

Bedfordshire & Luton
**Biodiversity
Recording &
Monitoring
Centre**



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Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

Annual Report 2015-16



Anacamptis pyramidalis var emarginata – a rare form of pyramidal orchid found at Old Warden Tunnel.

Background

The Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC) is hosted by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire and has been based at the Trust offices at Priory Country Park in Bedford since 2003.

The BRMC gathers verified species records (currently over 1.6 million in total) and collates and manages these data; maps and records habitat data from across the county; and maintains definitive information about sites recognized for their natural value. The aim of the BRMC is to enable easy access to biodiversity information to all those who need to use it whilst maintaining security and quality of data. The BRMC continues to develop so that a wide variety of biodiversity data both recent and historic is collected, stored and used. The BRMC is impartial, non-profit making and steered by the needs for data.

The BRMC works with local authorities, environmental consultants, conservation organisations, educational institutions and the general public and works closely with the Bedfordshire Natural History Society to promote wildlife recording and a wide understanding of the need for information about our environment.

The BRMC Policies are available from the BRMC web site (www.bedsbionet.org.uk).

Objectives

The objectives of the Centre are to:

- Ensure that the Centre maintains its standards that allow it to be part of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and enable the Centre to remain accredited by the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC);
- Promote wildlife recording and a wide understanding of the need for information about our environment;
- Ensure easy access to biodiversity data for all those who wish to use it whilst maintaining security and quality of data;
- Develop the Centre so that a wide variety of biodiversity data both recent and historic is collected, stored and used;
- Ensure that the operational Centre is adequately resourced to meet the needs of data suppliers and users;
- Review on a regular basis the framework needed to ensure that the Centre operates successfully;
- Use existing data and develop new datasets to improve the information and value of the data the Centre holds.

Partners

The BRMC Steering Group consists of representatives from each of the following partner organisations:

- Bedford Borough Council
- Bedfordshire Natural History Society (BNHS)
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Environment Agency (EA)
- Greensand Trust
- Luton Borough Council
- Natural England (NE)
- Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire (Wildlife Trust BCN)

The BRMC 'Memorandum of Understanding', which establishes collaborative relationships with all Steering Group organisations, except Natural England and the Environment Agency, runs until September 2020.

Staff and Volunteers

The BRMC currently has two permanent staff members, Jackie Ulyett (Centre Manager) and Keith Balmer (Network Officer). Rachel Broomfield has continued as Data Officer for 1 day a week for 1 year to assist with processing reports and species data. Our long term volunteer Jennifer O'Leary was also employed on a temporary contract for 2 days a week to complete some paid project work digitizing Mollusc records, her contract finished at the end of May 2015. Staffing levels are currently 2 FTE (full time equivalent) staff.

The BRMC has had much help and support from several office volunteers this year. Jennifer O'Leary continued to volunteer with us after completing the temporary paid part time role mentioned above. We are very grateful for her dedication and support and all the work she has done over the last year. We are also grateful to Karolina Golicz who, on an ad-hoc basis since November, has started to help with digitizing historic myriapod records .

We would also like to express our thanks to all the volunteers who gather species records over the year and send their sightings to our County Recorders at the BNHS. The County Recorders do a fantastic job of compiling datasets and spending hours of their own time verifying the records for us each year. Without the dedication and support of the recorders, County Recorders and the BNHS the BRMC would not be able to function properly as a Local Environmental Records Centre, so we would like to thank to everyone involved.

Finance

This year has been very busy, and has seen a continued increase in the number of data requests received. The BRMC has a hosting arrangement with the Wildlife Trust BCN for which the BRMC provides 'in-kind' services. Natural England and the Environment Agency continued their financial support this year with a four year agreement, however in early February 2016 Natural England informed us of their intention to withdraw from this agreement with no further funding from April 2016. Our funding agreement with Bedford Borough Council continued this year, a joint agreement with the Wildlife Trust, and will be carried on into next year. Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council also provided funding for single year agreements. The BRMC were also very grateful to the Bedfordshire Natural History Society who donated some of their income from book sales of the *Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire*.

