



NatureScot

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Scotland's Biodiversity Information Forum – A National Hub for Biodiversity – Citizen science

Purpose

1. This paper updates the Committee on the work of the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum, particularly recent proposals to transform Scotland's biological recording infrastructure. We invite the Committee to review the approach being taken and advise how we can raise the profile of biological recording within the citizen science community.

Action

2. The Committee is asked to:
 - Note the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum review and its recommendations for implementation; and
 - Advise on actions to raise the profile of biological recording within the local citizen science community.

Preparation

3. The paper has been prepared by Iain Sime, with inputs from Brian Eardley and Des Thompson. It is sponsored by Eileen Stuart.

Background

4. Underpinning our vision to be a world leader in looking after and improving nature is the need to understand, and access, a high quality evidence base on the state of Scotland's nature. A particularly important component of the evidence base is biodiversity data collected by local recorders, and disseminated by Local Environmental Record Centres and Biological Recording Groups (hereafter in shorthand referred to as LERCs). For example, such records are used in the majority of indicators reported in the most recent [State of Nature Scotland Report](#).
5. The Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) was established in 2010, following a parliamentary petition, to review the precarious biological recording infrastructure in Scotland. The Committee last considered the work of [SBIF in March 2018](#). Shortly after, [SBIF published their comprehensive review](#) calling for investment in, and transformation of, Scotland's biological recording infrastructure.

6. Since then we have worked with SBIF to prioritise the review recommendations. This has resulted in a two year project proposal being submitted to NatureScot which aims to progress the priority recommendations. The proposal is to support a sustainable network of LERCs in Scotland. It aims to do this by strategically protecting and aggregating the biodiversity datasets LERCs manage, improving the provision of data from local recording groups and ultimately improving weaknesses in the precarious funding situation of Scotland's biological recording communities. This final point is particularly pertinent as the security of data supply from citizen scientists, such as those contributing to LERCs, has recently been identified as a particular risk in our indicator suite.

Work in progress

7. The project will establish a National Biodiversity Data Hub for Scotland that can provide leadership and coordination to support delivery of biodiversity data at both national and regional levels. The project aims to establish a consortium, similar to the arrangements in Wales, with the existing LERCs in Scotland forming the basis of the National Hub. The project will
 - Establish a single, shared national online system for LERC data management and LERCs as customers;
 - Establish streamlined data flows to and from LERCs, supported by central data agreements, including consistent online data provision to NatureScot and other customers; and
 - Provide a single point of contact for national data enquiries, on behalf of the LERCs.
8. The aggregated Scottish data will continue to be available to the public, but with improved dataflow, via the NBN Atlas Scotland, and will be integrated with existing national data systems including iRecord and the UK Species Inventory (**Annex 1**). The data hub, while based on records from local recording groups, also ultimately aims to include records from national recording schemes and thereby provide as complete a picture as possible.
9. During the first two years, a business model will be developed to generate sufficient income. This will come from added value data services to data clients, such that the Hub should be able to support itself in two years (from April 2021). At present a business case is being developed for consideration by Scottish Government.
10. Scotland currently does not have a comprehensive network of LERCs and local biological recording groups. It is the intention that a National Hub, which is viable in the long term and able to provide strategic leadership and advocacy, will help drive increased LERC service coverage.

Further work

11. Related to the work of SBIF, the Committee should note other relevant efforts to improve biological recording data management by NatureScot. This includes a GovTech project, which aims to develop an interactive platform for land managers to access habitat and species information to inform potential land use changes on a protected area. This platform will link to data sources such as NatureScot corporate systems, the NBN Atlas and, ultimately, the data aggregated in the National Biodiversity Hub.

12. The intention is that the National Biodiversity Hub project will be developed by the SBIF partnership over the next two years. While the project will primarily work with LERCs, rather than individual recorders, it aims to help secure the recording infrastructure, and thereby inherently encourage greater biological recording. Citizen science clearly provides public benefits (e.g. indicators), as well as benefits for the recorders themselves who not only become more empowered and knowledgeable but derive associated benefits to health and well-being – something which has become sharply in to focus during the Covid-19 lockdowns.
13. The project could be seen as improving and helping to secure the ‘backroom’ functions that will better support, and share the results from, much of the local biological recording that takes place in Scotland. Such strategic interventions can often remain largely unseen to individual citizen scientists, who are understandably enthused by the biodiversity they are recording. Nonetheless, it is intended that through establishing a Biodiversity Data Hub in Scotland, the profile is raised by:
- Employing a coordinator and small team to champion and advocate local biological recording;
 - Establishing a continued professional development approach for LERC team members;
 - Working with local groups to facilitate further public participation in biological recording; and
 - Providing a small community fund to support LERCs to deliver extra recorder support and training where necessary. This could include appropriate strategic recording priorities from NatureScot/National Hub.
14. Taken together, the above actions will contribute to greater engagement with Scotland’s extensive biological recording community. By the end of the proposed project, the community should also be better able to see the value of their efforts to tackle the biodiversity crisis, through more rapid reporting, clearer input to supporting sustainable development decisions and experience more stable funding that could facilitate further public outreach.
15. Whist the project is based around resilient and sustainable data flows for Scotland, it is predicated on the continued functioning of the NBN Atlas as the public facing portal for records from citizen science. Running in parallel to the SBIF project, discussions are ongoing at a UK level over future relationships between the NBN Trust (who manage the Atlas) and the individual Country Agencies. Whilst the outcomes of these discussions should not affect the establishment of the Scottish Biodiversity Hub, they may shape future phases of SBIF related work.
- 16. The committee is asked to note this recent progress, and discuss and advise on opportunities for raising the profile of the National Hub project within the wider biological recording community.**

Contact:

Iain Sime iain.sime@nature.scot

Brian Eardley brian.eardley@nature.scot

Des Thompson des.thompson@nature.scot

Annex 1

Relationship between National Biodiversity Hub, LERCs, NBN Trust and NBN Atlas

