

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



% The Wildlife Trust
Priory Country Park Visitor Centre
Barkers Lane
Bedford
MK41 9DJ
Phone (01234) 355435
Email brmc@bedsbionet.org.uk

an **ALERC**  **accredited LRC**
Association of Local Environmental
Records Centres

Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

Annual Report 2016-17



Honey Bee on Heather at Cooper's Hill.

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 1.75 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

This year has seen some major staff changes. We were sad to say goodbye to Keith Balmer (Network Officer) who retired at the end of March 2017 having spent 13 years working for the BRMC. We are extremely grateful for his huge contribution to the Centre and the technological developments that he introduced to enable us to keep up with the ever changing developments in the computing and technical world. We would like to express our thanks and best wishes for his retirement.

We are very fortunate to have a new member of staff to take on this challenging role and are very pleased to welcome Jennie Mitchell as our new Network Officer. Jennie joined us in late February 2017, enabling a five week handover with Keith. Jackie Ulyett continues as Centre Manager and Rachel Broomfield has continued as Data Officer for 1 day a week for 1 year to assist with processing reports and species data. Staffing levels going into 2017-18 are therefore 1.8 FTE (full time equivalent) staff.

The BRMC has had much help and support from our dedicated office volunteer this year, Jennifer O'Leary. We are very grateful for her commitment and all the work she has done over the last year assisting in processing species 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 everyone involved.

Finance

As usual, this year has been very busy, and has again seen an 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. The Environment Agency have continued their financial support this year as have Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council, the latter as a joint agreement with the Wildlife Trust.

The total income for 2016-17 was just over £53,000 with expenditure of just below £55,000, amounting to a deficit of around £1,500. The majority of the expenditure was staff salaries, with most of the deficit attributable to less income from project work than anticipated and the additional staff costs for the last five weeks of the financial year. The table below shows the budget for this year, the previous year (2015-16) and a forecast for 2017-18. The income forecast for 2017-18 is looking positive, mainly thanks to a large Heritage Lottery Funded project that the BRMC are involved in. Income from data requests and project work vary from year to year so it is essential that the BRMC has enough contingency funding to ensure the centre can continue to run when income is short, as demonstrated this year.

| | | | | Income | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Funder | Amount in 2015-16 | Amount in 2016-17 | Anticipated amount in 2017-18 | | | |
| Data Searches | £19,987 | £21,692 | £18,000 | | | |
| Project work for Wildlife Trust BCN, Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and others | £7,520 | £5,617 | £14,000 | | | |
| Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities, Defra bodies and Utility companies | £27,717 | £25,875 | £25,875 | | | |
| Total income | £55,224 | £53,184 | £57,875 | | | |
| | | | | Expenditure | | |
| Type | Amount in 2015-16 | Amount in 2016-17 | Budgeted amount in 2017-18 | | | |
| Staff salaries/training/travel/recruitment | £53,180 | £53,732 | £51,662 | | | |
| IT hardware/software | £179 | £341 | £740 | | | |
| Subscriptions (e.g. NFBR, ALERC) & office consumables | £340 | £574 | £661 | | | |
| Contractor costs | £185 | £45 | | | | |
| Total expenditure | £53,883 | £54,692 | £53,063 | | | |
| | | | | Balance (red denotes shortfall in income) | | |
| | Amount in 2015-16 | Amount in 2016-17 | Anticipated 2017-18 | | | |
| | £1,342 | -£1,508 | £4,812 | | | |

Achievements in 2016-17

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.

- No new CWS were recognised this year, 1 CWS boundary was updated or modified due to development or changes within the original site boundary.
- There remain 30 'draft' CWS citations to be reviewed and finalized.
- The CWS criteria for birds was completely revised last year (details available via the BRMC web site), this resulted in alterations to the recognition information for 4 CWS this year.
- 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 Roadside Nature Reserve (RNR) boundary was updated 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 |

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, with updates to the Lowland Meadows and Traditional Orchards layers made this year.

- During 2016-17 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 May 2016.

Species

As well as providing species data as part of the data search service, the BRMC provided access to species data using Web Services developed for those organisations with whom we have an agreement. The Web Services were developed and updated as new versions of the software became available, and allowed users to search the NBN Gateway for data provided by the BRMC and other suppliers for a user specified area. It should be noted that this service ended on 1st April 2017 as the NBN Gateway has been replaced by the NBN Atlas and we are waiting for the NBN to provide an alternative Web Service interface that the BRMC can consider developing.