The total income for 2015-16 was just over £55,000 with expenditure of just below £54,000. The majority of the expenditure was staff salaries. The table below shows the budget for this year, the previous year (2014-15) and a forecast for 2016-17. The income forecast for 2016/17 is a conservative estimate as Natural England are no longer providing funding, and income from data requests and project work vary from year to year. It is therefore essential that the BRMC has enough contingency funding to ensure the centre can continue to run when income is short.

Income			
Funder	Amount in 2014-15	Amount in 2015-16	Anticipated amount in 2016-17
Data Searches	£13,893	£19,987	£16,000
Project work for Wildlife Trust BCN, Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Greensand Trust and others	£17,338	£7,520	£10,000
Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities, Defra bodies and Utility companies	£27,676	£27,717	£25,925
Total income	£58,907	£55,224	£51,925
Expenditure			
Type	Amount in 2014-15	Amount in 2015-16	Budgeted amount in 2016-17
Staff salaries/training/travel	£50,231	£53,180	£54,514
IT hardware/software	£320	£179	£745
Subscriptions (e.g. NFBR, ALERC) & office consumables	£225	£340	£525
Contractor costs	£358	£185	
ALERC Accreditation	£300		
Total expenditure	£50,776	£53,883	£55,784
Balance (red denotes shortfall in income)			
	Amount in 2014-15	Amount in 2015-16	Anticipated 2016-17
	£8,131	£1,342	-£3,859

Achievements in 2015-16

Additional work to core data management and data requests are detailed below:

Sites

GIS layers are available for download from the BRMC Partner Pages for those organisations with whom we have an agreement. These datasets and the Partner Pages are kept up to date as part of the BRMC support to the Local Sites Partnership, assisting with data management and secretarial support for the County Wildlife Site (CWS) panel and similarly for the District Wildlife Site (DWS) panel. DWS are a category of site one tier below CWS in status and currently only being recognized in Luton. The BRMC also maintains a GIS layer of Accessible Wildlife Sites (AWS). This is not a type of site designation but a descriptive title for a collection of sites that have a management plan that takes the needs of wildlife into account and have free public access.

- One new CWS was recognised this year, and 2 CWS boundaries were updated or modified due to development or changes within the original site boundary.
- There remain 31 'draft' CWS citations to be reviewed and finalized.
- The CWS criteria for birds have been completely revised this year. These are available via the BRMC web site.
- No changes were made to the District Wildlife Sites (DWS) this year.
- No changes were made to the Local Geological Sites (LGS) this year.
- One new Roadside Nature Reserve (RNR) was added this year.
- No changes were made to the Accessible Wildlife Sites (AWS) this year.

Summary of Bedfordshire non-statutory sites:

Number of Sites	Site Type
403	County Wildlife Sites
16	District Wildlife Sites (Luton Borough only)
21	Local Geological Sites
33	Roadside Nature Reserves
202	Accessible Wildlife Sites

Species

As well as providing species data as part of the data search service, the BRMC provides access to species data using Web Services developed for those organisations with whom we have an agreement. The Web Services are developed and updated as new versions of the software become available, and allow users to search the NBN Gateway for data provided by the BRMC and other suppliers for a user specified area.

- Around 199,818 species records were added to the BRMC database during 2015. This is less than last year (which was mainly due to the import of Bird records from BirdTrack for 2009 to 2013) however is significantly more than in previous years (around 50,000 to 60,000 records per year) due to the large number of records from BirdTrack for 2014 and the historic Mollusc records digitized from recording cards.
- During 2015, the BRMC provided 10 updated or new datasets to the NBN Gateway. This included submission of Bedfordshire Bird records for the first time, containing nearly 479,000 records. A regular program of updates to the NBN Gateway is in place as yearly datasets are received from our County Recorders, validated and processed by the BRMC for inclusion in our own database and supplied to the NBN Gateway.
- The new 'REST' services enabling Partners to access species data via the NBN Gateway are still working well and continue to be maintained.

Habitats

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat GIS layers are available for download from the BRMC Partner Pages for those organisations with whom we have an agreement. These layers are updated as new data becomes available, no updates have been made this year.

