG and BRAG to initiate and run the process outlined above for consideration and implementation of research, survey and monitoring actions proposed for the new list of BAP priority species and habitats.