- Around 162,000 species records were added to the BRMC database during 2016.
- During 2016, the BRMC provided 7 updated or new datasets to the NBN Gateway. A regular program of updates to the NBN Gateway was in place as yearly datasets were received from our County Recorders, validated and processed by the BRMC for inclusion in our own database and supplied to the NBN Gateway.
- In March 2016, the BRMC agreed to the migration of 7 out of 21 datasets to the NBN Atlas. Once the system has been tested and a few queries answered, the BRMC will approach individual County Recorders regarding their wishes to have their data available via the NBN Atlas.
- The 'REST' services enabling Partners to access species data via the NBN Gateway were still working well until the end of March 2016 when the Gateway was replaced by the Atlas.

Information Requests

- A total of 241 data searches were completed by the BRMC during 2016-17, an increase on the last two years (218 during 2015-16 and 201 during 2014-15).
- Of these, 184 were commercial enquiries (176 commercial enquiries last year) and 57 were completed free of charge (42 last year).
- The breakdown of free of charge enquiries is as follows:

| Requestor | Number of searches |
|--|--------------------|
| Local organisations/partners | 9 |
| Wildlife Trust BCN | 8 |
| Students | 0 |
| Local Authorities | 4 |
| Private Individuals | 5 |
| Searches as part of Service Level Agreements | 1 |
| Cross border searches (no charge) | 24 |
| Discretionary | 6 |

- 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 the Local Nature Partnership, Wildlife Trust BCN Trustees, the Bedfordshire Wildlife Working Group, Local Authorities and Parish Council clerks in Bedford Borough. The BRMC attended a Bedford Borough Parish and Town Council event with a display board presentation to demonstrate the data BRMC provide and encourage them to use the information when considering parish plans and development proposals. The BRMC also had a display board presentation and leaflets available at the BNHS Conference and gave a talk at a Wildlife Trust Local Group meeting. A new BRMC leaflet and a pull-up banner have been produced to take along to future events.

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:

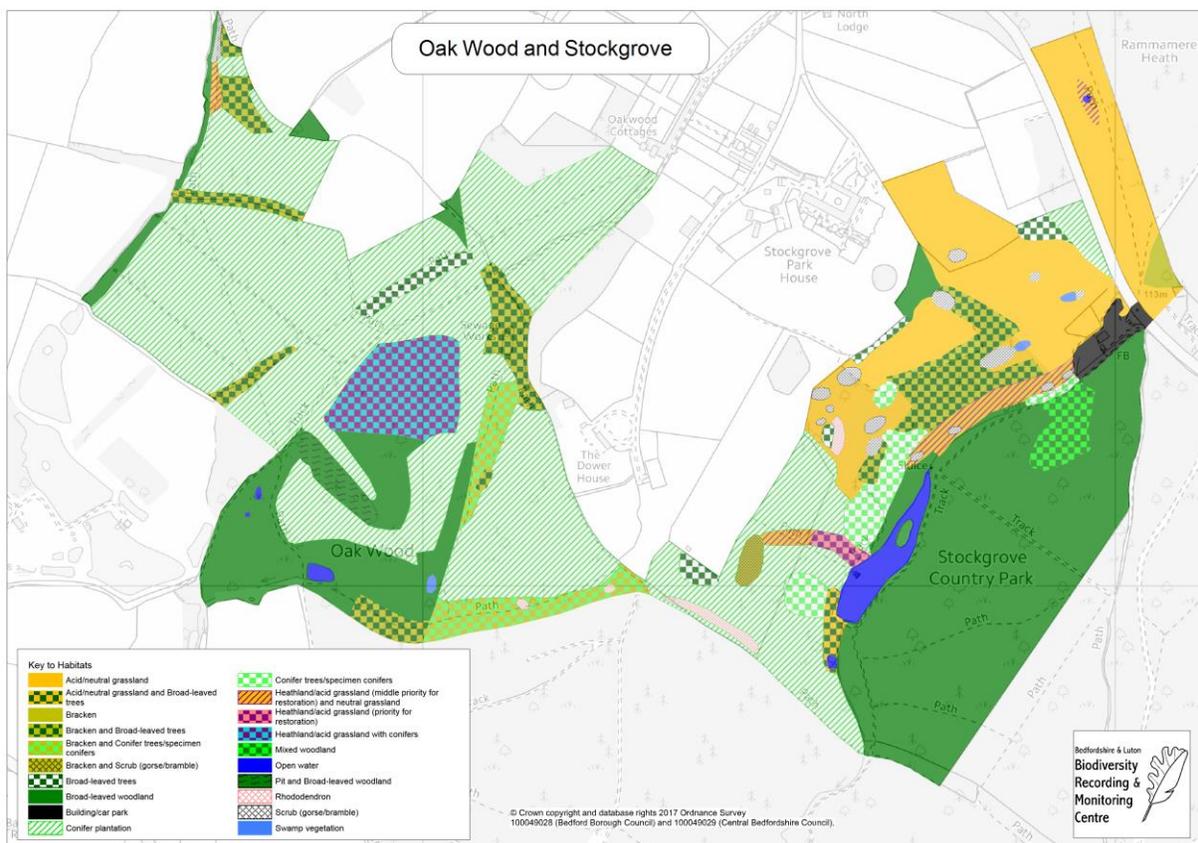
- Local Nature Partnership 'State of Nature' report – The BRMC has contributed to the Local Nature Partnership publication 'Bedfordshire's Natural Environment – its value to us all' which was published this year. It is a review of Bedfordshire's natural environment and outlines some of the pressures that it is under and some of the successes in protecting it. This report will be a forerunner to Natural Capital Investment Planning work that is now being developed. The full report is available here: <http://bedfordshirenaturally.com/downloads/lnp-publications/>