- During 2015-16 the following BAP habitat GIS layers were available via the Partner Pages :

Traditional Orchards	Wood-pasture and Parkland
Fens	Calcareous Grassland
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	Reedbeds
Wet Woodland	Heathland
Acid Grassland	Lowland Meadows

- A GIS dataset for Ancient and Veteran trees based on data supplied by the Woodland Trust is also available via the Partner Pages and was updated in April 2014.

Information Requests

- A total of 218 data searches were completed by the BRMC during 2015-16, an increase on the last two years (201 during 2014-15 and 127 during 2013-14).
- Of these, 176 were commercial enquiries (134 commercial enquiries last year) and 42 were completed free of charge (67 last year).
- The breakdown of free of charge enquiries is as follows:

Requestor	Number of searches
Local organisations/partners	4
Wildlife Trust BCN	6
Students	1
Local Authorities	6
Private Individuals	2
Searches as part of Service Level Agreements	4
Cross border searches (no charge)	16
Discretionary	2
Record Centre (not cross border)	1

- The average turn-around time for providing data was less than one day. All requests were completed well within 10 working days of receipt of confirmation to supply data.

Advocacy

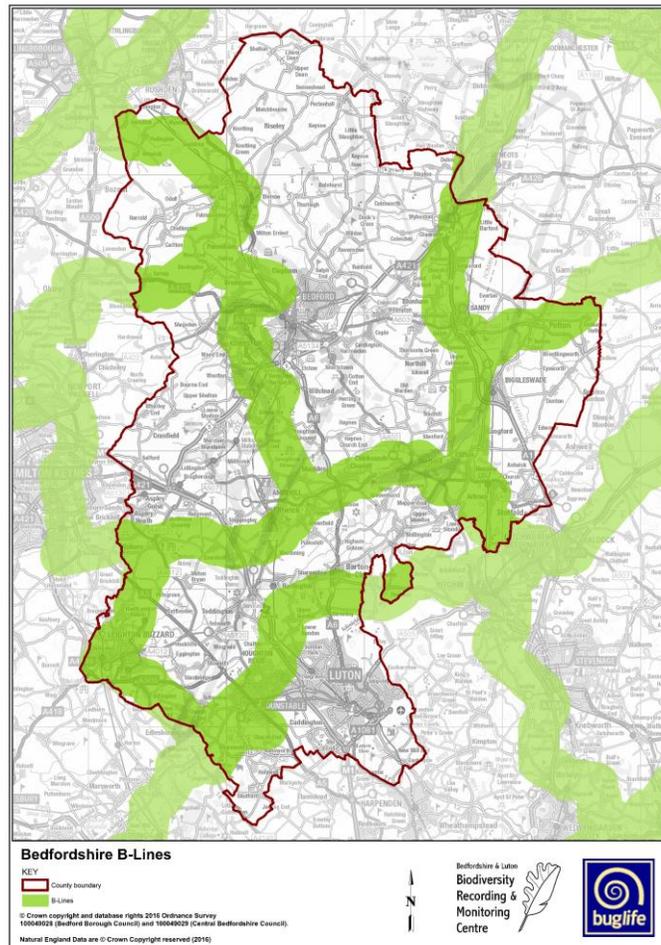
It is important that the services the BRMC can provide are continually promoted so that anyone requiring biodiversity information for Bedfordshire and Luton knows where to look. With this in mind, last year's annual report was circulated to Parish Council clerks in Bedford Borough, resulting in a few requests for data. A presentation was given to Bedford Borough Council Development Management Team to demonstrate the data BRMC provide and encourage them to use the information when considering planning applications.

Other Project Work

The BRMC has been involved in several projects over the last year, although these have been fewer in number than in previous years, and include:

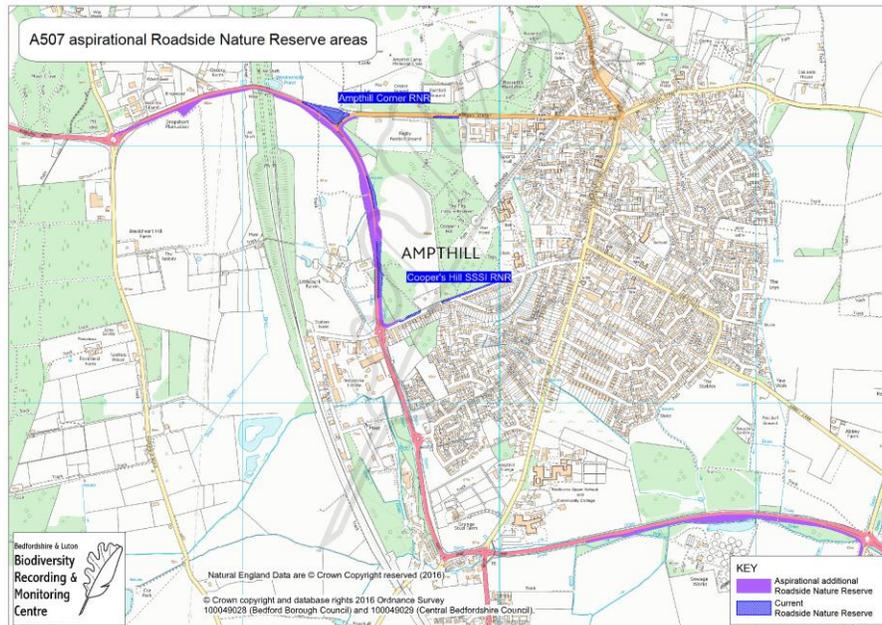
- Great Crested Newts in the Marston Vale – The BRMC were involved in a two year project with five other partners, funded by the SITA Trust, to investigate conservation of the Great Crested Newt (GCN) within the Marston Vale Forest area. The project and final report are now completed and all the resulting records have been verified and added to our database. Two GIS layers are now in use by the Local Authorities and the Wildlife Trust BCN for consideration in the planning process for this area: a) existing areas of suitable habitat (which could become fragmented, but by providing more high quality habitat would boost local GCN populations) and b) areas where habitat improvements would bring the most benefit for strengthening 'metapopulations' of GCN and provide linkages to suitable habitats.

- Green Infrastructure (GI) mapping – The BRMC has been involved in Parish, District and County scale GI mapping since 2008, working with many different partners. This year the BRMC produced ‘map packs’ providing contextual and biodiversity information for the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) to use at Parish meetings in Fairfield and Wrestlingworth. BRCC ran workshops to collect ideas from the local community about improving or creating local green infrastructure such as green spaces, access routes and wildlife habitats, and BRMC produced ‘aspiration’ maps showing these ideas which have been included in the final reports that will be used by parish and local councils.
- BugLife B-Lines mapping - The BRMC have carried out mapping work for BugLife’s national ‘B-Lines’ project, providing maps of ‘key’ and ‘beneficial’ habitats for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. ‘B-Lines’ are corridors that are being identified across the country to indicate where existing suitable pollinator habitat already exists and could be improved or joined up to benefit pollinators. The maps were used at a workshop to create draft ‘B-Lines’ and prompt discussion, these have recently been finalized, with the final corridors appearing on BugLife’s website www.buglife.org.uk/campaigns-and-our-work/habitat-projects/b-lines/east-of-england-b-lines .



Bedfordshire B-Lines and links to neighbouring counties.