Front cover of the Bedfordshire 'State of Nature' report.

- Bromham Parish 'call for sites' mapping - The BRMC assisted the Parish Council by producing a map to assist with their 'call for sites' housing plan and for use at a consultation session. This ensured that the information provided to Bedford Borough Council was accurate and used the correct boundaries.

- 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 has worked on several Parish GI plans, some of which are updates from the original plans completed almost 10 years ago. The BRMC has worked with both the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) and the Greensand Trust to produce ‘map packs’ providing contextual and biodiversity information for use at Parish meetings and for the final reports. Both BRCC and the Greensand Trust run 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 then produce ‘aspiration’ maps showing these ideas which are then included in the final reports that will be used by parish and local councils. Parish GI Plans worked on this year include: Cople, Potton, Toddington, Clophill and Flitton and Greenfield with Pulloxhill.
- Greensand Country Landscape Partnership Project – This Heritage Lottery Funded project finally received the go-ahead in January after many years of preparation. The project focusses on the Greensand Ridge area and initial work has started in capturing ‘baseline’ information for some of the larger project areas. The BRMC will be providing maps and data for all the sub-projects to demonstrate progress with habitat improvements and maps of new/improved cycle routes, horse riding routes and footpaths across the project area.



Baseline habitat data for Oak Wood and Stockgrove.

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 has represented the BRMC this year 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:

- Preparing Bumblebee distribution maps for the Beds Naturalist.
- Providing advice/data searches/information/maps as required.
- Giving a talk to the Mammal Group about how the BRMC works.
- Providing an article for the BNHS journal about the history of the BRMC.

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 more recently, discussions about future IT systems and possible developments in online data access.

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 4 LERCs this year and one re-accreditation.

Staff attended the ALERC conference in October 2016 where the Field Studies Council talked about their latest developments in Tom.bio tools and their Biolinks project to tackle less well recorded taxa. Dr. Roddy Fairley talked about the Atlas of Living Scotland and other country Atlases that will replace the NBN Gateway. There were also short talks about using Recorder 6 and GIS tools, Sussex BRC's experience of using iRecord, and a couple of 'soapbox' presentations, one of which was by Jackie to encourage LERCs to think about 'where next' with technology and system developments.

The Future of BRMC

With inevitable challenges in identifying 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. As always, the BRMC look to develop better and improved methods for delivering products and services and we will continue to investigate this over the coming year in consultation with other LERCs in our region and across the country.

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 |
| 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 |

*This has since been renewed until Apr 2022