- PondNet – The BRMC has been involved in the Freshwater Habitats Trust ‘PondNet’ project (part of a larger Heritage Lottery Fund project called People, Ponds and Water), providing species information, local knowledge and support for the rollout of the project in Bedfordshire. The aims are to carry out amphibian surveys for ponds within three 1km squares in the county and a pond quality survey for a single pond in the county, repeating these over a 2 year period. The vision is to build up a network of sites across England and Wales where 300 1km squares will be surveyed for amphibians and 150 ponds assessed for quality to determine national status and trend information for important species and habitats.
- Landscape Partnership ‘Secrets of the Sands’ – Over the last 4 years the BRMC has assisted the Greensand Trust by providing maps and information for a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund under their Landscape Partnerships scheme for the Greensand Ridge. During that time we have produced several maps including draft project area boundaries based on the Greensand Ridge National Character Area which have been used to help illustrate the project and secure initial funding. Over the last year we have provided various maps showing habitats, local sites and illustrating a ‘landscape under pressure’. The design of the project is now in the final stages of development.
- Aspirational Roadside Nature Reserves in Central Bedfordshire – The BRMC has provided support to Central Bedfordshire Council in mapping areas of roadside verge along the A507 corridor which could potentially become Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR). This would link existing RNR along the route with additional areas that could be managed for their wildlife interest.



Some of the aspirational Roadside Nature Reserve areas along the A507.

Support for the BNHS

The BRMC works very closely with the BNHS and provides data on their behalf to those that need to use it. Keith represents the BRMC at BNHS Scientific and County Recorder meetings, providing progress reports and answering any specific queries relating to the BRMC. The BRMC provides 'help in-kind' to the BNHS, supporting the County Recorders where ever possible. This year this has included:

- Provided recording advice to two County Recorders.
- Providing a site list and boundaries for Flora recording.
- Providing data on Water Voles to inform new surveys.
- Preparing Bumblebee distribution maps for the Beds Naturalist.
- Analysis of Brown Hawker dragonfly records.
- Providing data searches/information as required.

BRMC Server

The server that was installed in August 2013 continues to run well and the three separate backup systems continue to run smoothly: a daily backup on a disk cartridge (specifically for use on the Server), a daily backup on 2 portable disk drives (which are used so that BRMC could work on any PC temporarily if the Server failed), a weekly backup on a portable disk drive (for extra security).

Regional/National Collaboration

The BRMC works with other Record Centres within the East of England and staff attended two regional Record Centre meetings during the year. The meetings enable discussion about sharing best practice, joint working possibilities and a regional overview from Natural England and the Environment Agency on their work and Record Centre data agreements.

The BRMC are participating in the ALERC Accreditation Sub-Group, set up to refine and update the accreditation system and associated documentation and to encourage LERCs to become accredited. As part of the sub group, we are asked to check and agree the assessments carried out by the official ALERC 'assessors', and have agreed accreditation for 2 LERCs this year.

Staff attended the ALERC conference in October 2015 where Bat Conservation Trust provided an update on their 'Partnership for Planning in Biodiversity' project and Prof. Alister Scott of Birmingham City University talked about 'Planning for Biodiversity: Maximizing the Evidence Opportunity'. Group discussions, short talks and updates from the ALERC Working Groups were also presented, the 'Accreditation' group update presented by Jackie.

The Future of BRMC

With inevitable changes to funding in the coming year the BRMC looks set to manage this and provide the services and products our Partners and those requiring data need. Developing new areas of work can be difficult, however a project to train staff to use an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (or drone) and trial its use for habitat mapping and local site surveys has been put forward to the Natural England Innovation Fund in the hope that this will provide some funding to develop new skills and additional areas of work. As always, the BRMC look to develop better and improved methods for delivering products and services and we will be investigating this over the coming year in consultation with other LERCs in our region.

The BRMC Steering Group meets regularly to ensure the sustainability and direction of the BRMC. We are very grateful for the time and commitment that our Partners give in attending meetings and providing guidance.

Current Data Agreements

Type of Agreement	Organisation
Hosting Agreement (current until Sept 2020)	Wildlife Trust BCN
Memorandum of Agreement (current until Mar 2016)	Natural England
Data provision agreement (negotiated yearly)	Environment Agency
Data provision agreement (negotiated yearly)	Bedford Borough Council
Data provision agreement (negotiated yearly)	Central Bedfordshire Council
Data provision agreement (negotiated yearly)	Luton Borough Council
Data sharing agreement (current until Apr 2017)	Bedfordshire Natural History Society
Data sharing agreement	Woodland Trust
Data sharing agreement	Peoples Trust for Endangered Species
Ordnance Survey PSMA spatial data license	Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council